

HONR 300 1W
The Demoralized Schoolhouse
Spring 2026
Course Syllabus

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TTH 8:00-9:30 AM
Room: 201 Blair
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“The American public school is responsible not only for educating citizens to develop and maintain a democratic society but also for engendering in individuals the desire to continue their education throughout their lives” (Goodlad, 1994).

“It is not hyperbole to say that the teaching profession in the United States is in trouble. Teachers are leaving the profession at rates that outpace retirements” (Santoro, 2018).

Course description

Contemporary research suggests that American educators have moved from a feeling of deprofessionalization to being demoralized. This course provides an exploration of, and an opportunity to, analyze the professional dissatisfaction in our nation's schoolhouses. Readings will be focused on contemporary educational policy, teacher career trajectory, science of teacher selection, and how teachers' moral centers intersect with life in the schoolhouse. Recognizing a relationship between education and social progress, students will examine the influences policy, economics, and history have on opportunities for renewal of our demoralized schoolhouses.

Required texts

- Santoro, D. A. (2018). *Demoralized: Why teachers leave the profession they love and how they can stay*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Smith, B. J. (2023). *Teacher shortages and the challenge of retention: Practices that make school systems and cultures more attractive to and empowering*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Tyack, D. & Cuban, L. (1995). Tinkering towards utopia: A century of public-school reform. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- **Various Articles on Moodle**

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this honors seminar students will:

1. Identify the various definitions and examples of professional dissatisfaction in US public school systems. (DoL #1 & 2)
2. Articulate the relationship between an educated citizenry and social progress. (DoL #4)
3. Analyze the influence of history, policy, and economics on the professional dissatisfaction in US public school systems. (DoL #3).
4. Analyze human behaviors using knowledge, theories, and methods appropriate to the social sciences. (DoL #2 & 3). ***Connections Curriculum LO #9 (Students will analyze social systems or human behaviors using knowledge, theories, or methods appropriate to the social sciences)***
5. Write effectively considering audience and purpose. (DoL #2, 3, & 4). ***Connections Curriculum LO #2 (Students will write effectively, considering audience and purpose).***

Demonstrations of Learning (DoL)

This course will include a variety of assessments, to hopefully meet the learning needs of every honors student and provide opportunities to demonstrate learning through multiple modalities. The assessments for the course are listed below along with point values. More specific directions will be given prior to the assessment. **All demonstrations of learning must be turned in on the day and time they are due (this is usually at the beginning of class), a three- point reduction will be applied for each day late.**

| Demonstration of Learning | Point Total | Percentage of Final Grade |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Seminar Engagement | 4 points per class= 100 total | ~29 % |
| 2. Interview Analysis | 100 points | ~29 % |
| 3. Final Research Brief | 100 points | ~29 % |
| 4. Tyack and Cuban Reflective Journal | 50 points | ~14 % |
| Total | 350 points | ~100% |

Grading Scale

A+ = 98%-100%

A = 93%-97%

A- = 90%-92%

B+ = 88%-89%

B = 83%-87%

B- = 80%-82%

C+ = 78%-79%

C = 73%-77%

C- = 70%-72%

D+ = 68%-69%

D = 63%-67%

D- = 60%-62%

F = Below 60%

Expectation of Work and use of Generative AI

Being an Honors' Seminar, this course will primarily be a time for us to engage in intellectual conversations during the class sessions. I do want you to read closely the Seminar Engagement section below. We will be spending 3 hours each week in our seminar and you should plan on spending at least 6 hours each week completing the readings, assignments, and studying outside of the seminar. In addition, there will be at least 20 additional minutes of direct instruction each week and this will include library sessions, attendance at lectures, and student consultations at the Writing Center.

This Honors' Seminar deals with a lot of "wicked problems." "Wicked problems" are hard to articulate and are impossible to solve in a way that is simple and final (Rittel & Webber, 1973). When dealing with "wicked problems," we need to be okay with not having a definitive answer. This is tough for some students, but I will continue to remind us of this. Because of this, I don't want you to feel the pressure to have the "right answer" but to have good and deep thinking of these "wicked problems." **To aid in not feeling the pressure to have the "right answer," you are not to use any form of genAI in this course, unless you ask explicit permission from me.** It's more important to me that you do your own great thinking than to have the "right answer."

