

School Choice, Equity, and Democracy

Educational Studies (EDUC) 304, Trinity College
Spring 2023 | Mon/Wed 10:00–11:15am | LSC 137

**** This syllabus may be updated periodically. For the updated version, refer to the link on Moodle.**

Professor: Elise Castillo, Ph.D. (she/her)

Email: Elise.Castillo@trincoll.edu

I aim to return emails within 24 hours, except on Saturdays

Office: McCook 318

Office Hours: Drop-in (No appointment needed): Wed 3:00–4:00pm

By appointment: Book via <https://calendly.com/elise-castillo/15min>

Office Hours

My office hours are times that I reserve specifically for meeting with my students. During “drop-in” office hours, you do not need to sign up in advance. If you would like to meet outside my drop-in time block, please sign up in advance via the link above.

During office hours, I am happy to answer your questions about class material or assignments or offer academic advice or mentorship. Generally, I meet with each student for 15 minutes, so it’s helpful if you come with a clear sense of what you’d like to discuss so that we can make the most of our time together.

Course Description

How do families choose schools for their children? How do school choice policies, such as those advancing charter schools, magnet schools, and vouchers, advance or constrain equitable access to education, particularly for poor families and families of color? What are the democratic aims of public education, and how do school choice policies advance or constrain these aims? Students will investigate these questions while engaging in hands-on research. For the Community Learning component of this course, we are partnering with Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy (HMTCA) to research how and why parents/legal guardians chose HMTCA for their children. Study findings will inform HMTCA’s efforts to attract future students and families.

Learning Objectives

Over the course of the semester, you will be able to:

- Understand the theories of action undergirding school choice policies
- Explain how school choice shapes equitable opportunity and access to public education
- Enhance your qualitative research and analysis skills through interview experiences
- Enhance your critical reading skills by evaluating the work of scholarly researchers, journalists, and policy actors writing about school choice
- Employ credible evidence and analysis to craft persuasive oral and written arguments

Course Materials

The following book is required and available to purchase at the Trinity College bookstore and to borrow as an e-book at the Trinity College library:

Eaton, S. (2020). *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (Updated New Edition). Brandeis University Press.

I will post additional readings to our course Moodle site. Alternatively, for a fee of \$15, I will provide printed copies of all readings for the semester. Readings may be subject to change.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Due Date	Points Possible
Class Participation	Every class; Evaluated at mid- and end-of semester	10 x 2 = 20
Response Paper (2–3 pages)	By the beginning of class on your assigned date	10
Hartford School Choice Fair Event Reflection (~2 pages)	2 days after your event, by 11:59pm	5
Class Research Project		10
CITI ethics training	Friday, February 3, 11:59pm	
Interview audio recording	2 days after interview, by 11:59pm	
Reflection memo (2–3 pages)	2 days after interview, by 11:59pm	
Presentation of research findings	Wednesday, March 29, in class	10 (guest evaluation)
Interpreting Interviews Essay		
First draft	Monday, March 13, beginning of class	
Final draft (6–8 pages)	Sunday, March 19, 11:59pm	20 (5 points deducted if first draft not submitted thoroughly / on time)
Position Paper on School Choice		
Prospectus	Friday, April 14, 11:59pm	5
First draft	Monday, April 24, beginning of class	
Final draft (8–10 pages)	Monday, May 8, 11:59pm	20 (5 points deducted if first draft not submitted thoroughly / on time)
		Total possible: 100

Your final course grade will be calculated by dividing the total points earned by the total points possible. The grading scale is as follows:

Outstanding work	Good work	Adequate work	Unsatisfactory work
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A+ 97-100%	B+ 87-89%	C+ 77-79%	D+ 67-69%
A 93-96%	B 83-86%	C 73-76%	D 63-66%
A- 90-92%	B- 80-82%	C- 70-72%	D- 60-62% F < 59%

Class Attendance and Participation

"As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence."

