Course Summary
This course will focus on current issues in education and social policy, with an emphasis on identifying underlying causes and exploring potential solutions to problems facing public schools. Throughout the course, we will engage in a critical examination of the evidence for and against various policy choices – including unintended consequences.

In the first half of the course, we will explore the context of U.S. education and develop tools and frameworks for evaluating specific approaches to solving policy challenges. We will first analyze trends in U.S. student achievement, address the case for public intervention in the market for education, and discuss evidence about the problems facing U.S. education. Next, we turn to the role of schools to debate what exactly schools are supposed to do and how we can measure their performance. In our third class, we will cover education research approaches and discuss why it is so challenging to understand what works in education. Finally, we will cover the key economic framework for understanding education inputs and outcomes: the education production function.

In the second half of the course, we will explore specific policy debates. First, we will discuss approaches to improving teacher quality. Next, we turn to debates about education privatization and school choice. Finally, we will explore the theory and effectiveness of using test-based accountability to evaluate schools and teachers.

Other Class Information
- NYU Classes: You will need to have access to NYU Classes. All announcements and class-related documents will be posted here.
- Attendance: Please see me immediately if you have any conflicts with scheduled classes or assignments, as attendance is required in this course.
- Academic integrity: NYU Wagner policies on academic integrity will be strictly enforced in this class. You can find the school’s official statement on academic integrity here. Please contact me if you have any questions about these policies.
- Accommodations: Any student requiring an accommodation due to a psychological, visual, mobility, or learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing, should register with and consult with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, 726 Broadway, 2nd floor (www.nyu.edu/csd). I am happy to provide any accommodations recommended by the Moses Center.
Course Requirements and Grading

1. Online posts and discussion questions (30%)
Using the “Forum” feature in NYU Classes, every week you will need to respond to a discussion question (or two) based on the week’s readings. The question(s) will be posted a week in advance, and you will need to post your response by the Tuesday before class at 6 p.m. I will use your posts to help guide the class discussion, and so it is important that you submit them on time.

Your response should be approximately one single-spaced page (500 words) long, and you should support your arguments with evidence from the readings. If you choose, you may also address other students’ comments in your post. The only requirement is to post one response each week, but you are welcome to post multiple times, to make the forum more of a dialogue/discussion.

Discussion questions contribute 30% to your final grade. Each week’s post is worth 5% of your overall grade, and I will drop your lowest non-zero score. To be clear, zero grades will not be dropped.

2. Attendance and participation (20%)
This is a discussion-based course, and your attendance and participation are required. It is expected that you will be engaged throughout class and contribute to class discussions. Attendance and participation contribute 20% to your overall course grade, so failure to attend/participate will affect your success. Please be in contact with me as soon as possible if you have conflicts with specific course dates.

3. Policy brief (25%)
A policy brief or memo (approximately 5-10 double-spaced pages) will be due in class on April 15. The policy brief should explain key features of the education landscape or context for a specific policy issue; specific guidelines will be distributed during the second class. This is an individual assignment.

4. Policy proposal (25%)
A policy proposal (approximately 5-10 double-spaced pages) will be due via email on May 13. You may work with a partner on this proposal, which should address a specific education policy issue or topic. Assignment details will be distributed later in the course.

Course Texts

It is important for you to have access to the second edition (January 2015), as updates are significant. This textbook is available at the NYU Bookstore and at Amazon.com.

Other required and suggested readings (including those from Whither Opportunity) will be posted on NYU classes.
## Course Schedule and Due Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Item due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is there a problem with U.S. public education?</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> March 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are schools supposed to do? How do we measure that?</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> April 1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Education research and program evaluation: Why is it so hard to know what works?</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> April 8</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>What factors matter for kids’ outcomes?</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> April 15 <strong>Policy brief</strong> (hard copy)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>How can we improve teacher quality?</td>
<td>April 21</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> April 22</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>What is the role of privatization and choice in public education?</td>
<td>April 28</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> April 29</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Can testing and accountability improve schools?</td>
<td>May 5</td>
<td>Discussion board post (by 6 pm)</td>
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<td><strong>Class:</strong> May 6</td>
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**May 13:** Policy proposal due via email
Week 1: Is there a problem with U.S. public education? [**=Required]


A. Achievement gaps


B. Trends in outcomes


C. International comparisons


Class 2: What are schools supposed to do? How do we measure that? [**=Required]


A. Academic outcomes


B. Non-academic outcomes, including labor market outcomes


Class 3: Education research and program evaluation: Why is it so hard to know what works? [**=Required]

A. Importance and limitations of experiments


B. Other quantitative (causal?) designs


C. Qualitative approaches


Class 4: What factors matter for kids’ outcomes? [**=Required]

**A. Education production function**


**B. Non-school inputs**


**C. School-based inputs**


Class 5: How can we improve teacher quality? [**=Required]


New York Times Room for Debate: How to Ensure and Improve Teacher Quality

A. Teacher effects


B. Education programs / certification


C. Teacher labor markets: recruiting, hiring, firing, retaining


Class 6: What is the role of privatization and choice in public education?  
[**=Required]

A. Education markets and privatization


Hoxby, C. (2003). School Choice and School Productivity (or Could School Choice be a Tide that Lifts All Boats?). The Economics of School Choice, ch. 3.

B. Charters


C. Vouchers


Class 7: Can testing and accountability improve schools? [**=Required]

A. High-stakes tests and school accountability


B. Teacher evaluation and accountability


