

ESOC 4450L: Field Experience in Social Studies Education

Fall Semester, 2008
Tuesdays, 5:00 to 7:00 pm
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Hours: Before and after
class and by appointment

About the seminar: During this semester, you will be immersed—baptized, as it were—in what is often called the “real world” (we can talk later about how “real” that world is). For many of you, this will probably be the first time back in a public school on an extended basis since you graduated from high school. Importantly, you will be there in a very different role than when you were a student, or when you visited schools as a parent or in other capacities. For this semester, the role is anomalous -- you are not a student in the same sense as when you attended public school, but neither are you a teacher, nor even yet a student teacher. You are in the school as an observer, a guest, hopefully in some sort of participant role.

Teacher educators have long known that this sort of field experience can raise all manner of questions -- what *is* my role here? What should I be observing? This is not what I expected; why isn't it? What has changed since I was a public school student and why? Hopefully, too, you will be asking questions about how you will respond when you take on the role to which you aspire—a social studies teacher, an educator, an intellectual and ethical factor in the lives of young people, a professional in a culture that is increasingly disinclined to accord teachers the respect traditional to professionals—What do I want to teach *toward*? How can I do that effectively? What must I know and be able to do to teach as though it mattered? How do I assure myself and my school that my classroom is orderly and safe?

The heart of this seminar is to serve as a safe place in which to raise those questions. In your other courses you will be grappling with questions of the social studies curriculum and pedagogy appropriate to middle and secondary schools. In your field experiences you will be observing social studies classes. In this seminar, we will try to bring everything together: What are the social studies *for*? How is that purpose enacted “on the ground”? What are the obstacles to achieving the purposes of social studies? Is there a good “fit” between purposes and actual practices? Why or why not? What does that mean for me as a future educator? How can I conceptualize what I am observing in ways that lead to better teaching?

I have particular things that I expect for us to deal with, suggested in part in the course objectives, below. On the other hand, in the spirit of a true seminar, I also want to be guided by what you are observing and what you think worthy of our collective consideration. To achieve that goal, we will be walking a fine line -- the course must not degenerate into a “gripe session,” but must, by the same token, provide opportunities to authentically explore the problems and concerns that arise from your time in classrooms. To avoid the former while achieving the latter, we will avoid gripe sessions' usual victim-blaming by constantly posing the critical questions: If it (school, learning) is, or they (students, teachers, administrators, parents) are, as we observe them, *why*? *With what consequences*? *How else might it be*? *What must we do to move from what is to what should be*? To answer such questions, we will not rely on common sense answers, but will work toward *uncommon sense* by applying history, sociology, economics, and

other disciplines to understand the roots of the conditions we observe. Such habits of mind are essential, I believe, in the process of making us all into truly reflective practitioners, the sorts of teachers who reflect seriously and systematically on their teaching and their profession as a means to improve their craft and their students' learning.

Thus, a central goal, and specific assignment, for the seminar, is to learn to be careful, reflective observers, not merely of the teacher in front of the room, but of the entire school enterprise, from the ways the unintended or "hidden" curriculum is mobilized; through the ways learners react to one another, to the curriculum, to the institution, and to the teacher; to the ways the intended curriculum is parsed, packaged, and presented. I will, from time to time, give specific instructions on things to observe; I will frequently ask for specific, written feedback to the group about your observations. As part of that feedback, I will constantly ask that you pose questions to the seminar that we will take as our weekly seminar focus.

Simultaneous with ESOC 4450L you are taking other social studies courses. I have intentionally structured some assignments for this course to coincide with and reinforce assignments for other courses. Those assignments, such as the teaching rationale, will be assessed in your other courses; I will only be assessing the ways you apply your field experience to thinking about and responding to the assignment.

Course objectives: By the end of this field experience, participants in the seminar will be able to:

- Articulate a defensible rationale for teaching the social studies
- Describe what such a rationale means for what one must do as a teacher
- Explain the obstacles to achieving the goals enunciated in the rationale
- Describe preliminarily the ways one persists in teaching well in the face of obstacles
- Demonstrate the initial dispositions of a reflective teacher
- Compare and make ethically and pedagogically sound distinctions between competing strategies for classroom management and assessment
- Provide a critically informed reading of contemporary classroom life

Assignments: We will be reading portions of Butchart and McEwan, *Classroom Discipline in American Schools: Problems and Possibilities for Democratic Life*, available either new or used through most local or on-line booksellers and through libraries; it is available on-line through the UGA library. Feel free to share copies. There may be other reading assignments, but they will not require any purchases and they will be kept to a minimum.

The primary assignment for ESOC 4450L is to spend *a minimum* of five hours per week in classroom observation. You will be informed within the first two weeks of class (hopefully during our first meeting) about your school and teacher assignment. The day you receive that assignment, make an appointment with your host teacher to get acquainted. Working with your host, determine which class periods are appropriate for you to observe. To the degree possible, vary the days and times of observation from week to week. Make every effort (within the limits of your own academic schedule) to have some observations early in the week, others on a Friday; attempt to have at least one week in which you spend an entire day in your host's classroom; if

your host teaches more than one level (general track, college prep, Advanced Placement) or more than one age group (sophomores, seniors), attempt to observe her or him with each group on several occasions. After several weeks with your host, ask her or him to arrange for you to observe another teacher for a few hours, preferably teaching other levels or grades than your host. To the extent that your host is willing for you to participate, after the first three or four weeks ask if you can work with individual students or small groups of students. Be guided entirely by the wishes of the host in any sort of tutoring or teaching situation.