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), p. 8

Excellent class participation includes the following:

- *Attending all classes from start to finish.* More than two absences will affect your grade, except in cases of illness, religious observances, or family emergencies. Absences for these reasons may be made up through a makeup assignment. You must email me to receive permission to complete a makeup assignment. I encourage you to reserve your allowed absences for cases of illness.
 - See the Academic Policies on p. 4 for more details on Accommodations for Students in Isolation and Quarantine and Excused Absences and Making Up Work.
- *Coming prepared to each class.* Come to each class having completed all required readings and assignments and with all necessary materials, such as readings and notes. Arrive on time and ready to engage.
- *Actively engaging in class discussions.* Make thoughtful and analytic contributions to small- and large-group discussions, orally and in writing, based on completed readings and assignments.
- *Listening and responding to others with respect.* Make space for others to share their perspectives and opinions in class discussions. Listen attentively and respectfully. If you disagree with something someone has said, do so graciously, respectfully, and with evidence to support your counterargument. Be open to learning from others' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations.

You will self-evaluate your participation at mid-semester and at the end of the semester, to reflect on your strengths and on how you can improve. I will take your self-evaluations into account when determining your grade, and I will discuss with you individually if my assessment differs from your own.

Response Paper

By the end of Unit 2, you will submit one response paper (2–3 double-spaced pages) analyzing a set of Unit 1 or Unit 2 class readings before we discuss them in class. In the first week of the semester, you will sign up for one class date for which you will write your response paper. This assignment aims to help you practice the critical reading and analysis techniques that you will use throughout the semester. I will call on you on the day for which you submit the response paper and expect that you serve as one of several "resident experts" on the readings for that

day of class, taking a leadership role in the discussion. Additional assignment details will be distributed in class.

Hartford School Choice Event Reflection

You will observe one Hartford-area school choice fair for a minimum of 30 minutes and write a reflection of around 500 words, or up to 2 double-spaced pages. The purpose of this assignment is to gain an up-close view of how Hartford-area families learn about the school choices available to them. Additional assignment details will be distributed in class.

Class Research Project and Presentation of Research Findings

We will conduct a collaborative interview-based research project as part of our community partnership with HMTCA, conducting interviews with HMTCA parents. The goal of this project is to strengthen your qualitative research skills, connect empirical research with existing scholarship, and develop recommendations based on the study's findings. We will share research findings with our community partner. Additional assignment details will be distributed in class.

Interpreting Interviews Essay

The goal of this essay (5–7 double-spaced pages) is to interpret patterns across the interviews from our class research project and connects their meaning to secondary source literature in our syllabus. You will submit a first draft and receive feedback from your peers prior to submitting a final draft. Additional assignment details will be distributed in class.

Final Paper: Position Paper on School Choice

For your final paper (8–10 double-spaced pages), you will articulate your position on school choice and support your position by drawing upon credible evidence. The purpose of this assignment is to develop and support an original argument about school choice by bringing together research we have studied in class, as well as your own outside research. You will submit a proposal and a first draft, as well as receive feedback from your peers, prior to submitting a final draft. Additional assignment details will be distributed in class.

Academic Policies

Face Mask Requirement

Per [Trinity College policy](#), you are required to wear a face mask in the classroom, from the beginning to the end of class. Masks must cover your nose and mouth completely. *There are no exceptions to this policy.* You may not remove your mask to eat or drink during class; therefore, please plan ahead.

At times, it may be difficult to hear one another with our masks on. Therefore, please do your best to speak loudly and clearly during class discussions.

Accommodations for Students in Isolation or Quarantine

If more than half of the class must isolate or quarantine, our entire class will meet virtually via Zoom, and I will distribute a Zoom meeting link in advance.

If fewer than half of the class must isolate or quarantine, absent students may either apply one of their two excused absences (see Excused Absences and Making Up Work, below) or email

me to request permission to complete a make-up assignment. Additional accommodations may be made on a case-by-case basis with documentation and guidance from the health center.

