

Educational Privatization and School Choice

Syllabus may be subject to change

Instructor	Class Times and Days
Jalnidh Kaur Email: kaur.jalnidh@columbia.edu Office Hours: Friday, 10-12, GDH 602 https://calendly.com/jalnidh/edpe4155	Tuesdays 1-2:40 pm GDH 279

■ COURSE DESCRIPTION

Educational privatization and school choice raise fundamental questions about the purposes of education, the role of the state, and the boundaries of the market. This course traces the evolution of thought on the idea of education and choice, surveys works at the frontier of policy research in economics, and provides a high-level overview of credible research designs for evaluating school choice policies. Students will gain a mature understanding of central themes in the debates surrounding privatization in education.¹

■ LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

This course aims to teach students the following concepts:

- Key perspectives and ideological debates in the area of educational privatization, and the evolution of thought on the subject;
- Theoretical arguments for and against school choice;
- Empirical evidence for school choice policies and interventions;
- Methodological issues in evaluating these policies;
- Educational privatization and issues in the international context, with a focus on the developing world

■ REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Grades will be based on attendance (10%), quizzes (10%), in-class presentation (10%), reflection assignments (30%) and a final exam (40%).

Pop Quiz: There will be 4 short quizzes based on lecture readings of the day. These will be administered on 4 randomly selected class days.

¹ I am grateful to Samuel Abrams and John Singleton for sharing helpful references and content material for this course. My approach to crafting this syllabus has been inspired by my teachers at the Ph.D. level whose classes I have thoroughly enjoyed, especially Alex Eble, Jordan Matsudaira, Judy Scott-Clayton and Kiki Pop-Eleches.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class sessions, and actively participate in class discussions. A student is marked as present if at least one question or comment is asked in class.

Class Presentation: Each class will be led as a seminar based on the week's assigned reading. 1-2 students will be assigned to lead the discussion in each class. The oral presentation is expected to provide a concise summary of the week's readings and the learnings that emerge.

Reflection Assignments: There will be 3 reflection papers over the course of this class. The short writing assignments will consist of a 2-page critical reflection of assigned text (1-inch margins, 12-point font, single-spaced). These will be due before the following classes: September 20th, October 25th, and November 22nd.

Final Exam: There will be an in-class written examination on Tuesday, December 20. A sample exam will be posted before the exam date.

■ COURSE READINGS AND TEXT

There are four required texts for this course. All are available at Book Culture, on 112th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam

- Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970)
- Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Beacon Press, 1995)
- Michael Lovenheim and Sarah Turner, *Economics of education* (Macmillan Higher Education, 2017)
- Samuel E. Abrams, *Education and the Commercial Mindset* (Harvard University Press, 2016)

Readings outside of these books will be available either on the Web or in PDF on Canvas.

The readings are a mix of journal articles, popular articles, review articles, and books. Not all content will be covered in class and students are expected to fill the gaps through their self-study and interaction with peers. At times, the methods section in some readings may appear terse. I recommend a smart skim strategy to glean the substance and the intuition behind the approach taken. We will cover an overview of key methodological aspects in class. Please feel free to walk into office hours if you have any clarifications, questions, or concerns.

■ ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

This course will take you on a tour of literature surrounding school choice. In designing the course schedule, I have prioritized depth over breadth and restricted each class to 2-3 readings. The readings are handpicked to provide a range of perspectives, though, these may not be exhaustive. In engaging with the course material, I want you to enjoy the reading, get exposed to new and challenging perspectives, and enrich your capacity for thought and critical reflection. The reflection assignments are meant to structure the process of learning and synthesizing new ideas.

■ COURSE SCHEDULE

Sept 6: Individual, Community, and Education I: Fundamental Questions

Key questions: Why do we need schools? How did the world come up with the idea of schools? What is the role of different actors – government, parents, society?

- Massachusetts General Court, School Laws of 1642 and 1647
- James Traub, "What No School Can Do," *New York Times Magazine*, January 16, 2000

Sept 13: Individual, Community, and Education II: The Promise of Markets

Key questions: What are the key arguments for increasing the role of the market in education? What fundamental features make education different from groceries? What is the voucher idea and how is it intended to work?

- Milton Friedman, "Selling School like Groceries: The Voucher Idea," *New York Times Magazine*, Sep 23, 1973
- Milton Friedman, "Public Schools: Make Them Private," *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1995
- Arthur Levine, "Why I'm Reluctantly Backing Vouchers," *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1998

Sept 20: Individual, Community, and Education III: The Promise of Public Education

Key questions: What are the key arguments in defense of public education? What is the link between democracy and public schooling? How can choice save public education? What is the idea of small schools?

- Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Beacon Press, 1995)

Reflection paper due before class.

Sept 27: Individual, Community, and Education IV: Promise and Pitfalls in Perspective

Key questions: What are the issues plaguing traditional public schools in the US? What are the pitfalls of transitioning to a full-scale voucher system? Where does the jury stand on both, based on evidence?

