

EDC U 241 Introduction to Urban Education

University of Massachusetts Boston

College of Education and Human Development

Spring 2025

Location: Room M-01-608, McCormack Hall

Time: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 1:40-2:30 pm

We do not have an achievement gap; we have an education debt.

-Gloria Ladson-Billings

We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community - and this nation.

-César Chávez

Professors:

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General Course Description:

This course focuses on understanding the complexities of teaching in urban schools. We will explore the strengths, problems and issues that affect urban schools and examine how teachers can effectively respond to the issues that impact their students in this environment. The course covers four major topics. Understanding the Strengths and Challenges of the Urban Environment; Community Building and School Climate; Achievement Motivation: Working from a Strengths Based Perspective; Language Development as a Foundation of Learning.

Course Overview:

Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the phrase “education debt” for the cumulative historical impact of fewer resources and other harm directed at students of color, especially those who attend schools in urban communities. This course examines history, current day issues, and possible ways forward for education in urban contexts. It expands students’ understanding of the role that place and politics has in educational settings and urban communities more broadly. It seeks to inspire students to consider paths in urban education, including the role of a teacher and the important influence they have on students’ lives and their ability to teach for social change. It attempts to reposition urban schools, and their communities, as places of strength with power assets that require sustained support and resources.

As a UMass Boston early college course, EDC U 241 is meant to build on your experiences as a Boston Public Schools student and Boston community member. We want this course to be a two way street, where teachers and students learn together and from each other. We hope the readings, assignments, and course activities really make you think about yourself, your classmates, your teachers and principals, and families, as

well as those who make decisions related to your school system and urban school systems everywhere.

EDC U 241 introduces important concepts related to urban education. This course is organized into five themes: your relationship to schooling, the local urban education context of Boston, “Whose (public) education system?”, resistance and survival, and building new. Through these six themes we will strengthen your knowledge and understanding of urban education and ways that students, educators, and community members can help work together for justice.

Because students taking EDC U 241 are diverse racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, and in gender, sexual orientation, language, and physical ability, it is important we create a climate where everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives, as well as offering and receiving constructive feedback or advice. At all times we will give each other respect, confidentiality, and confidence in each other. We will speak from our own experiences and allow others to speak from theirs. We will give care for others and recognize that our classroom is a community.

Students are required to complete readings in preparation for each class session. These readings will be discussed in class (various strategies will be used to assess the readings).

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Reflect on issues of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and other identities specifically in relation to urban communities, and how these have an influence on student learning and classrooms in urban schools.
- Understand issues of educational equity and support strategies for the educational success of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students.
- Challenge their own thinking about urban schools, and envision classrooms that are built on a foundation of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy.
- Imagine solutions to the persistent educational debt and opportunity gaps in our urban schools and communities.
- Engage in the tactics of educational activists in urban contexts to support, strengthen, and sustain their educational communities and make positive social change within urban contexts.

Required Texts and Readings:

- Course Reading Packet (on course Google Classroom site). Students must bring digital or printed copies of readings to each class session. For sustainability reasons, we no longer photocopy handouts or readings. Please bring a laptop, digital tablet, or phone to access readings and course handouts.

Assignments*Journal Entries (1)*

Points: 100 (10 Points Each)

Description: You will respond to 10 different prompts through weekly journal entries. Each prompt will ask you to draw connections between what you are learning, your own experiences as a student and community member, and your reactions and reflections to the course materials.

Assignment 1: Social Media Post Solving Segregation in BPS

Points: 20

Description: You will create a social media post related to your proposed solution for racial segregation in the Boston Public Schools. This can take the form of a podcast, reel/thread, TikTok-style voice over, or some other format discussed with the course instructors.

Assignment 2: School Committee Testimony

Points: 20

Description: You will craft and perform a 2-minute testimony to the Boston School Committee about an education-related issue of concern.

Assignment 3: Op-Ed on an Education Issue

Points: 20

Description: You will write an op-ed (“opposite the editorial page”; meaning a response from a member of the public in a newspaper) about an educational issue (topic must be different from Assignment 2).

Assignment 4: Teach-In

Points: 20

Description: In small groups, you will create a lesson related to an issue in urban education to be taught to your peers in a teach-in style. You will then teach the lessons to your peers, including an engaging opener, development of key concept(s), and assessment of their learning (such as an “exit ticket”).

