

**Syllabus: EPS 600 Spring 2019**

**EPS 600: Cultural and critical approaches to college student employability**

Department of Educational Policy Studies

University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Instructor**

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**Course Schedule**

Weekly class meeting: Tues and Thurs, 11:00am-12:15pm, 151 Education

Office hours: By appointment

Credits: 3 credits

Canvas course url: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/130998>

Requisites: Graduate or Professional Standing

Course Designation: Advanced undergraduate and graduate level

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**Course Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the historic and current postsecondary policy environment that focuses on student “employability” from a cultural and critical perspective. The focus on college graduates’ employability is one of the most influential discourses shaping policy and practice in colleges and universities throughout the world. An emphasis on the vocational aspects of higher education has long been evident in early professional schools and vocational tracks in multiple countries, but since the 1980s a new focus on “skills” and the job readiness of college graduates has reached new heights and currently dominates global policy discussions about higher education. Results of this policy discourse include the use of “employability audits” at postsecondary institutions as part of quality assurance or accountability reforms, the inclusion of graduate employability measures in performance-based funding models, and the pressure for departments, colleges, and institutions to pay closer attention to cultivating and documenting student employability.

However, the new skills discourse is largely based on human capital frameworks that view technical or cognitive skills as the primary determinant in students’ labor market outcomes, ignoring broader structural issues with educational practice and the labor market, and other factors that may influence whether or not a particular student is well equipped to pursue their chosen career. In particular, the cultural influences that shape college students’ transitions to the workforce, such as different forms of cultural capital and participation in disciplinary communities of practice, play critical roles in student development and career readiness. Additionally, a growing number of scholars are raising questions about the employability discourse itself, challenging the construct itself (which is often operationally defined as employment status or the possession of in-demand skills), its assumptions regarding the purpose of education, the nature of skills themselves, and the underlying market-driven motives shaping current debates.

In this course, readings, discussions and lectures will include a review of theories regarding higher education-labor market relations (e.g., human-social-cultural capital theory), different perspectives on the notion of student employability, critiques of the skills discourse, and real-world cases where these issues are

directly shaping policy and practice. The course will pay particularly close attention to critical perspectives in education research and the cultural nature of skills and job acquisition. The course will also include a considerable amount of research and commentary from scholars in the United Kingdom and Australia, where employability policies have long been influential. Insights from a variety of disciplines, including cultural anthropology, sociology, labor economics, and cognitive psychology will also be brought to bear on these issues.

The goal of this course is to provide students with a substantive introduction to these topics and provide a theoretical and practical foundation for critically analyzing current employability policies and advancing alternative approaches for their conceptualization and implementation within a college, university, or governmental agency. To meet this goal, students will engage in various forms of in-class group discussions, problem- and case-based learning activities, interactions (i.e., interviews) with experts in the field, and a major class project involving the analysis (and improvement) of a real-world example of employability skills shaping institutional, state, or federal policy. To support the final project, one class meeting will be devoted to studying practice-based research, or studies of policy implementation in real-world contexts. The course will also integrate face-to-face and online learning activities that will facilitate student's close engagement with the material, one another, and experts in the field. In addition, course participants will sharpen several skills that will be valuable for their future careers: oral and written communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning.

### **Course Expectations**

The benefit you receive from this course is based on the effort you expend in studying and participation. If you wish to master the materials and concepts you will need to deeply engage with the material and think about how to apply the principles and methods of sound assessment in your professional (current and future) life. It is my goal as an instructor to help all students master the material, but this will require everyone to read and deeply reflect upon assigned readings and engage with course activities in and out of class.

Successful participation in the course will require attendance at two 75-minute class periods each week over the spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period.

### **Learning Goals**

The principal learning outcome for this course is for students to acquire and apply new knowledge regarding the cultural and critical underpinnings of the construct of "college student employability" and its policy implications. Specifically, learners will:

- Understand and explain the history of the employability construct, including its origins in labor market analyses, a brief history of vocational education in the U.S., and the current policy, political, and educational forces influencing debates about higher education and student employability.
- Understand and explain different models of higher education-labor market relations and skills that underlay the employability discourse (e.g., human capital, signaling, cultural capital, critical) with a particular focus on theory and research from cultural anthropology, the sociology of work, and critical traditions;
- Understand and explain different definitions and conceptualizations of student employability from around the world and their underlying theoretical positions;
- Understand and explain how the employability discourse has influenced higher education policy in the UK, Australia, European Union, China, and the U.S.;

- Synthesize and apply new insights to the analysis of a real-world employability policy, examining its origins and implications using cultural and/or critical theories; and,
- Cultivate a robust and active learning community with peers in the course and outside experts conversant in skills and employability discussions across the disciplines.