Use of Electronics

I recommend that you bring a laptop to class, but only to access electronic copies of course readings, take notes, and participate in collaborative activities. Please refrain from using your laptop or phone for non-class-related purposes. Please let me know if you need to borrow a laptop.

Late Assignments

Only for assignments due at 11:59pm, you are each entitled to two 36-hour extensions, no questions asked. When you submit the assignment on Moodle, please note in the comment box that you are using the extension.

These "free" extensions do not apply to any assignment due at the beginning of class. Other than the use of these extensions, late assignments will be penalized with a 10% deduction for every 1 to 24-hour period beyond the deadline. Exceptions will be granted only for documented family or medical emergencies.

Excused Absences and Making Up Work

More than two absences will impact your class participation grade, except in cases of illness, religious observances, or family emergencies. Absences for these reasons may be made up through a makeup assignment. (See Class Participation above.) Please notify me during the first week of the course if you require any scheduling accommodations for religious observances. For religious observances, please submit the [Trinity College Religious Observance Allowance Form](#) to me within the first week of the semester. If granted an excused absence from class for religious observances or documented family or medical emergencies, I will give you a make-up assignment to complete. This is to ensure that you do not fall behind in the course material.

Revise & Resubmit and Extra Credit

If I recommend that you revise and resubmit an assignment, you will meet me to self-assess errors and review grading comments. We will discuss and determine a resubmission deadline for up to 90% of the assignment point value.

I may offer extra credit assignments; examples might include attending a lecture or community event and writing a reflection that connects to course readings and themes. Please see me if you are interested in an extra credit assignment to receive approval.

Accessibility

Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Like many things, the need for disability accommodations and the process for arranging them may be altered by the COVID-19 changes we are experiencing and the safety protocols currently in place. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation in order to fully participate in this class are urged to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as soon as possible, to explore what arrangements need to be made to assure access.

If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify me by the end of week two of classes. For those students with accommodations approved after the start of the semester, a minimum of 10 days' notice is required. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation. Student Accessibility Resources can be reached at SARC@trincoll.edu.

Intellectual Honesty

According to Trinity College policy, intellectual honesty "assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw" (Trinity College Student Handbook, 2016). While we often draw upon the work of others, it is essential that any work presented as your own is indeed your own, no matter how big or small the assignment. Ideas and/or words that are not yours should always be appropriately cited.

You may use any citation style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA), as long as you do so consistently. If you have any questions about how to cite another author's work appropriately, or how to draw upon another author's work without plagiarizing, please ask me.

Intellectual dishonesty and plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated in this class. Instances of academic dishonesty or plagiarism may result in assignment failure, course failure, referral to the Honor Council, and/or other consequences.

Asking for Assistance or Clarification

I am usually happy to assist you and answer questions on anything related to course readings or assignments. However, part of being a successful college student is learning how to problem-solve on your own. So, before you ask me for assistance or clarification, please first consult at least two sources: (1) the course syllabus and Moodle site; (2) a classmate. If you still do not find the answer to your question, feel free to ask me!

Course Schedule

Unit 1: School Choice Theories

What are the theories of action undergirding school choice policies? How do past and ongoing experiments with school choice reflect these theories?

Wednesday, January 25: Course introduction: The context of school choice in metro Hartford (Re-)Watch [Sheff v. O'Neill: Striving Toward Educational Equity](#). (2021). Connecticut Public Television.

Saturday, January 28, 10:00am–1:00pm: School Choice Fair Event - Hartford Education Expo Sport and Medical Sciences Academy, 280 Huyshope Ave, Hartford (8 min drive from campus) If you attend this event, your reflection is **due Monday, January 30, 11:59pm.**

Monday, January 30: The "menu" of school choice options

Hale, J. N. (2021). Ch. 5: The School Choice Menu (pp. 116–138). In *The Choice We Face: How Segregation, Race, and Power Shaped America's Most Controversial Education Reform Movement*. Beacon Press. [22]