Participation: Readings, Class Discussions, Group Work, Activities and Attendance

Points: 20

Description: Class participation is important for successful learning. Students should regularly contribute to class discussions and participate during group work and class activities. Points will be deducted for cell phone or laptop use unrelated to the class activities.

The instructor will be informally assessing if students have read the material by their participation in reading related activities. You may have noticed that there is a significant number of readings for this course. However, we do not expect you to closely read every one. For longer readings, you are encouraged to “skim.” It is more important to read for the “big ideas” than comprehend every detail.

Evaluation and Extensions

There are 200 total points for the course. All assignments will be graded using a rubric (complete assignment requirements and rubrics are posted on the Google Classroom site) and all grades will be returned via Google Classroom. Assignments must be uploaded through Google Classroom by the posted deadline. Late assignments will have the grade decreased by 10% for each day late (if no extension is requested).

We would like you to do your best work in this course. We realize that sometimes circumstances outside of class may make it difficult to meet course deadlines. This class has an open extension policy, meaning any students may gain an extension in advance or, in cases where extenuating circumstances do not allow for forewarning, with an explanation. The only ultimate deadline for this course's assignments is the end of the semester. That being said, we will always ask you to set a deadline for when extension work will be completed, as it helps both of us (it will ensure that you do not fall behind in your work and it will ensure that we can schedule a time to grade and give you feedback on your assignment). To ask for an extension, please e-mail both of us (navashia@bostonpublicschools.org and christopher.martell@umb.edu).

Below is the UMass Boston grade scale.

Grading Scale		
Grade	Percentage	Points
A	93-100%	4.00
A-	90-92%	3.70
B+	87-89%	3.30
B	83-86%	3.00
B-	80-82%	2.70
C+	77-79%	2.30
C	73-76%	2.00
F	0-72%	0.0

Grading Policies		
NA	Not Attending (student appeared on roster, but never attended class). NA has no effect on cumulative GPA. Student is still responsible for tuition and fee charges.	N/A
W	Received if withdrawal occurs before the withdrawal deadline (see the academic calendar). Student is still responsible for tuition and fee charges.	N/A
INC	Incompletes are given at the discretion of the instructor and only when satisfactory work has been accomplished in the majority of the course work, i.e. a passing grade at the withdrawal deadline, but the student is unable to complete course requirements as a result of circumstances beyond his/her control. The student must sign a contract with the course instructor to receive a grade of incomplete. Incompletes will turn into F's if the work is not completed within one year.	N/A

Accommodations

The University of Massachusetts Boston is committed to providing reasonable academic accommodations for all students with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate format upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the Ross Center for Disability Services to discuss needed accommodations. Students must be registered with the Ross Center for Disability Services, CC UL 211, www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability, ross.center@umb.edu, 617.287.7430 before requesting accommodations.

Academic Integrity and The Code of Student Conduct

It is the expressed policy of the University that every aspect of academic life not only formal coursework situations, but all relationships and interactions connected to the educational process shall be conducted in an absolutely and uncompromisingly honest manner. The University presupposes that any submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student's own and is in compliance with University policies. In cases where academic dishonesty is discovered after completion of a course or degree program, sanctions may be imposed retroactively, up to and including revocation of the degree. Any student who reasonably believes another student has committed an act of academic dishonesty should inform the course instructor of the alleged violation. These policies are spelled out in the Code of Student Conduct. Students are required to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct, including requirements for academic honesty, as delineated in the University of Massachusetts Boston Graduate Catalogue and on their Website and in relevant program student handbook(s) or websites:

http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code/

You are encouraged to visit and review the UMass website on Plagiarism:

<http://umb.libguides.com/plagiarism>

Course Schedule

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
1 Monday 1/27	Introduction		
2 Wednesday 1/29	Self-Reflection on Schooling Experiences	1-People's History: The Point – Episode 1 "Placement" https://peopleshistorypod.net/#season-one	
3 Friday 1/31	Self-Reflection on Schooling Experiences		
4 Monday 2/3	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (History)		Reflective Journal: Entry 1 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
5 Wednesday 2/5	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (Busing)	2-Rethinking "Busing" in Boston by Matthew Delmont https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/rethinking-busing-boston	
6 Friday 2/7	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (Busing)		
7 Monday 2/10	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (Today)		Reflective Journal: Entry 2 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
8 Wednesday 2/12	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (Today)	3-"Segregation by Design" by Adam Susaneck https://www.segregationbydesign.com/boston	
9 Friday 2/14	Schooling in Boston: A Case Study (Today)		Assignment 1: Social Media Post and Reflection
Monday 2/17	NO CLASS BPS FEBRUARY BREAK		

