# Problems in Philosophy of Education

**MS_ED-413/TEACH_ED 313, Spring Quarter 2007**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time:</th>
<th>413, Section 20, and 313 meet on Wednesday, 6:30-9PM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location:</strong></td>
<td>School of Education and Social Policy, Annenberg Hall</td>
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<td>Main Classroom: Annenberg G21</td>
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<td>Breakout Rooms: G01, G14, G27, G30, G31, G32, 101, 345 (all in Annenberg)</td>
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## Instructor:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

I. INTRODUCTION

The course is grounded in the Northwestern University Conceptual Framework (NUCF), which reads:

As active participants in the field of education, our candidates will strive for improvement and innovation, based on inquiry that is grounded in reflection and research. The candidates will have

1) A vision of learning that focuses on:
   1.1 understanding student thinking about the subject matter;
   1.2 reflection and research as means of learning;
   1.3 learning as a social practice, which encourages collaborative learning in which people clarify doubts, examine beliefs and work together to address questions and concerns;
   1.4 authentic experience, where class sessions and assignments are designed to engage students’ interests and to have implication for the student beyond the classroom; and
   1.5 the use of technology to extend learning opportunities and thinking.

2) A vision of the learner that focuses on:
   2.1 lifelong learning and development shaped by social contexts; and
   2.2 student diversity as resource for the educational community.

3) A vision of teaching that focuses on:
   3.1 connection of theory to practice, where the candidates understand that theories suggest questions and ideas about practice, and practice suggests modification of theory; and
   3.2 professional conduct that is responsible and ethical.

The course addresses several themes in our CF including:

- a concern with student thinking (CF 1.1);
- learning as a social practice (CF 1.3);
- reflection and research as a means of learning (CF 1.2);
- authentic learning—or pursuing questions of genuine concern (CF 1.4);
- use of technology to extend learning opportunities and thinking (CF 1.5);
- diversity as a resource (CF 2.2);
- relating theory to practice in teaching (CF 3.1).

Hence, work in this course addresses some of the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, as these are aligned with some tenets of the NUCF:
Standard #3 Diversity:

“The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners”: The focus on discussion allows the students to bring their beliefs and arguments for the beliefs to the attention of the group. Perspectives informed by cultural background and experiences are invoked and examined both in discussions and in creating the philosophy of education. Each student’s questions and philosophy are clarified as the course proceeds.

Standard #5 Learning Environment:

“The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation”: The use of group discussions, for a variety of purposes, allows students to engage themselves in materials of the course in a way that promotes meaningful involvement.

Standard #7 Communication:

“The teacher uses knowledge of effective written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom”: The use of discussion and the writing and rewriting of the philosophy of education help to foster inquiry, collaboration, and meaningful exchange of ideas within the classroom.

Standard #9 Collaborative Relationships:

“The teacher understands the role of the community in education and develops and maintains collaborative relationships with colleagues, parents/guardians, and the community to support student learning and well-being”: The approach of the course is grounded in a model of interaction among members of a community—one that involves the expressing one’s views, questioning oneself and others about the meaning and justification for those views, listening to others so as to grasp their ideas and the reasons they have for their views, and a quest for greater understanding. The model is useful in many situations to help people work together.

Standard #10 Reflection and Professional Growth:

“The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates how choices and actions affect students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community and actively seeks opportunities to grow professionally”: The activities of the course help students to develop habits of reflection and appreciation of them. These reflective habits should help one to create learning situations that change as needed to benefit participants over time.

In presenting the rationale, course objectives, detail of course objectives, and teaching approach, I explain how the course helps students to address the above tenets of the NUCF.
II. RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the course is to help candidates to identify, develop, and defend their philosophies of education. To meet the aim, the course asks them to:

1) articulate their own philosophies of education. That is, they will identify their beliefs about the aims of education, how people learn, how teaching ought to be carried out, and the relation between the schools and society, given school populations today. These beliefs will be defended with clear arguments;

2) develop and defend interpretations of the course texts using evidence found in those texts and explored in class discussion. To interpret the texts, candidates should read and question the texts with care so that they develop questions that clearly express their genuine doubts. Through discussion with one another, they should work to cultivate their questions, their ideas about the answers, their own views about the meaning of the texts, and the soundness of the authors’ beliefs, given the populations of students in our schools today;

3) use their interpretations of the texts, the arguments advanced by the authors of those texts, their personal experiences and observations, and the class discussions to further identify, evaluate, refine and build arguments for their philosophies of education;

4) prepare to co-lead and co-lead class discussion. To co-lead and participate in discussion, candidates will develop skills needed to engage themselves and others in reflection upon texts and refine their philosophies of education. These skills include the ability to:

   - pose clear questions about the meaning of the text and its implications for teaching and learning practices;

   - question others about the meaning of their statements; listen for and suggest ideas about the relation between statements that have been made, questions that the statements raise, and progress made toward resolution of questions.