Seminar Engagement

Your success in the class depends primarily on your engagement in each and every class session. You will be expected to come to each class session with the reading completed and to engage in discussions. The primary teaching method used will be class discussion. Each class session provides an opportunity to earn up to 4 points and those 4 points will be attained in different ways. Sometimes it will be based on your engagement in discussion, sometimes it will be a reading check activity, and sometimes it will be another formative type of assessment.

Interview Analysis

The signature assessment will be an in-depth multi-step interview analysis with a practicing teacher. The interview and its analysis will be focused on career trajectory, working conditions, personal moral centers, and key motivations. You will be assessed on your ability to articulate your subject(s)' behavior and relationship to their school.

Final Research Brief

The other major assessment will be a research brief on the contemporary realities of school reform and how to empower teachers to exercise control over the labor process of teaching and to appreciate the instructional values of their work. This research brief will look specifically at the interactions of teacher unions, school boards, and their impact on teacher life and student achievement. This assignment will serve as the signature assessment for students to demonstrate their ability to write for a specific audience and purpose.

Tyack and Cuban Reflective Journal

You will be maintaining a journal as we work through the Tyack and Cuban text. This will be a guided journal where I will give you a fairly specific prompt each week that correlates with that week's reading. You are required to respond to the prompt and turn in your journal the next week. These journal entries will typically be two pages in length and will require you to synthesize the text with your classroom experiences.

Academic Integrity

The Honor Code applies to this class. The expectations for academic integrity in this class are attached to this syllabus, and you will be offered the opportunity to pledge your intent at the beginning of class and with each assignment as it is submitted.

Student Services

Your learning in this course is important to me. I invite you to talk with me about ways to ensure your full participation in and access to this course. Please be aware that Wittenberg is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you are eligible for course accommodations because of a disability, you need to register with the Accessibility Services Office, located in the COMPASS: Sweet Success Center in Thomas Library. After you register, give me your accommodation letter from Academic Services and arrange to talk with me about your learning needs privately in a timely manner. Early identification at the start of the term is essential to ensure timely provision of services as accommodations are not retroactive. If you have questions or would like more information about services for students with disabilities, please contact the Accessibility Services office at accessibilityservices@wittenberg.edu.

Wittenberg Writing Center

The Wittenberg Writing Center is a resource for consultation on any writing project. Student writing advisors will work with you at any stage in your writing, and you can bring any kind of writing to the Center. The Writing Center is located in the first floor of the Thomas Library; the phone number is 327.6154. You may either drop in or make an appointment. More information about the Writing Center is available at their website: <http://www.wittenberg.edu/administration/writingcenter.html>

Course Schedule

| Week | Tuesday | Thursday |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | 1/13/26—Introductions and openings | 1/15/26—Overview of Public Education & Education in the Trump Era Assignment: Read Overview of Public Education (Moodle) p. 5-6, 11-39 & USDOE (Moodle-link) |
| 2 | 1/20/26—Teachers Assignment: Read Characteristics of Teachers (Moodle) | 1/22/26—Routes to teaching cont'd Assignment: Read Profiles of Teachers in the US (Moodle) p. 20-39 |
| 3 | 1/27/26—Teaching satisfaction Assignment: What is it Like Being a Teacher (Moodle) | 1/29/26—A coming crisis Assignment: Teacher Shortages (Moodle) |
| 4 | 2/3/26—Introduction to Demoralization Assignment: Read Santoro Introduction & Chapter 1; Demographic Instrument Due | 2/5/26—The Moral Sources of Teacher Dissatisfaction Assignment: Santoro Chapter 2 |
| 5 | 2/10/26—NO CLASS Yontz out of town Assignment: Interview Schedule Due | 2/12/26—NO CLASS Yontz out of town |
| 6 | 2/17/26—The Moral Sources of Teacher Dissatisfaction cont'd Assignment: Santoro Chapter 3 | 2/19/26—Distinguishing demoralization from burnout Assignment: Santoro Chapter 4 & 5; Interview Schedule Due |
| 7 | 2/24/26—Sources of demoralization Assignment: Santoro Chapter 6 & 7 | 2/26/26—Degrading the profession Assignment: Santoro Chapter 8; Interview Schedule Due |
| 8 | 3/17/26—Remoralizing strategies: pay, class size, and time Assignment: Smith Chapters 1-6 | 3/19/26—Remoralizing strategies: teacher trust Assignment: Smith Chapters 7 & 8 |
| 9 | 3/24/26—NO CLASS Yontz out of town | 3/26/26—Remoralizing strategies: support Assignment: Smith Chapters 9-11 |
| 10 | 3/31/26—Remoralizing strategies: teacher resources Assignment: Smith Chapter 12 | 4/2/26—Remoralizing strategies: leadership and working spaces Assignment: Smith Chapters 13-Conclusion |
| 11 | 4/7/26—Learning from the past Assignment: Tyack & Cuban Introduction; Research Brief Proposal and Annotated Reference List Due | 4/9/26—Progress or regress Assignment: T&C Chapter 1 & Journal |
| 12 | 4/14/26—Policy cycles and institutional trends Assignment: T&C Chapter 2 & Journal | 4/16/26—How schools change reforms Assignment: T&C Chapter 3 & Journal |
| 13 | 4/21/26—Persisting grammar of schools Assignment: T&C Chapter 4 & Journal; Research Brief Outline and Some Initial Data Analysis Due | 4/23/26—Reinventing schooling Assignment: T&C Chapter 5 & Journal |
| 14 | 4/28/26—Final Analysis Presentations | 4/30/26—Final Analysis Presentations Assignment: Teacher Analysis Written Component Due |
| 15 | 5/12/26—Final Exam 3:30 PM Assignment: Final Research Brief Due | |

