

ELP 330K: Topics in K-12 Education

Unique #12634 | Fall 2026

Tuesdays, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, In person

George I. Sánchez Building ([SZB](#)) Room 3.222**Instructor:** Daniel Dawer**Pronouns:** he/him**Email:** daniel.dawer@utexas.edu**Office:** SZB 3.804A**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 12-1 PM or by appointment**Course Overview and Learning Outcomes**

In this course, we will:

- Explore a wide array of introductory issues in educational leadership and policy;
- Investigate a set of enduring questions about education and schools;
- Develop our skills as education policy analysts, researchers, and historians.

To accomplish these goals, we will:

- Engage critically with a variety of academic research and media reporting;
- Make connections between historical events and contemporary issues in education;
- Critically analyze an enduring issue in K-12 education.

Course Requirements**Required Texts**Ewing, E. L. (2025). *Original Sins*. Random House Publishing Group. ([Ebook link](#))

Various articles, chapters, and other resources can be found at the course website on Canvas at <https://utexas.instructure.com>. Additionally, instructions, assignments, readings, rubrics, and essential information will be on the Canvas website. Check the Canvas site regularly.

Course Expectations

- **Classroom community.** All of us come to this space with a unique set of lived experiences that inform our perspectives, values, and beliefs. As we learn and explore ideas together, there will be moments in which we will challenge or critique each other's ideas, and when our own ideas will be challenged or critiqued. It is important that we all have the opportunity to express our viewpoints in an atmosphere of care and mutual respect. To accomplish this, we will accept individual and collective responsibility for maintaining a classroom community that encourages creativity and dialogue and for repairing harm if/when it occurs.
- **Active participation.** This course will require all students to actively participate in learning. This means critically reading all assigned chapters and articles prior to each class, thinking carefully about the ideas presented, and applying concepts from the readings to current and historical sociopolitical contexts. This also means contributing in small- and large-group discussions. You do not need to have everything figured out before you participate. We are all in the process of learning, and actively contributing to discussions is one way to figure out what we are thinking. Also, active participation means intentionally listening and knowing when to step back so others can speak.
- **Technology.** There will be moments during class when life happens and we will need to take a call, respond to a text or email, or handle an issue at a moment that is not always convenient. I will operate under the assumption that you are present and paying attention when in class, and should something arise that requires your attention, you will excuse yourself from the learning environment to address it. Many of us are also working jobs and internships and/or have family and life responsibilities outside of class. If you need to be on the phone to tend to these responsibilities, please do so—I will expect that you have done all you can in advance of class to avoid having to remove yourself from our learning space. As needed, please communicate with me about any issues that might pull you away from our learning time.
- **Communication.** Please communicate with me if you are going to miss class, need an extension on an assignment, or have other concerns that arise during the semester. This includes religious observances and faith practices. If you need to miss class due to a religious observance, please let me know and we can work together to make up any assignment or session that you miss.

Assignment Descriptions

Attendance/Participation (10%)

This course requires your attendance and active participation in discussions and activities. You are welcome to use **1** absence during the semester as needed without explanation, but you will

still be responsible for reading assigned texts for that session. It is crucial that you attend all class sessions, arrive on time, return promptly from breaks, and stay for the entire class. You cannot miss more than 3 classes and still pass the course.

Current Event Presentation (15%)

Once during the semester, you will give a brief presentation (about 10-15 minutes) connecting that week's enduring question to a current issue in education at the local, state, or national level. The presentation should describe the current issue, introduce one news article, video, or other piece of media, and pose 1-2 questions for class discussion. You will have the opportunity to sign up for a slot for your current event project during the first week of class. You will also submit a 1 to 2 page (double-spaced) document to the instructor describing the issue and the media you selected.

Exploratory Paper (20%) Due 10/13 by 11:59 PM

You will write a 2-4 page (double spaced) paper exploring the question/issue you are interested in investigating for your final paper. Your exploratory paper should include a brief description of what you already know about the issue, why the topic interests you, and any questions you would like to ask the instructor. Your exploratory paper should also identify and describe at least three sources that you plan to consult as you research and write the paper. After submitting the exploratory paper, you will also be required to meet briefly with the course instructor to discuss your topic and your plan for completing the final paper.

Final Paper Presentation (15%) Due 12/8 before class time

You will give a brief (~10 minute) presentation summarizing the key ideas in your final paper. If you use PowerPoint or a similar program to create your presentation, please upload the slides to Canvas before class time.