In addition to these topic-specific goals, learning goals also include the acquisition of skills such as oral communication, written communication, and self-regulated learning. These skills are embedded within the course itself, and not an add-on feature. The specific learning goals for these skills are:

- Develop strong critical thinking skills that include identifying and “hunting” one’s own assumptions, weighing diverse forms of evidence, and making informed decisions.
- Develop strong oral communication skills including delivery, argumentation, and strategies for dealing with communication apprehension via in-class discussions and oral presentations.
- Develop strong writing skills including argumentation, grammar, and appropriate citation conventions via short essays and a major project.
- Develop self-regulated learning strategies including self-monitoring learning progress and critical self-reflection.

### **Guest speakers**

Guest speakers may be featured in this course in order to bring their real-world expertise with employability-related issues to the classroom. Speakers will be announced in advance, and students will be expected to articulate 1-2 questions that could be asked during their visit.

### **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities will be fully included in this course. The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” <http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>. You may also contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 905 University Avenue, Madison (263-2741) if you have questions about campus policies and services.

### **Basic needs**

In addition, any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

### **Diversity and inclusion**

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching,

research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

### **Technology use**

Appropriate use of electronic devices is an acceptable part of your participation in class. Using laptops or smart phones as tools is acceptable, as long as it is not distracting to you, your colleagues or your instructor. Examples of acceptable use include taking notes and consulting resources for work in class. Non-instructional texting, phone calls, shopping, and other non-course related use of these devices during class is not appropriate. If you are concerned about your ability to meet this expectation, please discuss your concern with me. Please also let me know if there is an emergency or situation that affects your need for using an electronic device during class time.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is critical to achieving the goal of this graduate-level course with high academic standards and rigor. All course participants are expected to maintain academic integrity and play a key role in fostering a learning environment that is fair, just, and conducive to authentic learning. Behaviors that involve academic misconduct will not be tolerated and when proven, will result in a zero on the assignment, a lower grade in the course, or failure in the course. Repeated acts of academic misconduct may result in more serious actions such as probation or suspension. In light of the requirements of this particular course, examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to:

- submitting a paper or assignment as one’s own work when a part or all of the paper or assignment is the work of another;
- submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas;
- submitting work previously presented and/or submitted in another course;
- knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.

If you are not sure about whether a specific practice not listed above is considered to compromise academic integrity, please discuss it in person with course instructor.

### **Grading scale**

<b>93% - 100%</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>88% - 92.9%</b>	<b>A/B</b>
<b>83% - 87.9%</b>	<b>B</b>
<b>78% - 82.9%</b>	<b>B/C</b>
<b>70% - 77.9%</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>60% - 69.9%</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>F</b>

### ***I. Self-assessment (10%)***

While instructor-assigned grades are an important form of evaluation of the quality of your work, self-assessment is an important step in your own learning and development. For this course, self-assessment will entail the following steps: (a) a piece of reflective writing at the beginning of the semester where you describe in detail your personal learning and developmental goals for the course, (b) the specific study strategies and related work habits that you anticipate being used to meet your goals, and (c) specific metrics that you propose to use to self-evaluate your own performance in the course (e.g., handing in assignments on time, getting an op-ed published, etc.). Then, at a mid-point during the semester and then at the conclusion of the semester you will review the document and provide a short review of your progress and performance, with the last review taking place during Finals week where you will assign yourself a grade.

### ***II. Class participation and attendance (10%)***

Being present in class and participating actively in the learning activities is essential for successful completion of the course. Each student is expected to attend class regularly and to thoughtfully engage in class discussions. The readings are fundamental to learning in this class. Each student is expected to have read the assigned materials prior to coming to class.

Enrollment in this graduate seminar assumes your commitment to its purposes and objectives in your academic and professional development. Only those absences due to emergencies, illness, professional meetings of critical importance, or extenuating circumstances will be excused. Make-up activities or assignments for classes missed are expected and are to be arranged with the instructor on an individual basis.

