Urban Social Geography (Geo 3HZ3)

This is a third-year undergraduate course taught by Richard Harris in the School of Geography and Geology at McMaster University. In the current year (1999) students are working on class assignments in which they examine the effect of segregation in Belfast, in U.S. cities, and in Hamilton, Ontario.

1. Course outline.

2. Readings.

3. The first assignment.

4. The second assignment.

5. The third assignment.

6. An evaluation of the grade 3 test (undertaken by David Ireland, June 4, 1997).

7. Selected newspaper articles pertaining to the release and interpretation of grade 3 test scores.
   [Not available after 2000]

Comments or questions should be addressed to Dr. Richard Harris.

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This course deals with the social geography of the North American city. The lectures will emphasize general concepts and use Belfast, Los Angeles, Toronto, and Hamilton as examples. The topic of education, specifically at the elementary school level, will be used to illustrate the significance of segregation, and will form the basis of the main assignment.

The class will meet once a week, on Mondays at 3:30 p.m. Each student will also attend tutorials on Thursdays, either at 3:30 or 4:30 p.m. The following is the lecture schedule. Assignments, a list of readings, and discussion topics for tutorials will be distributed separately.

Date

Jan.4  Introduction: themes, the assignments.

Jan.11  The significance of residential segregation
         Belfast; education as examples

Jan.18  Sources and methods #1: Quantitative Data
         The census; index of segregation
         Jan.21: FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE IN TUTORIAL.

Jan.25  Sources and methods #2: Qualitative data
Feb.1   Canadian and US cities compared
         Toronto and LA

Feb.8   Midterm test
         Theory in social geography
         Feb.11: SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE IN TUTORIAL
Feb. 22  Midterm returned! Theory in social geography (cont.)

March 1  Levels of segregation
          by class, race, ethnicity, family structure

March 8  Causes of segregation
          choices & constraints in housing market

March 15 Patterns of residential differentiation
          suburbanisation and gentrification

March 22 Causes of residential patterning
          job location; political geography

March 25: THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE IN TUTORIAL

March 29 Significance of residential patterns
          individual, social & political; scale effects

April 5  Wrap up: themes.

ASSESSMENT:

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<th>Due date</th>
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<td>Jan. 21</td>
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<td>Feb. 8</td>
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READINGS:

There is no text for the course. Some readings will be distributed with the first assignment; others will be available as a course pack from the bookstore.
NOTE:

All students are reminded of the seriousness of academic dishonesty in any form, and particularly that of plagiarism. In this regard, the Senate Policy on Academic Ethics applies and all students are responsible for adhering to its requirements. (see Senate Policy Statements, 1990, pp.2-4. This document was included with your registration materials.)
Geo 3HZ3 - Urban Social Geography

Reading List

Return to Course Table of Contents.

This is a comprehensive list of all the required readings for the course, organized according to lecture topics. Some are listed more than once since they are relevant to more than one lecture topic. (In these cases only an abbreviated reference is provided.) Most have been annotated to indicate how you might best employ them. Except for those marked with an asterisk, all will be available in a course pack at the bookstore.

1. Introduction.

2. The significance of segregation.

The two items listed in the 'general' section should be read for the second lecture. The others are chiefly relevant for the assignments.

a) General


b) Example: Catholics and Protestants in Belfast

[Chiefly relevant to assignment #1]

* Peach (above)


c) Issue: Educational achievement

[Relevant to assignments #2 and/or #3]


3. Sources and methods #1: Quantitative Data


4. Sources and methods #2: Qualitative data


5. Canadian and US cities compared: Toronto and Los Angeles


See also Eric Fong, 1996 (below)

6 and 7. Theory in social geography


See also Timothy Fong on Monterey Park (below)

8. Levels and trends in segregation, by class and race/ethnicity

O.Duncan and B.Duncan (see above)

9. Causes of segregation: choices & constraints in housing market

W.A.V.Clark. 1996. (above)


10. Patterns of residential differentiation

[It is assumed that students are familiar with the urban models of E.W.Burgess; H.Hoyt; C.Harris and E.Ullman. Those who are not familiar should request additional readings.]


11. Causes of residential patterning


12. Significance of residential patterns


Assignment #1

SEGREGATION: GOOD OR BAD?

Length: 1500 words
Due date: Jan. 21st.
Weight: 15 percent of final grade

Answer the following question:

If you were the Mayor of the City of Belfast would you develop policies that encouraged Catholics and Protestants to live closer together? Why?

Guidelines:

* Your summary should be written out, double-spaced, and not in point form.

* You MUST make use of, and provide proper referencing to, each of the published works listed below. You MAY make use of any additional sources, as long as these are referenced correctly.

* You MAY wish to phrase your argument as a refutation of, or in support of, that which is developed by Boal.

References:


Assignment #2

Due date: Feb.11
Weight: 15 percent of final grade

This assignment contains both an individual and a group component. These are worth, respectively, 5 percent and 10 percent of the overall grade for the course. For the group component students will work in groups of five.

A. INDIVIDUAL COMPONENT (5 percent)

Length: 500 words

Each student is asked to summarise ONE of the following articles. No two members of the same group should summarise the same article. Full references are provided at the end of this handout.