Final Paper (40%) Due 12/14 by 11:59 PM

You will write a 5-8 page (double-spaced) paper responding to one of this course's enduring questions about education, or a different question of your choosing (with approval from the course instructor). You have three options for organizing the final paper:

1. **Issue analysis paper:** Analyze a current issue in K-12 education. Provide relevant context about your issue, identify ongoing conflicts or disagreements, and explain what is at stake for involved actors.
2. **Historical paper:** Examine how an issue in K-12 education surfaced in a particular historical era (or in more than one era). Describe how your issue was shaped by people, places, events, and policies during this era.
3. **Competing perspectives paper:** Compare and contrast at least two competing perspectives about an issue in K-12 education. Evaluate these different perspectives, identifying areas of agreement and/or disagreement, and offer your own perspective.

Use this link to view UT's final exam schedule: <https://registrar.utexas.edu/schedules/269/finals>

Grading Policy

Assignment	Points possible	Percentage of total grade
Attendance/participation	10	10%
Current event presentation	15	15%
Exploratory paper	20	20%
Final paper presentation	15	15%
Final paper	40	40%

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-
94-100	90-93	86-89	83-85	80-82

Course Outline

*Plans, readings, assignments are subject to change; instructor will communicate all in class and on Canvas.

*Detailed University session information can be found here: <https://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars/26-27>

	Enduring questions and readings	Assignments
Week 1 8/25	Why study education?	
Week 2 9/1	What is education for? Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i> , 34(1), 39-81. <u>What is school for?</u> Choose one cluster: 1. Everyone, Economic Mobility, Making Citizens 2. Care, Wasting Time, Learning to Read 3. Connecting to Nature, Merit, Hope	
Week 3 9/8	Who should have the power to shape education? Ewing, E. L. (2025). <i>Original Sins</i> Introduction and Chapter 1 (Print: pp. 1-36; Ebook: pp. 13-46). Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2019). National or special interests? Federal and state education policy and reform. In <i>The politics of education in an era of inequality</i> (pp. 69-88). Routledge. Listen: Is education in America fair and balanced for all kids? An interview with Eve Ewing . <i>The Excerpt</i> Podcast, March 26, 2025. (14 min)	
Week 4 9/15	What should students learn? <i>Original Sins</i> Chapters 2, 3, 4 (Print: pp. 37-93; Ebook: pp. 47-104) Goldstein, D. (2024, December 20). Why it's hard to control what gets taught in public schools. <i>The New York Times</i> Choose one: 1. Reading: Loewus, L. (2026, April 7). The cost of over-teaching phonics. <i>Education Next</i>.	Guest speaker; Trae Madrigal , PhD candidate

	2. Math: Schwartz, S. (2026, January 2022). Debates over math teaching are heating up. They could affect classrooms. <i>Education Week</i>. 3. Science: Erduran, S. (2025, May 1). The post-truth era and how science keeps ignoring it. <i>Science</i>. 4. Social Studies: Schwartz, S. (2026, March 4). What makes a good social studies curriculum? <i>Education Week</i>.	
Week 5 9/22	How should we measure what students learn? <i>Original Sins</i> Chapters 5, 6, 7 (Print: pp. 95-146; Ebook pp. 105-157) Koretz, D. M. (2017). The evolution of test-based “reform.” In <i>The testing charade: Pretending to make schools better</i>. University of Chicago Press (pp. 25-37). Schneider, J., & Hutt, E. L. (2023). How grades fail. In <i>Off the mark: How grades, ratings, and rankings undermine learning (but don't have to)</i>. Harvard University Press (pp. 19-39)	
Week 6 9/29	How should we hold schools accountable for their performance? Finn Jr, C. E. (2022). School accountability: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i>, 104(3), 12-17. Vasquez Heilig, J., Brewer, T. J., & Pedraza, J. O. (2018). Examining the myth of accountability, high-stakes testing, and the achievement gap. <i>Journal of Family Strengths</i>, 18(1), 1-14. Edison, J. (2026, January 27). Low test scores on one campus can trigger a state takeover in Texas. <i>The Texas Tribune</i>.	
Week 7 10/6	What makes a good teacher? Santoro, D. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. <i>American Journal of Education</i>, 118, 1-23. Dawer, D. I. (2026). “We’re teaching them to follow orders”: English language arts teachers’ responses to state takeover. In B. Hsieh, M. P. Chopin, J. T. Priede (Eds.), <i>Being a teacher in a world in transition</i>. Routledge. Listen: Teachers speak out. <i>Have You Heard</i> podcast, April 20,	