Please note that the *minimum* effort is five hours per week. Given the likelihood that you might have to miss a few days for illness or other unexpected absences, and given what I hope is the value of this experience, it would be wise to put in more than the minimum hours so that you have the required sixty hours by the end of the semester.

After every visit to the school, spend time as soon as possible engaging in formal reflection on your observations. These reflections, which you will write up as journal entries, serve several purposes. First, but hopefully least important for you, they will serve as documentation of your time in the field. Be sure to report in each journal entry the total hours (and fractions of hours) spent in the classroom that day, and exactly what you observed. Second, the journal entries will allow you to capture, while they are fresh, all the impressions gained from the experience, the positive, the negative, and those that simply interested or surprised you (you may make more sense of them later). If a specific assignment is given regarding what you should observe in a particular week, be sure to include responses to the assignment. Third, from the journal entries you will be extracting questions you wish to pose to the seminar, and examples you can use to illustrate responses you might make to questions others are posing.

For reasons of confidentiality, and to give you the greatest freedom to observe honestly and critically, the journal entries will be shared only with me. I will read all entries, though I will not necessarily respond to each entry, unless you pose a specific question to me. You may submit the entries in hard copy or as e-mail notes or attachments. Submit them immediately, both as a way of assuring yourself that you do not lose them (they are my only documentation that you have met the course requirement of sixty hours of observation) and to keep me apprised of what is going on in the field.

Format for journal entries: at the top of the entry, give your name, where you are observing, grade level, and the number of hours, and fraction of hours, spent in the observation. After the first entry, you can skip the place and grade level, but be sure to always include your name and time devoted. The rest of the entry is free-form -- write as full, or as brief, an entry as you wish that will provide context, examples, and descriptions for reflection. Conclude with some reflections on the experience. The reflections may be little more than the questions the experience raise for you, or they may be expressions of your pleasure or frustration with or wonder at the experience, or it may be a longer meditation on what the experience means. Remember, for this seminar we are more concerned with the meaning of teaching and learning than with the technologies of teaching (you are covering the technologies in your other classes); this is your space to explore the deeper meaning of being a student, being a teacher, being a society working on preparing the next generation for the future. What sort of future is embedded in the schooling you are observing?

In addition to your field experience journal, you will also respond at least weekly, and more frequently as you wish, to the seminar Web-CT bulletin-board. This will be the place to share more publicly the questions that arise from your observation experiences, or to respond to questions posed by others. No questions are out of bounds, so long as they pertain to teaching, learning, schools, or the content of your observations. They may be very specific, programmatic questions (“I have to go to Alabama next week; can I make up my observation time over the two following weeks?”), specific questions about observations (“Is anyone else having difficulty getting host teachers to let you tutor?”), or the broader questions that most profoundly get at the central problematics of contemporary teaching (“Why are these kids so bored when the subject matter should be so compelling?”).

Remember, though, that the *journal entries* are confidential and the place to raise highly personal issues; the *bulletin-board* is a public space. Use the latter with care; you should not name names, for instance. No questions are out of bounds, but do give thought to the ethical issues of how you pose the questions.

My expectation is that we will all contribute to answering the simpler questions on-line. Everyone can jump in and offer suggestions. In most cases, I suspect we can handle those questions without taking seminar time for them, or limiting our seminar time to very quick responses to them. On the other hand, the more fundamental questions will become the fodder for our major seminar discussions. The night before seminar each week I will pull the questions I think most compelling and bring them to our seminar; you are welcome to assist with that process by bringing the questions you find most important, whether they are a question you posed or one that someone else raised.

From the content of our weekly meetings, I will occasionally give specific observation assignments.

To summarize, then, your assignments for the semester are as follows:

- Spend a *minimum* of five hours per week at your assigned school, with your assigned host teacher or with another teacher, by arrangement with your host
- After *every* day’s observation, write a journal entry, including total time spent and impressions gained. Send that directly me to immediately by e-mail or in hard copy.
- At least once each week, contribute to the seminar list-serve, either by responding to queries by others, or posing questions of your own (or both)
- Attend every weekly seminar prepared to contribute to the discussion from your own observations and understandings
- Use your observations and our seminar reflections to complete your teaching rationale
- As assigned during the semester, read selections from Butchart and McEwan and, potentially, other selected readings

Grading: This seminar is graded S/U. To achieve a grade of Satisfactory, you must have a total of 60 hours in observation time, one journal entry for each day’s observation, one weekly contribution to the bulletin board, and attendance at and contributions to the weekly seminars.

Hopefully, as committed professionals-in-training, you will find it valuable to do a good deal more than those minimums.

Academic honesty: All academic work, in this seminar and all others at the university, must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work (see <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>). In this seminar, questions of academic honesty apply primarily to plagiarism. Be certain to acknowledge the sources of your ideas, and be very careful that you do not use the exact words of others without quotation marks, even in list-serve discussions and Live-Text journal entries.