

Fall 2017 Course

EAD949 Advanced Topics in Education Policy: Urban Education Politics and School Reform

Professor Rebecca Jacobsen
Tuesdays 12:40- 3:30; 128 Erickson Hall

Course Description: Central cities are considered to be especially in need of better functioning school systems, but the challenges they face in initiating and sustaining meaningful reform efforts are different in degree, and perhaps in kind, from those encountered in smaller, more homogenous, and more advantaged jurisdictions. This course considers the factors that constrain and frequently frustrate reform efforts. Among the issues to be assessed will be metropolitan fragmentation, suburbanization and the exit option, the roots and consequences of federalism, racial and ethnic conflict, patronage politics, the power and interests of the downtown business community, proposals to abolish or reconstitute school boards, and state takeovers. The course will also identify political strategies and governance changes with potential to bring positive and lasting change.

This course is designed to provide you with an overview urban education politics. Because this overview necessarily misses nuance associated with specific cities, you will be asked to focus at three points during the semester on one particular urban context. These city study assignments will enable you to build your site-specific knowledge and identify historical and political issues and current policies shaping the educational opportunities for students in your chosen city.

Part 1: Where Schools Reside: The History of Urban Areas

This part of the course will focus on the historical development of urban centers paying special attention to issues of race and class segregation. The political impact of this segregation is then studied to understand how urban education and the power of central city residents can be constrained by larger state politics.

Part 2: Urban Education Politics

This part of the course will focus specifically on urban schools. We will consider the governance of urban schools and pay particular attention to the role of race in educational governance. While African-American communities have typically controlled public education in urban areas, they have had to work with the often White downtown business elites, which may want to pursue different education policies. Further, as the test scores of urban students continue to lag, calls to remove traditional school leaders have increased thereby diminishing an important pathway for African-American political engagement in schools and beyond. We will consider these issues and the way that race is an undercurrent, if not overt issue, in these debates.

Part 3: Urban Schools and Reform

In this section, we will focus on some of the most recent reform movements aimed to improve urban education. Building upon the themes develop in the prior sections, the course will focus on current governance reform efforts (choice and portfolio management models). Because of its omnipresence in education today, we will also consider how accountability policies impact urban schools and urban education governance.