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
Wednesday 2/19	NO CLASS BPS FEBRUARY BREAK	4-People's History: The Point – Episode 4 “Free Breakfast” https://peopleshistorypod.net/#season-one	
Friday 2/21	NO CLASS BPS FEBRUARY BREAK		
10 Monday 2/24	Field Trip – Columbia Point		Reflective Journal: Entry 3 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
11 Wednesday 2/26	Challenges Facing BPS Today (Overview)	5-“Commentary: What can be done to halt the drop in Boston’s school-age population?” by Bill Walczak https://www.dotnews.com/2021/commentary-what-can-be-done-halt-drop-boston-s-school-age-population	
12 Friday 2/28	Challenges Facing BPS Today (Housing)		
13 Monday 3/3	Challenges Facing BPS Today (Funding, Enrollment, and School Closures)		Reflective Journal: Entry 4 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
14 Wednesday 3/5	Challenges Facing BPS Today (Right Wing Threats - Ethnic Studies)	6-“A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door” (Excerpt) by Jack Schneider and Jennifer Berkshire	
15 Friday 3/7	Challenges Facing BPS Today (Privatization and Charter Schools)		

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
16 Monday 3/10	Challenges Facing BPS Today (School Committee Testimony Project)	7-"Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side" (Excerpt) by Eve Ewing 8-"70% of BPS Schools Have Been Closed, Moved, Merged, or Reconfigured Since '02, BLA Teacher Finds" by José Valenzuela https://schoolyardnews.com/70-of-bps-schools-have-been-closed-moved-merged-or-reconfigured-since-02-bla-teacher-finds-cae705da9068	Reflective Journal: Entry 5 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
17 Wednesday 3/12	Challenges Facing BPS Today (School Committee Testimony Project)		
18 Friday 3/14	Challenges Facing BPS Today (School Committee Testimony Project)		Assignment 2: School Committee Testimony and Reflection
Monday 3/17	NO CLASS UMASS BOSTON BREAK		
Wednesday 3/19	NO CLASS UMASS BOSTON BREAK	9-"From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools" by Gloria Ladson-Billings	

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
Friday 3/21	NO CLASS UMASS BOSTON BREAK		
19 Monday 3/24	Whose (Public) Education System? Educational Debt vs. Achievement Gap		Reflective Journal: Entry 6 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
20 Wednesday 3/26	Whose (Public) Education System? Education as Indoctrination (Book Bans, Censorship Laws, Religion and White Christian Nationalism)	10A-Current Event Articles (Choose one of the 10 articles; changes each semester based on current events and students' interests)	
21 Friday 3/28	Whose (Public) Education System? Education as Erasure		
22 Monday 3/31	Whose (Public) Education System? Education for Liberation (Curriculum Projects)		Reflective Journal: Entry 7 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
23 Wednesday 4/2	Whose (Public) Education System? Education for Liberation (Ethnic Studies, YPAR, Action Civics)	10B-Current Event Articles (Choose a second of the 10 articles; changes each semester based on current events and students' interests)	
24 Friday 4/4	Op-Ed Writing – Planning		
25 Monday 4/7	Op-Ed Writing - Writing	11-Assorted Op-Eds	Reflective Journal: Entry 8 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
26 Wednesday 4/9	Op-Ed Writing - Workshop		

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
27 Friday 4/11	Abolitionist Pedagogy		Assignment 3: Op-Ed and Reflection (Student Demands: https://schoolyardnews.com/students-rally-for-a-better-fairer-bps-1929c4f5ebca)
28 Monday 4/14	Fugitive Pedagogy	12-"Cult of Pedagogy: Historically Responsive Literacy" by Jennifer Gonzalez https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/historically-responsive-literacy/	Reflective Journal: Entry 9 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
29 Wednesday 4/16	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy		
Friday 4/18	NO CLASS BPS SPRING BREAK		
Monday 4/21	NO CLASS BPS SPRING BREAK		
Wednesday 4/23	NO CLASS BPS SPRING BREAK		
Friday 4/25	NO CLASS BPS SPRING BREAK		
30 Monday 4/28	Project: Planning Week		Reflective Journal: Entry 10 (See Prompts on Google Classroom)
31 Wednesday 4/30	Project: Planning Week		Work on Teach-In (Peer Lesson)
32 Friday 5/2	Project: Planning Week		Work on Teach-In (Peer Lesson)