   - work to help others identify, clarify, and address issues of shared concern.

DETAIL OF COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. Writing the philosophy of education

A philosophy of education is a set of beliefs and arguments that address the following questions: What ought the aims of education to be? How do people learn? How is the character as well as the intellect to be educated? What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of educational institutions in society? And in American society we add: How can education help to foster democracy?

Each of these questions raises many complex issues. Once the issues become apparent, the task of forming one’s ideas about them requires reflection over a period of time from a variety of perspectives. One’s beliefs need to be identified, examined, defended, and perhaps modified. They also need to be understood in relation to one another.

Hence, over the course of the quarter, candidates will be asked to first write and then rewrite their philosophies of education several times. The texts that are read and discussed in the course will provide perspectives on the beliefs stated in the personal philosophy. Study of the texts allows candidates to identify, examine, defend and, if necessary, modify their beliefs so as to better articulate their
philosophies. Revisions will include discussion of passages from the texts that help writers articulate and defend their beliefs.

**Note:** Your philosophy should be placed in your portfolio at the end of the course. It will give evidence that you have integrated reflection and research into your teaching and that you have developed arguments for claims that are of personal interest to you. **In addition, by May 1, your first revision of the philosophy is to be placed in the digital portfolio. Description of the first revision is forthcoming.**

**B. The Texts**

Time in class will be spent discussing the assigned texts and relating them to the personal philosophies of education.

Nine of the ten weeks in the quarter will focus upon classic texts which span 2500 years, and so will move from ancient to modern views of the timeless and most profound of educational issues. The first three texts are chosen because they are the underpinnings of education in the western tradition as we know it. Plato’s *Republic* is the foundation of many of our current schooling practices and beliefs; and Rousseau and Dewey build directly upon it, and are, themselves, foundations of the constructivist and other contemporary approaches. WEB Du Bois gives us with classic essays on the education of African Americans. They provide a wonderful point of comparison to the other texts—different yet similar in some interesting ways.

The time in the quarter is short—nine weeks in which to read and discuss texts. Experience suggests that covering fewer texts in depth is more beneficial than covering a greater number superficially. As it is, the reading in the course is heavy, although I have cut out sections of each text. Because they are so fundamental to our educational traditions, the works selected provide access to and perspective upon educational writings that candidates may have read in other courses or may wish to read independently in order to build convincing arguments for their philosophies. A supplemental reading list will be distributed later in the quarter.

**C. The Activity of Class Discussion**

Each week, the class will use discussion to explore the meaning of the texts, the relation of positions in the texts to candidates’ beliefs and practical experiences, and the development of arguments to support the beliefs. A class section may hold small group as well as whole group discussions, and may use discussions to:

1) identify questions that a few find of interest and want to bring to the attention of the whole group;

2) relate the text under discussion to personal philosophies;

3) relate the text under discussion to the personal experiences;

4) pursue reflection on a particular issue in depth with a few people;

5) relate issues identified in small groups to an issue of shared concern to the whole group;

6) pursue resolution of a shared concern together;

7) other.
Each section should determine how best to use its time so that the discussions help to develop personal philosophies of education over time.

**Note:** Participation in class discussion helps one develop:

- concern with student thinking;
- understanding of learning as a social practice;
- the disposition to reflect upon the meaning of texts and personal experience;
- understanding of authentic learning—or pursuing questions of genuine concern;
- understanding of diversity as a resource for discussion;
- understanding of how to relate theory to practice, as ideas in texts are related to personal experience.

**D. Preparation for discussion**

In order to have productive discussion, I urge you to read the assigned material at least twice and develop responses to or questions about it. Often, the most satisfying discussions focus upon material that helps one to address questions of shared concern to the group. The more quickly your group can move to issues that it cares to resolve, the more interesting and productive your discussion can become.

As a consequence, you are asked to come to class with two questions about the meaning of the text under discussion. I recommend that you write questions while reading and then select two questions about the meaning of the text that you cannot but wish to resolve. The next step is to cultivate the two questions—to write the questions by quoting and interpreting particular passages that suggest ideas about resolution. For example:

*When the text says “. . .,” does it mean _______ (State in your words the meaning of the quoted words.)? If so, _______ (here, pose your point of doubt.)*

Please see your section leader or me if you have questions about this format. It is meant to liberate your thinking.