- Henry M. Levin, "The Failure of the Public Schools and the Free Market Remedy," *The Urban Review* 2:37 (1968): 32-37
- Helen Ladd, "School Vouchers: A Critical View," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16:4 (2002): 3-24

Oct 4: School Choice I: Economic Theory

Key questions: How can we place the ideological and theoretical arguments in an economic framework? Which mechanisms dampen the competitive pressure from school choice? What are the traditional and non-traditional forms of school choice in the US context?

- Lovenheim and Turner, Sections 10.1 and 10.2
- "What Do America's 'Traditional' Forms of School Choice Teach Us about School Choice Reforms?" Caroline Hoxby, *Economic Policy Review* 4:1 (1998): 47-59

Oct 11: School Choice II: Effect of school choice on student achievement

Key questions: How does school choice affect student achievement? What are the unintended consequences on student sorting? What is the issue of cream-skimming and how does it complicate the estimation of effect sizes?

- Atila Abdulkadiroglu, Parag Pathak, and Christopher Walters, "Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?" *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 10:1 (2018): 175-206.
- Chang-Tai Hsieh and Miguel Urquiola, "The effects of generalized school choice on achievement and stratification: Evidence from Chile's voucher program," *Journal of Public Economics* 90:8-9 (2006): 1477-1503.

Oct 18: School Choice III: Vouchers and Evidence

Key questions: What is the difference between general and partial equilibrium in the context of school choice? Methods focus: How does a two-stage randomization design enable the estimation of general equilibrium effects? Content focus: What is the evidence on educational voucher policies in international settings? How do state capacity and school quality affect impact the effectiveness of voucher programs in developing countries?

- Karthik Muralidharan and Venkatesh Sundararaman, "The Aggregate Effect of School Choice: Evidence from a Two-Stage Experiment in India," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130:3 (2015): 1011-1066
- Eric Bettinger, "Educational vouchers in international contexts," *Handbook of the Economics of Education* (Elsevier, 2011), pp. 551-572

Oct 25: School Choice IV: Charter Schools and Evidence

Key questions: How did the charter idea come into being? What are charter schools and what is the current state of evidence on their effectiveness?

- Albert Shanker, "Restructuring Our Schools," *Peabody Journal of Education* 65:3 (1988): 88-100
- Sarah R. Cohodes and Katharine S. Parham. "Charter Schools' Effectiveness, Mechanisms, and Competitive Influence," NBER Working Paper No. 28477, 2021.

Reflection paper due before class.

Nov 1: School Choice V: Charter Schools in Developing Countries

Key questions: How is the charter idea transplanted in developing countries? What are the unique challenges in the way of effective implementation in developing countries?

- Mauricio Romero, Justin Sandefur, and Wayne Aaron Sandholtz, "Outsourcing education: Experimental evidence from Liberia," *American Economic Review* 110: 2 (2020): 364-400.
- Karthik Muralidharan, "The State and the Market in Education Provision: Evidence and the Way Ahead", Working Paper No. 2019-06, Columbia SIPA, Deepak and Neera Raj Center on Indian Economic Policies

Nov 8 (Election Day) NO CLASS

Nov 15: School Choice VI: What constitutes meaningful choice?

Key Questions: Do charter schools increase choice for all across the board? What are the different ways in which schools respond to competition? What is the role of information targeting in ensuring effective school choice?

- Peter Bergman and Isaac McFarlin, Jr., Education for All? A Nationwide Audit of Schools of Choice, NBER Working Paper No. 25396, 2018
- Kehinde F. Ajayi, Willa H. Friedman, and Adrienne M. Lucas, "The importance of information targeting for school choice," *American Economic Review* 107:5 (2017): 638-43.
- Huriya Jabbar, "Every kid is money' market-like competition and school leader strategies in New Orleans," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37:4 (2015): 638-659.

November 22: The Economics of Privatization, I: The Dynamics of Exit

Key questions: What are the different ways for institutional reform? How can we examine charter schools, through Hirschman's prism of exit, voice, and loyalty?

- A.O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Harvard University Press, 1970)
- Samuel E. Abrams, "Exit, Voice, and Charter Schools," *La Revista Jurídica de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* 88:3 (2019): 895-919

Reflection paper due before class.

Nov 29: The Economics of Privatization, II: For-Profit School Management

Key questions: How are for-profit school managements different from non-profits? How do market forces and commercial mindset affect the quality of education?

- Samuel E. Abrams, *Education and the Commercial Mindset* (Harvard University Press, 2016), Chs. 1-7
- *Discussion with Sam Abrams*

Dec 6: The Economics of Privatization, III: International Context

Key questions: What lessons can we learn from the Nordic experience with education provision? What are the similarities and differences with other countries discussed so far?

- Samuel E. Abrams, *Education and the Commercial Mindset* (Harvard University Press, 2016), Chs. 11-12

Dec 13: The Economics of Privatization, IV: International Context

Key questions: What lessons can we learn from the French and Chinese experiences with education provision? What are the similarities and differences with other countries discussed so far?