In class: Sign up for Response Paper dates

Wednesday, February 1: Choice as resistance to desegregation

Hale, J. N. (2021). Ch. 1: The "Divine Right" and Our Freedom of Choice in Education (pp. 17–37). In *The Choice We Face: How Segregation, Race, and Power Shaped America's Most Controversial Education Reform Movement*. Beacon Press. [20]

Optional: Hannah-Jones, N. (2017, Sept. 6). [The Resegregation of Jefferson County](#). *The New York Times Magazine*. [20]

****Friday, February 3, 11:59pm, 11:59pm: CITI training certificate due (if not previously done)**

Saturday, February 4, 10:00am–1:30pm: School Choice Fair Event - RSCO School Choice Fair
CREC Discovery Academy, 176 Cumberland Ave, Wethersfield (10 min drive from campus)

If you attend this event, your reflection is **due Monday, February 6, 11:59pm.**

Monday, February 6: Market rationales for school choice

Hale, J. N. (2021). Excerpt from Ch. 2: Milton Friedman and the Problems with Choice in Chicago (pp. 38–49). In *The Choice We Face: How Segregation, Race, and Power Shaped America's Most Controversial Education Reform Movement*. Beacon Press. [10]

Jabbar, H. (2015). "Every kid is money": Market-like competition and school leader strategies in New Orleans. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(4), 638–659. [20]

****Response papers due beginning Feb 6, until Feb 22, by the beginning of class on your assigned date.**

Wednesday, February 8: Progressive rationales for school choice

Forman, J. (2005). The Secret History of School Choice: How Progressives Got There First. *The Georgetown Law Journal*, 93(1287), 1287–1319. [34]

Shapiro, E. (2019, Jan. 8). ["I Love My Skin!" Why Black Parents are Turning to Afrocentric Schools](#). *The New York Times*.

Unit 2: How Families Choose Schools

How do families choose schools for, and with, their children? How do racial, socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts impact families' choices, decision-making, and access to information? How do families' experiences align with, or challenge, the theories of action undergirding school choice?

Monday, February 13: "Shopping for schools"

Holme, J. J. (2002). Buying homes, buying schools: School choice and the social construction of school quality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(2), 177–205. [30]

Wednesday, February 15: "Stealing school" or "Motherwork"?

Rooks, N. (2018). Excerpt from Ch. 6: Stealing School (pp. 161–175). In *Cutting School: The Segrenomics of American Education*. The New Press. [14]

Cooper, C. W. (2007). School choice as 'motherwork': Valuing African-American women's educational advocacy and resistance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(5), 491–512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390601176655> [21]

Thursday, February 16, 4–6pm: School Choice Fair Event - [RSCO Family Fun Night](#)

HMTCA, 53 Vernon St (Use Broad St entrance)

If you attend this event, your reflection is **due Saturday, February 18, 11:59pm.**

Monday, February 20: Choosing schools in segregated school districts

Hannah-Jones, N. (2016). [Choosing a school for my daughter in a segregated city](#). *The New York Times*. [19]

Castillo, E. (2022). 'More of the diversity aspect and less of the desegregation aspect': Asian Americans and desegregation in metropolitan Hartford. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2033196> [19]

Wednesday, February 22: Immigrant families, families of color, and navigating school choice information

Sattin-Bajaj, C. (2015). Unaccompanied Minors: How Children of Latin American Immigrants Negotiate High School Choice. *American Journal of Education*, 121(3), 381–415.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/680409>

Listen to *The Promise*. (2020, October 12). Season 2, Episode 7: [The Recruitment Divide](#). WPLN Nashville Public Radio.