One of the keys to learning and excelling in a graduate-level course is to deeply engage with the readings. As a way to facilitate deep reading and also conversations with your classmates, you will be expected to do online annotations using the hypothes.is tool for **1-3 readings a week**. Annotations can be comments, observations, or questions linked to a passage in a paper, or an idea in a book chapter. **In the first class meeting we will review the hypothes.is online annotation tool and its use.** More information on online annotation can be found here (<https://web.hypothes.is/annotation-tips-for-students/>).

In addition, each week will feature a small group discussion on the weekly readings. The format of these discussions will vary, but a good rule of thumb is to **come prepared to discuss in depth 1-2 short passages from any of the week's readings**. In these forms of group discussion exercises, you will be expected to give a thoughtful 2-3 minute summary and analysis of the passage to your group. These discussions are intended to encourage reading but more importantly, to develop a deeper understanding of the text, and to cultivate your critical thinking and communication skills.

Finally, each student is required to briefly present 1 example of “employability in the news” during the course of the semester. These examples will also be collected on the course Canvas website as resources for the class and potential ideas for the main course project. These presentations will be brief 2-3 minute oral presentations, and any accompanying multi-media (e.g., links to online resources) should be emailed to the instructor prior to the course. A sign-up sheet for this mini-assignment will be circulated on the first day of class.

### ***III. Papers (20%)***

There will be two papers required for this course (though see below for the course project, which also involves the preparation of a written report). The instructions, expectations, and deadlines for these papers are as follows:

**Paper #1: Theoretical foundations of employability (10%) – *due Tuesday February 12<sup>th</sup> via Canvas***

For this paper you will provide an original analysis of a specific theory or perspective on the relationship between education and work. Select one of the theoretical frameworks or ideas reviewed in the readings and: (a) discuss the core ideas of the framework, (b) evaluate competing or alternative perspectives, (c) provide your own position regarding the utility (or lack thereof) of the framework for issues related to college student employability. The paper should be approximately 9-10 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font), and will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of writing, soundness of logic and argumentation, and demonstrated understanding of the readings.

**Paper #2: Analysis of employability policy (10%) – *due Tuesday March 5<sup>th</sup> via Canvas***

For this paper you will select a policy initiative or program related to college student employability, and conduct an analysis on its: (a) relationship to practical needs of people in the field, (b) relationship to theories covered in the course readings, (c) relationship to historical trends covered in the course readings, and (d) its ultimate strengths and weaknesses with respect to conceptual rigor and practical utility. **The policy, initiative, or program can be at the state or federal government level, university or college system level, institution or college level, and so on.** The paper should be approximately 9-10 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font), and will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of writing, soundness of logic and argumentation, and demonstrated understanding of the readings.

***IV. Course project (40%)***

Much of the class credit will be earned through analyzing, developing (if feasible), and presenting an approach to cultivating and/or measuring college student employability. This course project can build upon the content of Paper #2 but could also address a different policy or initiative. The goal of this project is to provide an opportunity for you to situate a current policy or initiative within the broader historical, intellectual, and political contexts that shape debates about student employability. For this project you will be expected to take a much more in-depth and critical approach to analyzing the policy than in Paper #2, and the following products – that represent the distinct audiences for employability analyses - are required for full credit:

- An op-ed piece that could be submitted to a local, regional, or national newspaper or other media outlet. This piece of writing should NOT include much (if any) discussion of theory, academic jargon, or citations. This piece should not exceed 1,000 words and should succinctly summarize: (a) the problem, (b) a proposed solution, and (c) why it matters. Ideally, you will actually submit this op-ed to a media outlet. ***Due Thursday April 25<sup>th</sup> via Canvas***
- A policy analysis report intended for scholarly audiences: This 15-20 page report can build upon Paper #2 in content and form, and is intended to provide a historical and critical analysis of a single employability policy or initiative. Similar criterion will be used as with Paper #2 regarding its scope, but this paper will represent a more in-depth analysis and will also build upon an analysis of strengths and weaknesses by offering: (d) clear and specific recommendations for future action. ***Due Thursday May 2<sup>nd</sup> via Canvas***
- A 1-pager for legislators: This single-page document is intended to be a 1-pager that busy legislators and legislative staff could read in order to get quick insights into research, theory, and policy analysis related to the employability question. This piece of writing should NOT include much (if any) discussion of theory, academic jargon, or citations. The piece should fit onto 1-2 pages and should succinctly summarize: (a) the problem and why it matters, (b) specific existing policies or policy contexts, and (c) a proposed solution. ***Due Thursday May 2<sup>nd</sup> via Canvas***