5. D. Grant et al. 1996.

B. GROUP COMPONENT

Length: 4000 Words

Answer the following questions:

(i) What is the general nature of the 'neighbourhood (or concentration) effect' that is experienced by low-income African-Americans?

(ii) What is the specific nature of the neighbourhood effect upon children in the public school system?
(iii) To what extent are the neighbourhood effects that you identified in your answer to (i) a consequence of low income as opposed to racial discrimination?

(iv) For African-Americans since World War II, do you think that the neighbourhood effect has been different (less or more marked, or simply different) in Los Angeles as opposed to other US cities?

Suggestions and Guidelines:

* Groups may choose to divide up tasks in whatever way they prefer, and all students in each group will receive the same mark for this component of the assignment.

* That said, it is recommended that each group assigns primary responsibility for each of the above questions to one person, with one person taking responsibility for coordinating and synthesising the result.

* Although each of the above questions should be addressed in turn, the overall result should read as an integrated piece of work, with a brief introduction and conclusion.

* You should make use of, and provide proper referencing to, each of the published works listed below. Additional material may be used and, if used, should be properly cited. (You may wish to consult the pieces by Fong, and by Clark, from the general course reading list.)

References:

An enormous amount has been written on the above topics. The following are indispensable. You may wish to consult additional material.

Ceri Peach argues that the level, causes, and consequences of segregation have been different for African-Americans than for any other social group in North America. In this connection, a number of writers have discussed the 'concentration' or 'neighbourhood' effect of segregation upon African-Americans. Wilson (1987) suggests that it is the recent "isolation" of low from higher-income blacks that is critical. Massey and Denton (1993) argue that segregation of African-Americans has always been high. For your convenience, four book reviews are listed that provide brief summaries of these arguments as well as some critical discussion.

The piece by Grant et al. outlines the overall postwar experience of African-Americans in LA, while Clark and Ware focus upon the issue of residential segregation there.

The final short piece, by Coleman, summarises part of an influential report on education that was written in the 1960s.
REFERENCES

Ceri Peach (see first assignment)


See also the reviews of The Truly Disadvantaged written by David Bensman (Dissent Spring 1988: 245-247) and by Joe Feagin (American Journal of Sociology 94 (1988): 179-182).


Assignment #3

SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

In this assignment you will work in a small group to interpret evidence for Hamilton-Wentworth as a whole, and also on your own to interpret evidence for a specific school.

PART 1 (GROUP COMPONENT): GENERAL PATTERNS IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH

Length: approx. 3000 words
Due date: March 22.
Weight: 10 percent of final grade
TA/Resource person: Ceinwen Giles (525-9140, ext. 23070)

One of the basic aspects of the social geography of cities is the segregation of social groups from one another. Segregation has many consequences, one of the most important being its effects on educational opportunity and educational achievement. The issue of educational achievement, and its measurement through province-wide tests, has been much in the news in Ontario in the past two years. In this assignment you are asked to interpret Grade 3 test results for public elementary schools in Hamilton-Wentworth.

Specifically, as a group and based on the material which you are provided (see below), you are asked to answer the following questions.

(i) What characteristics of school catchment areas seem to have the greatest effect on the academic performance of Grade 3 pupils?

(ii) Is the available evidence likely to underestimate, or to overestimate, the effect of school catchment characteristics on the performance of grade 3 pupils at particular schools?

(iii) What can we learn by comparing the grade 3 and regression results for 1998 with those reported by Harris and Mercier for 1997?

The material that is included with this assignment, and that you should use, comprises the following:

(i) Data for all public elementary schools in Hamilton, showing how grade 3 pupils at those schools performed on the province wide test in 1997 and 1998 (composite score for reading, writing, and math.), together with selected census data for the tracts in which these schools were located.
(ii) Regression results which indicate the statistical relationship between test score results and the selected census variables. These include scattergrams for test score results against income and the proportion of families that were headed by single parents.

(iii) A glossary of terminology.

(iv) Samples of local media coverage of the Grade 3 results.

The paper by Harris and Mercier was included in your coursepack.

PART II. (INDIVIDUAL COMPONENT). A SPECIFIC SCHOOL.

Length: approx. 1500 words
Due date: March 22, 1998
Weight: 10 percent of final grade

Background

In the group part of this assignment you are examining broad influences upon educational achievement across all schools in Hamilton-Wentworth. There are a number of problems with this type of analysis. In particular, it is difficult to get a sense of how particular circumstances might affect educational achievement in specific schools.

The purpose of the individual part of the assignment is to use information for a specific school in order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of residential patterns for educational achievement. In this part you will be provided with detailed test score information for a specific school, as well as written comments regarding the school, written by the school principal in 1997.

Using the information package for a specific school you should answer the following questions:

(i) How did the test score results for this school compare with those for other schools in 1997 AND 1998?

(ii) How would you explain the performance of this school, relative to other schools?

Logistics

No two students will be studying the same school. You are asked to submit a ranked preference for three schools in writing in class on March 1st. You will be assigned a school, and notified as to which one, in the tutorials on March 4th. Every effort will be made to accommodate your preferences. If you have a very particular reason for selecting a school (eg. you attended it, or are volunteering there) please indicate this. If you have not indicated a preference by March 1st you will be assigned a school at random. Packages of information for specific schools will be distributed on March 4th.