Note: If you are responding to a passage, chances are there is something intriguing to you about it, and further study of it in class may help you to clarify the concern and pursue resolution. Class discussion is likely to be most satisfying if you identify the question behind your interest in a passage, which is why you are asked to bring questions to the class discussion. **If you cannot articulate the question, quote the passage and interpret its meaning instead. Then, bring the passage to the attention of others in class.** (See assignment section below.)

**E. Discussion Leading**

As was true in 2005 and 2006, the course will give all candidates the opportunity to lead discussion. At the beginning of the course, candidates will sign up in pairs to co-lead one discussion during the quarter. One week in advance of leading discussion, the co-leaders will receive the candidate for the BQ that the instructional team identifies: co-leaders may develop follow-up questions for that question or another that they choose. Preparation for discussion will follow the procedure outlined below:

Co-leaders will post their basic question and three follow-up questions to Blackboard. A second pair of students will volunteer each week as "helpers" who will also post one question that they think follows up
the basic question as well as comments on the other 6 questions from the co-leaders. The discussion leaders then will take all 8 questions and put them into a cluster to post. The section leaders will enter into dialogue with the co-leaders and helpers. The goal is to help them clarify the cluster. The time-table for preparing the cluster of questions each week as follows:

1) Wed./Thursday, co-leaders receive candidate for BQ from the instructional team;

2) Saturday, 9:00 AM: co-leaders post a cluster of questions on the Blackboard site (discussion section board) (BQ and six follow-up questions, three written by each co-leader;

3) Saturday/Sunday: co-leaders and the “helper” pair correspond on the Blackboard site. The helper question co-leaders about their meaning and suggest modifications of questions; the co-leaders modify questions; helpers will each post one additional follow-up question;

4) Sunday, 5:00 PM: draft of cluster is sent to section leader;

5) Sunday-Monday, co-leaders/helpers/section leaders work to refine cluster;

6) Monday, 5:00 PM: TA sends cluster draft to SHG;

7) Tuesday, 10:00 PM or before, SHG returns draft with comments/questions aimed at further clarifying the questions; NOTE: SHG comments will be sent to section leader, who will post on blackboard group discussion page;

8) Co-leaders revise the cluster at least once more before leading the discussion; share revision with section leader and helpers;

9) Wednesday, 6:30 PM.: co-leaders bring copies of the cluster to the discussion and distribute after the discussion.*

  
  
  *I will be posting announcements on preparing for and leading discussion. Co-leaders will be encouraged to experiment with the discussion format.

10) AFTER leading the discussion, co-leaders each post a statement on whole-class Board (Blackboard site) which indicates: 1) something that he/she found useful about the preparation and leading phases of the discussion; 2) a suggestion for improving the preparation and leading phases/procedures.

F. Use of Blackboard

Blackboard helps us cultivate questions and pursue resolution. Blackboard may be used to:

1) post questions before class;

2) continue reflection on an issue when discussion is getting hot and class time runs out;

3) raise new questions—interpretive or otherwise—that grow out of class discussions;

4) carry out dialogue aimed at refining cluster—co-leaders/helpers/section leaders/SHG;

5) take up topics of general concern outside of class. Sometimes I will post messages to the entire class on the “Announcements” and “Course Documents” sections of Blackboard. More information about Blackboard to follow ;
6) reflect upon discussion preparation and leading experiences (see above).

**You should visit Blackboard and post at least one contribution to discussion in your section each week OR to the whole-group discussion board.**

**Note:** Use of Blackboard helps students to understand how technology can be used to extend thinking.

### III. TEACHING APPROACH

The course is grounded in beliefs about its aims, how people learn, the role of the teacher, and its place in the preparation of educators. Its aims are detailed in the course objectives above, but in general, the goal is to help students articulate and defend well their philosophies of education. It assumes that people make progress toward the goal not by hearing lectures about the meaning of others’ philosophies but by developing their own philosophies, which involves becoming clear about their beliefs, their reasons for the beliefs, and developing sound arguments to support their beliefs. The role of the teacher is to help candidates identify their beliefs through discussion—discussion that draws out and tests the beliefs in relation to the beliefs and arguments of others, including the most well developed and influential philosophies available (Plato, Rousseau, Dewey, and this year, WEB Du Bois (if one has only a few weeks!).

In order to allow discussion and examination of the texts, in light of personal beliefs and experiences, the class sections must be small. **In a group of 12-14, each person can and should speak at least three times during the discussion.** We have worked hard to make discussion groups of this size possible. Please take advantage of the opportunity to speak frequently and listen well to others so that all work together to help create issues that the group can pursue out of genuine interest. Such discussions are not only stimulating but will enable you to gain insight into your personal philosophies.

### IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) Attend all classes; course cannot be satisfactorily completed if classes are missed;

2) Read all assigned readings at least twice; complete the reading before class; **bring the text to class;**

3) Write two interpretive questions about the meaning of the assigned text (typed only) and bring them to each discussion. **An alternative assignment may take the place of one or two of the questions, if desired.** An alternative assignments may include: 1) Journal entries in which you select two –three passages of interest, INTERPRET THEM FULLY, that is, say in your own words no more and no less than the quoted passages say, and relate the passages to some experience that you have had; 2) 2-3 passages as described in 1) which you then relate to lines in other works that may offer perspective for viewing them. You may also use the selected passage to provide perspective on passages from other texts. **(Note: You need not submit the two interpretive questions the week that you lead discussion as you will be developing the cluster of questions.);**

4) Discussion leading responsibility: Prepare for and co-lead discussion as described above;

5) Act as a “helper” to another co-leading pair;

6) Write and rewrite a five to twelve page philosophy of education paper (partial revisions due as indicated below). **Note:** Guidelines for writing philosophy of education will be distributed after first draft is completed;
7) VISIT BLACKBOARD EACH WEEK; LEAVE QUESTION OR COMMENT IN YOUR DISCUSSION SECTION SPACE OR ON THE GROUP DISCUSSION BOARD. Reflection on discussion preparation and leading is to be posted to whole group discussion board the week following the leading experience.

**Note:** All submitted papers and questions must be typed (double spaced).

**GRADING**

Successful completion of the course requires that you fulfill all course requirements and attend at all classes. Questions/weekly assignments, philosophies (partial revisions and final version) must be well-argued and well-written, as indicated in the description of the project. Every student is expected to speak at least three times in discussion, and discussion leaders are expected to complete questions and question revisions on schedule. Problems in Philosophy of Education is a rigorous, demanding class, and thorough, consistent, timely participation will promote significant achievement. While the challenge is great, know that the development of a careful, well-argued philosophy of education is a critical element of the preparation for teaching - one worth all the effort you can muster!

In accordance with the policy of both the Northwestern University Graduate School and the School of Education and Social Policy, plus and minus grading will used. Those who meet the course obligations as described above are candidates for A’s and B’s.

**ASSIGNED TEXTS** (available at Norris Center Bookstore)


*You MUST use the above editions of these works. Please bring text under discussion to class!*

**Note:** You may wish to review SHG’s “Listening—to a Challenging Perspective,” (2004), *Schools*, 1;2 41-62. The article provides an example to argument construction that is based upon analysis of texts.

**READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Text Assigned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 1:</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy of Education</td>
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<td>3/28</td>
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<td>WEEK 2:</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em></td>
<td>Books I &amp; II</td>
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**Due: Initial Draft - Philosophy of Education (5pp.)**
WEEK 3: Plato, *Republic* Books III & IV
4/11

WEEK 4: Plato, *Republic* Book V & VII (SL #1)
4/18

WEEK 5: Rousseau, *Emile* Books I & II (SL #2)
4/25

Due: 1st Partial Revision (max 3 pp.) of Philosophy of Education

WEEK 6: Rousseau, *Emile* Book III & IV: pp. 266-272 (SL#3)
5/2

WEEK 7: Dewey, *Democracy...* Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4 (SL#4)
5/9

Due: 2nd Partial Revision (max. 3 pp) of Philosophy of Education

WEEK 8: Dewey, *Democracy...* Ch. 5, 6, 7, 8 (SL#5)
5/16

5/23

Due: 3rd Partial Revision (max 3 pp) of Philosophy of Education

WEEK 10 WEB Du Bois, “Education and Work,” “Field and Function of the Negro College,” “Revelation of Saint Orgne the Damned” (SL #7)
5/30

CANDIDATES NEED TO HAVE AN ACTIVE NU E-MAIL ACCOUNT. MUCH OF THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTOR/SECTION LEADER AND BETWEEN STUDENTS IN WORKING GROUPS WILL TAKE PLACE VIA E-MAIL. STUDENTS MUST ALSO VISIT BLACKBOARD ONCE A WEEK AND MAKE COMMENT/RAISE QUESTION.

*SL stands for student co-leaders
Final version, Philosophy of Education due Monday, June 4, 2007 by 5:00PM. 12 page maximum.

**INSTRUCTIONAL TEAM MEETING SCHEDULE**

3/21—preparing Plato I and II

3/28—preparing Plato III and IV

4/4—preparing Plato V and VII

4/18—preparing Rousseau I and II

4/25—preparing Rousseau III and IV

5/2—preparing Dewey 1-4

5/9—preparing Dewey 5-8

5/16—preparing DuBois

5/24—preparing DuBois