- An elevator speech/presentation: For the final class meeting you will present a 90-second “elevator speech,” or a quick outline of your policy analysis and recommendations. This short format is called an elevator speech because you may find yourself in an elevator with a decision-maker who asks you for a quick synopsis of your work, research, or policy interests. This presentation will take place without any visual aids, and will be evaluated by the entire class in terms of its: (a) clarity and delivery, and, (b) inclusion of a clear policy problem and solution. ***Due Thursday May 2<sup>nd</sup> in class.***

Examples of op-eds, 1-2 pagers, and elevator speeches for legislators will be reviewed in class in order to familiarize you with the writing conventions of these outlets.

#### ***V. Final (20%) – Tuesday May 7th***

On the last day of class during finals week, a written examination containing multiple-choice and open-ended essay type questions will be administered. This exam will cover topics from the entire semester’s worth of course readings.

All written assignments are to be typed, double-spaced, and written professionally according to APA style, 6th edition. ***All written assignments are due in their respective Canvas Assignment folders by the appropriate deadline.***

#### **Important Deadlines**

Self-assessment writing (1 <sup>st</sup> ) -----	January 22
Self-assessment writing (2 <sup>nd</sup> ) -----	March 14
Self-assessment writing (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) -----	May 7
First paper due -----	February 12
Second paper due -----	March 12
Course project:	
Op-ed -----	April 25
Course project paper -----	May 2
1-2 pager for policymakers -----	May 2
Elevator speech -----	May 2
Final -----	May 7

#### **Course Readings**

All readings are posted in the course Canvas website. You will be expected to use the Hypothes.is online annotation tool for readings marked with an asterisk (\*).

#### **Section I: Historical and theoretical context of the employability debate**

##### **Week 1: Introduction and overview**

###### Class 1 (Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>)

Bills, D. (2004). The sociology of education and work. Chapter 1 (Education and Work: Establishing Some Terrain), Pp. 1-13. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Note: Please come to class having read this chapter and be prepared for discussion on its contents.

Class 2: (Jan 24<sup>th</sup>)

Bills, D. (2004). The sociology of education and work. Chapter 2 (Schooling and Socioeconomic Success), Chapter 3\* (Two Models of the Relationships Between Education and Work), Pp. 14-60. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Note: **No class meeting** on 1/24 due to instructor being at a conference, but class participation and engagement is still required via online annotation of reading, watching lecture in Canvas, and engaging in a group discussion board on Canvas (this will be the only use of the Canvas discussion boards).

**Week 2: Education Gospel & Capital Theory**Class 3 (Jan 29<sup>th</sup>)

Grubb, W. N., & Lazerson, M. (2005). The education gospel and the role of vocationalism in American education. *American journal of education*, 111(3), 297-319. \*

Class 4 (Jan 31<sup>st</sup>)

Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. Chapter 1\* (Theories of Capital) and Chapter 2 (Social Capital). Pp. 3-28. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 3: Capital Theory & HE Trends**Class 5 (Feb 5<sup>th</sup>)

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). Westport, CT: Greenwood. \*

Davies, S., & Rizk, J. (2018). The three generations of cultural capital research: A Narrative Review. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(3), 331-365.

Class 6 (Feb 7<sup>th</sup>)

Alexander, F. K. (2000). The changing face of accountability: Monitoring and assessing institutional performance in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(4), 411-431.

Hora, M.T. (2018). Beyond the skills gap: How the vocationalist framing of higher education undermines student, employer, and societal interests. *Liberal Education*, 104 (2). \*

**Section II: History of Construct and Role in Public Policy****Week 4: Employability: History and definitions**Class 7 (Feb 12<sup>th</sup>)

Gazier, (2001). Employability: The complexity of a policy notion (pp. 3-23). In Baukens, M. (Ed). *Employability: From theory to practice*. London, UK: Transaction Publishers.\*

Class 8 (Feb 14<sup>th</sup>)

McQuaid, R. W., & Lindsay, C. (2005). The concept of employability. *Urban studies*, 42(2), 197-219.\*

Yorke, M. (2006). Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not. Learning and Employability Series One. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy

**Week 5: Employability and Public Policy I**Class 9 (Feb 19<sup>th</sup>)

Tomlinson, M. (2012). Graduate employability: A review of conceptual and empirical themes. *Higher Education Policy*, 25(4), 407-431.\*

Class 10 (Feb 21<sup>st</sup>)

OECD (2016). *Enhancing employability: Report prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group*.