Unit 3: Qualitative Interviewing and Analysis

What do we learn from conducting interviews as a method of qualitative research? How do we conduct interviews in an ethical and responsible manner? How can we leverage prior research to analyze interview data? How can interviews help us to address the following research questions: *Why and how do parents and caregivers choose HMTCA for their children? To what extent does the Trinity College partnership influence their decision? According to HMTCA parents and caregivers, how could the Trinity College-HMTCA partnership be improved?*

Monday, February 27: Qualitative interviewing, Part 1: Methods and techniques

Class will meet at Trinfo Cafe, 1300 Broad Street

Lareau, A. (2021). Ch. 5: How to conduct a good interview. From *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up* (pp. 91–139). University of Chicago Press. [48]

Guest speaker: Liliana Polley, HMTCA partnership coordinator

Wednesday, March 1: Qualitative interviewing Part 2: Navigating relationships and researcher positionality

Desmond, M. (2016). "About this Project." In *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown Publishers.

Ewing, E. (2018). Excerpt from Methodological Appendix. In *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*. University of Chicago Press.

Lee, S. J. (2009). "Notes on Methods, Positionality, and Representation." In *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (pp. 18–23). Teachers College Press.

Makris, M. V. (2015). Excerpt from Ch. 1: "Methods." In *Public Housing and School Choice in a Gentrified City: Youth Experiences of Uneven Opportunity* (pp. 21–25). Palgrave Macmillan.

Conduct interview with HMTCA parent/legal guardian at Trinfo Café, 1300 Broad St. Wednesday, March 1, Thursday, March 2, or Friday, March 3; see exact schedule on Moodle

**2 days after interview, by 11:59pm: Interview audio recording and reflection memo due

Monday, March 6: Analyzing qualitative data, Part 1
In class: Edit interview transcript

Wednesday, March 8: Analyzing qualitative data, Part 2
Read your peers' interview transcripts

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Data Analysis*. In *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

In class: Data analysis workshop

Monday, March 13: First draft of Interpreting Interviews Essay due, beginning of class
In class: Peer review workshop

Wednesday, March 15: Class will not meet, consider attending "drop-in" office hours during class for assistance on your paper (and Prof Castillo may request that you attend).

**Sunday, March 19, 11:59pm: Final draft due, Interpreting Interviews Essay

Monday, March 20 and Wednesday, March 22: No class – Spring break!

Monday, March 27: In class presentation preparation

Wednesday, March 29: In class: Presentation of findings to HMTCA Partnership Committee

Unit 4: How Students Experience Voluntary School Choice

How do students experience school choice? How do racial, socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts impact their experiences? How do their experiences align with, or challenge, the theories of action undergirding school choice?

Monday, April 3:
Eaton, S. *The Other Boston Busing Story*, Introduction, Ch. 1, and Ch 2 [47]

Wednesday, April 5:
Eaton, S. Ch. 3, Section I (pp. 38–73) [35]

In class: Assign final paper

Monday, April 10:
Eaton, S. *The Other Boston Busing Story*, Ch. 3, Sections II and III (pp. 73–105) [32]

Wednesday, April 12:
Eaton, S. *The Other Boston Busing Story*, Ch. 4 [33]

****Friday, April 14, 11:59pm: Final paper proposal due**

Monday, April 17:
Eaton, S. *The Other Boston Busing Story*, Ch. 5 [37]

Wednesday, April 19:
Eaton, S. *The Other Boston Busing Story*, Ch. 6 & Ch. 7 [42]

Monday, April 24: Final paper first draft due, beginning of class
In class: Peer review workshop

Unit 5: School Choice and the Democratic Aims of Public Education

What are the democratic aims of public education? How do school choice policies advance or constrain these aims?

Wednesday, April 26: Market and democratic goals of school choice, revisited
Scott, J., & Wells, A. S. (2013). A more perfect union: Reconciling school choice policies with equality of opportunity goals. In P. L. Carter & K. G. Welner, *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance* (pp. 123–140). Oxford University Press. [17]

Monday, May 1: Course wrap-up
Readings TBD

****Monday, May 8, 11:59pm: Final paper due**

Helpful Things to Know

Trinity College Student Emergency & Equity Fund. This fund is available for all students to apply for financial support that will help ensure their academic success. This includes such things as course or lab fees, textbooks, software required for courses, emergency travel, and even graduate and medical school entrance exam fees. To apply for funding, please visit [the Dean of Students' website](#) (also in Moodle).