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Wittenberg University, and this professor, are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. At the heart of our search for knowledge is personal honesty; an honesty that makes possible an open and vibrant exchange of ideas. True community and academic excellence thrive at Wittenberg through honesty, trust, and mutual respect. It is the aim of the Code of Academic Integrity to foster an atmosphere in which all individuals can reach their fullest potential as students and teachers and, ultimately, as human beings. To achieve the aims of this code, every student, faculty member, and administrator is responsible for upholding the highest standards of personal integrity. In this spirit, it is expected that every member of the Wittenberg community will refuse to tolerate academic dishonesty. (*Taken from Wittenberg University Code of Academic Integrity*). I take academic integrity extremely seriously. I have outlined what I see as both your and my moral responsibilities in this course:

What you can expect from me:

I promise to be truthful and treat you with respect. I will come to class fully prepared every day and will be thoughtful and fair in my preparation of assignments and exams. I promise to always tell you “why” a particular assignment is important for your growth as a professional. I will be thorough, fair, and honest in my assessment of your work and will provide varied and frequent opportunities for you to demonstrate your understanding of course material. I believe that significant learning often occurs as one encounters mistakes and determines how to correct them; therefore, when appropriate, I will provide opportunities for you to revisit and revise your work based on feedback from myself and others. Remember what Thomas Edison said: *“If I find 10,000 ways something won’t work, I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged; because every wrong attempt discarded is often a step forward.”* I promise to listen to you and to seriously consider your ideas and suggestions; and, I will trust your academic integrity unless you give me reason otherwise.

What I expect from you:

I expect you to be truthful and respectful of your classmates and me and of the intellectual ideas that are shared in the course. I expect you to come to class each day fully prepared, with all material thoughtfully read and with assignments prepared with attention both to critical thinking and to the details of format and presentation. I expect you to prepare work that is your own or to acknowledge your debt to others for their ideas when appropriate. I expect you to take action of some kind if you witness cheating or dishonest academic behavior.

Pledges and plagiarism:

Maintaining a high standard of academic integrity is in the best interest of everyone at Wittenberg and is everyone’s responsibility. Plagiarism is stealing. **Resist the temptation to take the easy way out.** In this class, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarizing usually is to receive no credit on that assignment; it is possible, and not at all unusual, to fail the course with an XF grade for cheating or plagiarizing. In this class, I will ask you to sign a pledge of commitment to academic integrity. By signing, you acknowledge that you will not use material without acknowledging sources (plagiarism), nor will you copy homework or quiz/exam answers. This includes discussing take-home exams or assignments with others unless the assignment is designed for cooperative collaboration. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism or cheating or about whether or not collaboration is appropriate on a given assignment, please see me or raise those issues in class. The **Wittenberg Code of Academic Integrity** is available on the website at: <http://www.wittenberg.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

I understand the expectations for academic integrity in this class. I affirm that my work will uphold the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity at Wittenberg University, and that I will neither give nor receive any unauthorized assistance.

Signature

Date