Paris, France: OECD.\* (<https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/publicationsdocuments/>)

U.S. Department of Labor (2013). Perkins collaborative resource network. (<http://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework>)

## **Week 6: Employability and Public Policy II**

### Class 11 (Feb 26<sup>th</sup>)

Knight, P. T., & Yorke, M. (2003). Employability and good learning in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1), 3-16.

Morley, L. (2001). Producing new workers: Quality, equality and employability in higher education. *Quality in higher education*, 7(2), 131-138.\*

## **Section III: Applications in the field**

### Class 12 (Feb 28<sup>th</sup>)

Coburn, C. E., & Turner, E. O. (2012). The practice of data use: An introduction. *American Journal of Education*, 118(2), 99-111.\*

### Class 13 (Mar 5<sup>th</sup>)

Harvey, L. (2001). Defining and measuring employability. *Quality in higher education*, 7(2), 97-109. \*

### Class 14 (Mar 7<sup>th</sup>)

Dacre Pool, L., & Sewell, P. (2007). The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability. *Education+ Training*, 49(4), 277-289.\*

### Class 15 (Mar 12<sup>th</sup>)

Cole, D. & Tibby, M. (2013). Defining and developing your approach to employability. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy. \*

## **Section IV: Critiques of employability: A critical perspective**

### Class 16 (Mar 14<sup>th</sup>)

Apple, M. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Chapter 4 (Curriculum history and social control) pp. 59-76 and Chapter 7\* (Commonsense categories and the politics of labeling). Pp. 117-144. New York NY: Routledge.

## **SPRING BREAK**

### Class 17 (Mar 26<sup>th</sup>)

Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: possession, position or process?. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 538-554.\*

### Class 18 (Mar 28<sup>th</sup>)

DuBois, W.E.B. (1903). The souls of black folk. Chapter 3\* (Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and others) pp. 25-36 and Chapter 6 (If the training of Black men) pp. 55-68. Chicago, IL: Dover.

Additional resource: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-roth/thinking-about-education\\_b\\_1739807.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-roth/thinking-about-education_b_1739807.html)

Class 19 (Apr 2)

Moss, P., & Tilly, C. (1996). "Soft" skills and race: An investigation of black men's employment problems. *Work and Occupations*, 23(3), 252-276.\*

Class 20 (Apr 4)

Moreau, M. P., & Leathwood, C. (2006). Graduates' employment and the discourse of employability: a critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19(4), 305-324.\*

Class 21 (Apr 9)

Tomlinson, M. (2017). Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. *Education+ Training*, 59(4), 338-352.\*

Note: Dr. Tomlinson is scheduled to visit the class on this date for a guest lecture.

**Section V: Critiques of employability: A cultural perspective**Class 22 (Apr 11)

Urciuoli, B. (2008). Skills and selves in the new workplace. *American Ethnologist*, 35(2), 211-228.\*

Class 23 (Apr 16)

Holmes, L. (2001). Reconsidering graduate employability: The 'graduate identity' approach. *Quality in Higher Education*, 7(2), 111-119.\*

Class 24 (Apr 18)

Rose, M. (2004). The mind at work: Valuing the intelligence of the American worker (10<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Chapter 3\* (The intelligence of plumbing) pp. 56-66 and Chapter 7 (Rethinking hand and brain) pp. 141-166. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Class 25 (Apr 23)

Byars-Winston, A. (2010). The vocational significance of Black identity: Cultural formulation approach to career assessment and career counseling. *Journal of Career Development*, 37(1), 441-464.\*

Class 26 (Apr 25)

Maanen, J. V. and S. R. Barley (1985). "Cultural Organization: Fragments of a Theory" in P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis, C. C. Lundberg and J. Martin. *Organizational Culture*. Beverly Hills, Sage: 31-53.\*

Class 27 (Apr 30)

Hora, M.T., Benbow, R., & Smolarek, B. (2018). Re-thinking soft skills and student employability: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change: The magazine of higher learning*, 50 (6).\*

Moore, T., & Morton, J. (2017). The myth of job readiness? Written communication, employability, and the 'skills gap' in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(3), 591-609.

Class 28 (May 2)

No readings

Class 29 (Finals Week)

No readings