	2023. (50 min.)	
Week 8 10/13	What makes a good educational leader? Anderson, E., & Weiner, J. (2023). Managing up, down, and outwards: Principals as boundary spanners during the COVID-19 crisis. <i>School Leadership & Management</i>, 43(4), 411-429. White, R. S., Stitzlein, S., Abowitz, K. K., Gottlieb, D., & Schneider, J. (2026). Are locally elected school boards really failing? <i>Education Next</i>. Listen: The untold truths of the superintendency. <i>Harvard EdCast</i>, November 7, 2024. (22 min.)	Exploratory Paper due Guest speaker: Maria Benzon, Houston ISD District V Trustee
Week 9 10/20	How should schools keep children safe? <i>Original Sins</i> Chapters 8, 9, 10 (Print: pp. 147-206; Ebook: pp. 158–220) Woulfin, S., & Sadler, J. (2023). A is for Apple, B is for Bulletproof: The racialized fortification of schools. <i>Berkeley Review of Education</i>, 12(2), 60-80. Lee, J. (2026, July 13). In Texas schools, a crisis of arrests of kids as young as 10. <i>Texas Observer</i>.	Current event presentation: Tim Guest speaker: Andrew Hairston, formerly at Texas Appleseed
Week 10 10/27	How should schools respond to inequality? <i>Original Sins</i> Chapters 11, 12, 13 (Print: pp. 207-248; Ebook: pp. 221-263) Ladson-Billings, G. (2006) From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 35(7), 3-12. Domina, T., Penner, A., & Penner, E. (2017). Categorical inequality: Schools as sorting machines. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 43(1), 311-330.	
Week 11 11/3	Who should pay for education, and how much should it cost? Baker, B. D., & Knight, D. (2025). <i>Does money matter in education?</i> Albert Shanker Institute. (closely read pp. 7-26; skim the rest)	Guest Speaker: Chandra Villanueva, Every Texan

	Villanueva, C. K. (2024). <i>Pinching Pennies: Texas is shortchanging public education</i>. Every Texan. Listen: Unfair school finance and golden pennies. <i>Texas Public Radio</i>, January 26, 2024. (30 min.)	
Week 12 11/10	What choices should families have in their children's education? Friedman, M. (1997). Public schools: Make them private. <i>Education Economics</i>, 5(3), 341-344. Gooden, M.A., Jabbar, H., & Torres, M.S. (2016). Race and school vouchers: Legal, historical, and political contexts. <i>Peabody Journal of Education</i>, 91(4), 522-536. Egalite, A. J. (2026, July 21). Parental Choice Is Sending Public Schools a Message. Are They Listening? <i>Education Next</i>. Listen: School vouchers explained: What the new federal program means. <i>Harvard EdCast</i>, October 2, 2025. (28 min.)	
Week 13 11/17	How should schools serve all students? Carey, A. C. (2026). The precarity of disability rights historically and in the Trump administration. <i>Societies</i>, 16(37), 1-17. Cervantes-Soon, C. G. (2026). When silence speaks: Power, marginalization, and Latinx immigrant students in Dual Language classrooms. <i>Journal of Latinos and Education</i>, 25(1), 78-97. Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., Saba, V. C., James, I., & Ioverno, S. (2021). Promoting school safety for LGBTQ and all students. <i>Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i>, 8(2), 160-166.	
Week 14 12/1	How should schools prepare students for the future? <i>Original Sins</i> Conclusion (Print: pp. 249-269; Ebook: pp. 264-283) Nichols, P. T., Thrall, A., Quiros, J., & Dixon-Román, E. (2024). Speculative capture: Literacy after platformization. <i>Reading Research Quarterly</i>, 59(2), 211-218. Listen: Silicon Valley's dystopian vision for schools. <i>Have You</i>	Guest speaker: UT Librarian

	<i>Heard</i> podcast. January 22, 2026. (47 min.)	
Week 15 12/8	What have we learned, and how will we use it?	Final presentations Final paper due 12/14

University Resources

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: “As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.” Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT. Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT’s Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address:

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

Accessibility

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course.

If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability and Access (D&A). Contact and more details are available on D&A’s website: <http://disability.utexas.edu/>. If you are already registered with D&A, please share your Accommodation Letter with me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss how your approved accommodations will be implemented in this course.

