

# **Educational Studies 308: Cities, Suburbs, and Schools**

Trinity College      Fall 2006  
W 1:15-3:55pm      Library seminar room 103  
<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ>

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## **Theme for Fall 2006: Shopping for Homes and Schools**

### **Description:**

This upper-level undergraduate seminar operates as a team research workshop. First, we closely examine a noteworthy study on some aspect of cities, suburbs, and schooling in the United States. Next, we design and conduct a small-scale parallel research project to test whether the author's claims apply to the metropolitan Hartford area. Students develop three types of research skills: historical (interpreting archival source materials), qualitative (analyzing oral interviews), and quantitative (generating descriptive statistics and GIS computer maps from large datasets). For the community learning experience, the seminar partners with a local organization to develop the research study, present the findings, and discuss their significance.

A major goal of the seminar is to prepare students to design and conduct their own independent research projects during their senior year. For examples of undergraduate research projects that have emerged from this seminar, see the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools website: <<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ/css>>

In fall 2006, our seminar theme will be "**Shopping for Homes and Schools.**" We will investigate questions such as: How do city and suburban families construct beliefs about the quality of neighborhood schools? How does public data about schools (such as test scores, or student racial and socioeconomic composition) influence home purchasing decisions? What are the broader social consequences of a system where privileged families may use private real estate markets to "buy" access into selected public schools?

Prerequisite: Ed 200 or Psyc 225 or the Cities Program or permission of instructor.

**Readings:** Will be made available in the seminar

**Assessment:**

Project #1 Home-buyer Interviews (qualitative skills)	
literature review	10
data exercises	10
analysis paper	20
Project #2 Schools, Test Scores, and Home Sales (quantitative skills)	
data exercises	10
analysis paper	20
Final Project	
research proposal   OR   public outreach project paper	20
Class Participation (graded by classmates)	
discussion facilitator -- organize an engaging, focused dialogue on assigned topic, with partner; prep with instructor or TA	5
overall contribution to the seminar	5
TOTAL	100

Be advised that adequate work earns a C, good work earns a B, and outstanding work earns an A in this class. Students are expected to engage in academic honesty in all forms of work for this course. If this is unclear to you, ask me for clarification.

The penalty for overdue assignments will be 10% for every 12-hour period beyond the deadline, with exceptions granted only for documented medical or family emergencies.

Please notify me during the first week if you require any special accommodations.

Your classmates and I expect your regular and prompt attendance at every session, since we rely upon our collective efforts to succeed in this team-based seminar.

**Seminar schedule:**

REMINDER: Since this is a project-based research seminar involving real-world situations, the instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus schedule at any time.

**Sept 6th**

Intro to syllabus and CSS research project; Home buying simulation, part 1

**Sept 13th**

Read: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 11 ("Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream") and chapter 13 ("The Baby Boom and the Age of the Subdivision").

In seminar: "Confidential Report of a Survey in Hartford, Connecticut," Division of Research and Statistics, Home Owners' Loan Corporation, Washington DC, 1936 & 1937; and "Residential Security Map" for Hartford and West Hartford, 1937 [historical documents from the National Archives].

Facilitators 1 & 2 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Read: Christopher Howard, *The Hidden Welfare State: Tax Expenditures and Social Policy in the United States*. Princeton University Press, 1997, introduction and chapter 5, "Home Mortgage Interest."

In seminar: Home buying simulation, part 2

Facilitators 3 & 4 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

**Sept 20th**

Read:

Jennifer Jellison Holme. "Buying Homes, Buying Schools: School Choice in the Social Construction of School Quality." *Harvard Educational Review* 72 (Summer 2002): 177-205.

Facilitators 5 & 6 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar: conference call with the author

Facilitators 7 & 8 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar: literature review assignment distributed

**Sept 27th**

In seminar: literature review reports; design study sample and draft of interview guide

Facilitators 9 & 10 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitators 11 & 12 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct 4th**

Read: (TBA after literature reviews) \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitators 13 & 14 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar: pilot interviews with home-buyers; transcribing guidelines

**Oct 11th**

Interviews with home buyers (during seminar or alternative date/time \_\_\_\_\_)

**Oct 18th**

In seminar: Thematic analysis of interview transcripts; paper #1 assignment distributed

**Oct 25th**

Paper #1 and informal presentations due in seminar

Read: Joel Best, *More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), chapter 2.

In seminar: Descriptive statistics and charts with Microsoft Excel

**Nov 1st**

Read: Sandra Black, "Do Better Schools Matter? Parental Valuation of Elementary Education." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 114 (May 1999): 577-99.

Facilitators 15 & 16 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Read: Mark Monmonier. *How to Lie with Maps, second edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, chapter 3 excerpts.

In seminar: Computer mapping with ArcGIS

**Nov 8th**

Project #2 paper assignment distributed; data analysis workshop

**Nov 15th**

Paper #2 and information presentations due in seminar; discussion with Professor Zannoni's econometrics students about their research project

**Nov 22nd [reschedule to new date and location: \_\_\_\_\_]**

Final project brainstorming session

**Nov 29th**

Read: Lis Pennington, "A Political History of School Finance Reform in the Metropolitan Hartford Region, 1945-2005," [research proposal and draft of final paper].

Facilitators 17 & 18 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar: prepare for next week's presentations

Facilitators 19 & 20 \_\_\_\_\_; prep meeting \_\_\_\_\_

**Dec 6th**

Research presentation exchange with the Pols 355: Urban Politics seminar, taught by Prof. Stefanie Chambers

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**Final Project options:**

A) Design and write a **research proposal** for a senior-level project on any topic related to this seminar on cities, suburbs, and schools, to be evaluated on these criteria:

- Does the author pose a thought-provoking, researchable question (or hypothesis) and explain its significance?
- Does the author connect the question to the existing research literature (secondary sources) and move beyond into new territory?
- Does the author identify the most appropriate primary sources and research methods for this study?
- Is the author's proposal well organized, and does it include sufficient background for audiences unfamiliar with the topic? Does the author cite sources in an acceptable format so that future readers may easily locate them?

B) Design and carry out a **public outreach project** that introduces real audiences to some research findings from our seminar. For example, you may:

- deliver a research presentation and lead a discussion with community partner
- produce a user-friendly research summary to be used by a community partner
- write and submit a research-based op-ed essay to a local periodical
- organize a political protest or public speak-out, based on research findings

Students choosing this option must write a paper that describes the planning and results of the outreach project, reflects on the lessons learned, and links the experience to at least one of the seminar readings.

For either option A or B, the suggested length is approximately 5 double-spaced pages. In lieu of a final exam, the **final paper is due on Thursday, Dec 14th at 3pm.**