- Yiwen Wang, Educational Privatization in China: A Case Study, NCSPE Working Paper No. 238, 2019
- Sarah Butrymowicz, "This Country Spends Billions on Private Schools—and Has a Terrible Learning Gap Between Poor and Wealthy," *The Hechinger Report*, March 1, 2018

Dec 20: Final Exam

■ BASIS OF GRADE DETERMINATION

A+	Rare performance. Reserved for highly exceptional, rare achievement.
A	Excellent. Outstanding achievement.
A-	Excellent work but not quite outstanding.
B+	Very good. Solid achievement is expected of most graduate students.
B	Good. Acceptable achievement.
B-	Acceptable achievement but below what is generally expected of graduate students.
C+	Fair achievement, above the minimally acceptable level.
C	Fair achievement but only minimally acceptable.
C-	Very low performance. The records of students receiving such grades are subject to review.

■ COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Most of the course's communication will go through Canvas, an online learning platform. I strongly encourage you to check notifications regularly, at least once per day.

You are encouraged to utilize the Student Questions Forum on the course site for general questions about the course or its content. Posting your general questions to the Student Questions Forum allows other students to learn from their peers' responses and to post follow-up questions that pertain to the initial inquiry. You should feel comfortable responding to each other, answering posted questions, or providing feedback. This practice will also help me to manage the volume of emails I receive about similar questions from other students.

If you have questions that specifically apply to you (e.g. feedback you've received for an assignment), you can email me directly instead of posting it to the student questions forum. I will respond to emails typically within 48 hours during the business week (Monday through Friday) and 72 hours during the weekend.

■ TC POLICIES

Privacy

Students who receive or are provided access to a recording of a class may not download the recording to a computer or other electronic device on which it would be accessible to others and may not distribute the recording or any portion or transcript of it to anyone else. We are part of a learning community and students must respect each other's privacy. Students may talk about personal or sensitive topics and it is important to the course that we

have a safe space to share openly. If a student is found to have shared a recording in violation of this rule, the student will be subject to sanctions for academic and general misconduct, including a failing grade for this course. The instructor has the option of sharing the class session recordings with other members of your class. Any other use of the recording will require your expressed written permission.

Accommodations

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact the Office of Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities (OASID) for information about registration. You can reach OASID by email at oasid@tc.columbia.edu, stop by 301 Zankel Building or call 212-678-3689. Services are available only to students who have registered and submit appropriate documentation. As your instructor, I am happy to discuss specific needs with you as well. Please report any access related concerns about instructional material to OASID and to me as your instructor.

Incomplete Grades

For the full text of the Incomplete Grade policy please refer to the [Incomplete Grades policy](#).

Student Responsibility for Monitoring TC email account

Students are expected to monitor their TC email accounts. For the full text of the Student Responsibility for Monitoring TC email account please refer to [Student Responsibility for Monitoring TC Email Account](#).

Religious Observance

It is the policy of Teachers College to respect its members' observance of their major religious holidays. Where academic scheduling conflicts prove unavoidable, students will not be penalized for absences due to religious reasons, and course instructors will work with students on alternative means for satisfying academic requirements. If students and instructors cannot reach a suitable arrangement, they should consult the appropriate Program Director or Department Chair. If necessary, students or instructors may take the matter to the Office of the Provost for additional appeal. Please see the [Religious Observance policy](#).

Sexual Harassment and Violence Reporting

Teachers College is committed to maintaining a safe environment for students. Because of this commitment and because of federal and state regulations, we must advise you that if you tell any of your instructors about sexual harassment or gender-based misconduct involving a member of the campus community, your instructor is required to report this information to the Title IX Coordinator, Janice Robinson. She will treat this information as private, but will need to follow up with you and possibly look into the matter. The Ombuds Officer is a confidential resource available for students, staff and faculty, including matters concerning "Gender-based Misconduct". "Gender-based misconduct" includes sexual assault, stalking, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and gender-based harassment. For more information, see Columbia University's [Sexual Respect policy](#). The TC Ombuds Officer may be reached at ombuds@tc.columbia.edu or 212-678-4169.

Emergency Plan

TC is prepared for a wide range of emergencies. After declaring an emergency situation, the President/Provost will provide the community with critical information on procedures and available assistance. If travel to campus is not feasible, instructors will facilitate academic continuity through Canvas and other technologies, if possible. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are set to receive email notifications from TC and communications from their instructor at their TC email address. Within the first two sessions for the course, students are expected to review and be prepared to follow the instructions stated in the emergency plan. The plan may consist of downloading or obtaining all available readings for the course or the instructor may provide other instructions.

Academic Integrity

Students who intentionally submit work either not their own or without clear attribution to the original source, fabricate data or other information, engage in cheating, or misrepresentation of academic records may be subject to charges. Sanctions may include dismissal from the college for violation of the TC principles of academic and professional integrity fundamental to the purpose of the College.