

Do Schools Have a Civic Purpose?

Fiat Lux Seminar
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Office Hours: tbd

Overview of the Course:

This course asks a question that seems to be essential to modernity itself: Why do we have schools? What do schools do and what should schools do? Should schools make students into citizens and moral individuals, should they work to remedy social inequality, or is their actual role to maintain that inequality and make it appear legitimate? Is there a civic purpose to all of this? We will read selections from classic texts about goals of schooling and the degree to which schools actually accomplish those goals. We will discuss stratification by race, gender, sexuality, and class, and the ways that schooling can both weaken and strengthen those inequalities. We will discuss whether schools are responsible for making their students into good citizens and moral people, and whether public education has a necessary role in those goals. By the end of the quarter, students should have a good introduction to many ongoing conversations about why we have schools.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on participation, attendance, and three brief reflections (minimum one double-spaced page) really just to give me a sense of how you're relating to the texts and the discussion. This is a straightforward course. Do the readings and you'll be fine. The reflections are due on the Friday of the third, seventh, and tenth week.

Attendance and Participation:

You should come to class able to say something that shows you've done the reading. I have a fine ear for generic comments so please bring the texts to class and refer explicitly to particular arguments in our conversation. I will take attendance each day, and more than three absences will be counted as a failure for the course. If for some reason you must be absent four or more times, please contact me to discuss it.

Difficult Subjects

There is nothing particularly graphic or descriptively intense in the readings for this class, though it is still possible you may find some of the topics we discuss difficult or painful. I will try to be mindful as I describe the readings beforehand, and if you believe you are not able to do some of the readings for any reason, psychological or otherwise, please let me know.

Contacting Me

I'm at the e-mail above. Please e-mail all reflections directly to that e-mail address, and ask me any questions there as well. I'm in my office basically every day so please feel free to come by!

Syllabus (all readings will be scanned and available at the class website)
(note: listed readings must be completed by and for the day under which they're listed.)

Week 1: Johann Neem, Democracy's Schools (selections)

Week 2: Plato, Republic, Books 2-3 (selections)

Week 3: Rousseau, Emile (selections)

Week 4: John Dewey, Democracy and Education (selections)

Week 5: W.E.B. DuBois, Educational Writings (selections)

Week 6: Emile Durkheim, Moral Education (selections)

Week 7: Hannah Arendt's "The Crisis in Education", Juliet Hooker's "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair"

Week 8: Danielle Allen, Education and Equality (selections)

Week 9: bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress (selections)

Week 10: Lakota Woman by Mary Crow Dog (selections)