Trinity College Writing Center. At the [Trinity College Writing Center](#), specially trained peer tutors (called [Writing Associates](#)) will help you improve your writing—no matter your skill level. Writers are welcome at all stages of the writing process, from the moment you receive an

assignment, to when you've produced a draft, to when you're polishing up your final version. You can work with a Writing Associate in-person at 115 Vernon Street room 109 or upload your paper using our online scheduling system and receive feedback within 24-hours via an asynchronous eTutoring appointment. [Visit the Writing Center web page](#) for further information and procedures. Students can walk-in during our hours of operation or reserve appointments in advance online by registering at <https://trincoll.mywconline.com/>.

For some assignments, I offer 0.5-point extra credit for visiting the Writing Center (refer to each assignment distributed in class for more information).

Trinity College Library. Our librarians are amazing and eager to help you identify sources for research projects or other assignments. Although you can make a virtual appointment with any librarian, Rob Walsh, our social science librarian, has particular expertise in the library sources relevant to our class. You can email him at Robert.Walsh@trincoll.edu or [make an appointment on the library website](#).

Student Technology Assistants. The Student Technology Assistants (STA) work with Trinity's Research, Instruction, and Technology (RIT) staff to provide remote assistance and support regarding your technology needs, including using Zoom and Moodle. Contact the STAs at sta-help@trincoll.edu, drop by their virtual help desk (<https://trincoll.zoom.us/my/sta.helpdesk>), or read more on their [website](#).

SensusAccess File Converter. If you wish, you may convert course readings in PDF form into alternative formats, including audio files. In doing so, you can listen to the reading while following along with the written text. Trinity's RIT website includes additional details on the [SuccessAccess File Converter](#).

Title IX Resources and Mandated Reporting. As a faculty member, I am considered a "Responsible Employee." This means that if you disclose to me instances of sexual assault, sexual harassment, other sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I am required to share this information with Trinity's Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator. See Trinity's [Title IX website](#) for additional information.

If you need to talk to someone who will maintain confidentiality, you can reach out to "Privileged Employees" at the following places:

Spiritual and Religious Life, Trinity College Chapel, (860) 297-2013

Counseling Center: 135 Allen Street, (860) 297-2415

[After business hours, call to receive an available counselor's phone number]

In addition, "Confidential Employees" at the following places are required to report basic information about alleged incidents, but will not disclose names or other details that may reveal individuals' identities, unless there is imminent harm to the campus or person/s disclosing.

The Health Center: Wheaton Hall 1st Floor, (860) 297-2018

Women & Gender Resource Action Center (WGRAC), Mather Hall, 2nd Floor, (860) 297-2408

Queer Resource Center (QRC), 114 Crescent Street, (860) 987-6273

Mental Health. Many of us face mental health challenges over the course of our lives. Sometimes, being a student can create or exacerbate these issues. In addition, it is common to experience additional anxiety due to the pandemic and other national and global events. If you are struggling, your mental health is suffering, or you just need someone to talk to, I encourage you to make an appointment with the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#), or call (860) 297-2415. These services are free and confidential.

Learning During the Pandemic. We are still navigating numerous uncertainties and challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic. My goal is to support you in doing the best work you can in light of these uncertainties and challenges. I encourage you to prioritize your health and wellness, which are far more important than the grades you get in this class or any class. If you are finding it difficult to balance your health and wellness with your work in this class, please let me know. It's okay to ask for help.

I ask that you be patient with me if the challenges to the semester force me to make last-minute changes. I will do my best to communicate any changes clearly and with as much notice as possible. Finally, please be patient with your peers as well as we all navigate this semester together.

Acknowledgements

Some of the statements on this syllabus were inspired by or adapted from statements on the syllabi of other scholars, including Professors Jessica Calarco, Mira Debs, Eve Ewing, and Stefanie Wong.