Artificial Intelligence

In accordance with the University’s Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities, Chapter 11, students accept the responsibility to always uphold academic integrity and an honor code reflective of a scholarly community devoted to academic and personal success. All members of the University community are fully accountable and responsible for any output they produce as part of academic work. They are also responsible for following the guidance specified in the Texas Statement on Academic Integrity and avoiding prohibited uses of generative AI tools outlined in the Information Security Office’s guidance on Acceptable Use of Generative AI Tools.

Generative AI use shall be permitted on a partial basis for academic work in this course, provided that students 1) use AI responsibly, 2) practice critical discernment and conduct meaningful human review of any output generated by AI, and 3) properly disclose use. Using generative AI tools without authorization or failing to disclose generative AI use according to the disclosure policy in this course, even when AI use is permitted, may constitute academic misconduct under UT Austin’s Institutional Rules and may be referred to Student Conduct and

Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students for resolution. As a general rule, students should not use AI to produce any written work (including papers, discussion posts, or presentations) that will be submitted for this course under the student's name.

Carrying of Handguns in my Personal Office

Per my right, I prohibit carrying of handguns in my personal office. Note that this information will also be conveyed to all students verbally during the first week of class. This written notice is intended to reinforce the verbal notification and is not a “legally effective” means of notification in its own right.” Review the university policy regarding campus carry for more information.

Content Warning

Our classroom provides an open space for the critical and orderly exchange of ideas through discussion. Some readings and other content in this course will include topics and comments that some students may find offensive and/or traumatizing. I'll aim to forewarn students about potentially disturbing content, and I ask all students to help to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity.

Controversial Topics

In accordance with institutional standards and U.T. System Regents Rule 31004, this course is designed around a clearly defined, evidence-based curriculum. The study of Education inherently requires the scholarly examination of multiple and competing viewpoints. These topics are fully germane to the course objectives. As required by university policy, unsettled or disputed matters will be approached using a broad, balanced, and evidence-driven framework that equips students to use reason to form their own independent conclusions.

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The [Counseling and Mental Health Center](#) serves UT's diverse campus community by providing high quality, innovative and culturally informed mental health programs and services that enhance and support students' well-being, academic and life goals. To learn more about your counseling and mental health options, call CMHC at (512) 471-3515.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call the CMHC Crisis Line 24/7 at (512) 471-2255.

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning

how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

Land Acknowledgement

We are meeting on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what now is called North America. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge the Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas.

Land acknowledgement provided by the [Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies](#), The University of Texas at Austin)

In recognition of the ongoing and cumulative challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in Central Texas and globally, we call upon The University of Texas at Austin:

- To repatriate the ancestral remains held by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory to their Indigenous descendant communities and Native lands.
- To commit to the active recruitment and material support of Native American and Indigenous students, who currently comprise fewer than 0.2% of UT Austin's student body.
- To support the transition of the Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies into a Center.
- To establish a protocol of research and study on Tribal or Native lands, and to foster an ethics and practice of engaged scholarship, with and for Indigenous peoples and communities, locally and internationally.

Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "preferred name" with the Gender and Sexuality Center, which you can do so here: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/publications-and-resources/>. I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc). Please advise me of any changes early in the semester so that I may make appropriate updates to my records. For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/profile-pronouns>.

Sanger Learning Center

Did you know that more than one-third of UT students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger

Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Libraries: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

ITS: <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Student Rights & Responsibilities

- You have a right to a learning environment that supports mental and physical wellness.
- You have a right to respect.
- You have a right to be assessed and graded fairly.
- You have a right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- You have a right to privacy and confidentiality.
- You have a right to meaningful and equal participation, to self-organize groups to improve your learning environment.
- You have a right to learn in an environment that is welcoming to all people. No student shall be isolated, excluded or diminished in any way.

With these rights come responsibilities:

- You are responsible for taking care of yourself, managing your time, and communicating with the teaching team and with others if things start to feel out of control or overwhelming.
- You are responsible for acting in a way that is worthy of respect and always respectful of others.
- Your experience with this course is directly related to the quality of the energy that you bring to it, and your energy shapes the quality of your peers' experiences.
- You are responsible for creating an inclusive environment and for speaking up when someone is excluded.
- You are responsible for holding yourself accountable to these standards, holding each other to these standards, and holding the teaching team accountable as well.

Title IX Reporting

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. **I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419.

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, including the types of conduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

University Policies and Resources for Students

[Click here to view a Canvas page](#) of resources that are important for students as you engage with and navigate this course and the university.