Class	Topic(s)	Homework Due	Assignments Due
33 Monday 5/5	Project: Teaching Week		Assignment 4: Teach-In (Peer Lesson) and Reflection
34 Wednesday 5/7	Project: Teaching Week		
35 Friday 5/9	Project: Teaching Week		
36 Monday 5/12	Project: Teaching Week		
37 Wednesday 5/14	Course Evaluations Final Thoughts and End of Course Celebration		

READING LIST**Reading 1**

Ramirez, Alejandro et al. *The Point – Episode 1 "Placement."* People's History. <https://peopleshistorypod.net/#season-one>. Accessed 16 Jan. 2025.

Reading 2

Delmont, Matthew. "Rethinking "Busing" in Boston." *Smithsonian*, 27 Dec. 2016. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/rethinking-busing-boston>

Reading 3

Susaneck, Adam Paul. "Segregation by Design." *TU Delft Centre for the Just City*, 2024 <https://www.segregationbydesign.com/boston>

Reading 4

Ramirez, Alejandro et al. *The Point – Episode 4 "Free Breakfast."* People's History. <https://peopleshistorypod.net/#season-one>. Accessed 16 Jan. 2025.

Reading 5

Walczak, Bill. "Commentary: What Can Be Done to Halt the Drop in Boston's School-Age Population?" *Dorchester Reporter*, 9 Dec. 2021. <https://www.dotnews.com/2021/commentary-what-can-be-done-halt-drop-boston-s-school-age-population>

Reading 6

Schneider, Jack and Jennifer Berkshire. *A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door: The Dismantling of Public Education and the Future of School*. The New Press, 2023.

Reading 7

Ewing, Eve. *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*. The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Reading 8

Valenzuela, José. "70% of BPS Schools Have Been Closed, Moved, Merged, or Reconfigured Since '02, BLA Teacher Finds." *Schoolyard News*. <https://schoolyardnews.com/70-of-bps-schools-have-been-closed-moved-merged-or-reconfigured-since-02-bla-teacher-finds-cae705da9068>

Reading 9

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 35, no. 7, 2006, pp. 3-12, doi: [10.3102/0013189X035007003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035007003).

Reading 10 (First is required, then choose a second one for 10A and one for 10B)**Required:**

Butrymowicz, Sarah, Ariel Gilreth, Meredith Kolodner, Jackie Mader, Neal Morton, Caroline Preston, Javeria Salman, Christina A. Samuels, Olivia Sanchez and Nirvi Shah. "Trump Education Policy Would Dismantle K-12 Public Schools and Overhaul Higher Ed." *Teen Vogue*. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/trump-education-policy-k-12-public-schools-higher-ed>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.

Choose:

Graves-Fitzsimmons, Guthrie. "The Ungodly Motive Behind Trump's 'school prayer' pledge." *MSNBC*. <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/trump-school-prayer-department-of-education-rcna180067>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.

- Soares, Wellington. "Amid Fear, Trans Students and Families Plan for Trump's Second Term." *Chalkbeat*. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2024/11/26/trans-students-families-prepare-for-trumps-second-term/>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Belsha, Kalyn. "Think Tank with Ties to Trump Lays Out Plan to Deny Free Education to Undocumented Students." *Chalkbeat*. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2024/04/09/plyler-protects-undocumented-students-heritage-foundation-seeks-challenge/>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Blad, Evie. "How Trump Could Roll Back Access to Free School Lunches." *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/how-trump-could-roll-back-access-to-free-school-lunches/2024/11>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Meltzer, Erica and Kalyn Belsha. "Should Kids Learn About LGBTQ Issues at School? Many Teachers and Teens Say No, Surveys Find." *Chalkbeat*. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2024/02/23/teachers-teens-not-at-ease-discussing-lgbtq-issues-in-school-survey-finds/>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Anonymous. "My Pro-Palestine Activism was Blocked. So the ACLU and I Sued My High School for Censorship." *Teen Vogue*. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/pro-palestine-activism-aclu-dc-high-school>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Chastain, Blake. "Exvangelica by Blake Chastian traces the Rise of the Evangelical Movement in the US." *Teen Vogue*. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/exvangelical-blake-chastain-evangelical-movement>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
- Blake, John. "White Christian Nationalists Are Poised to Remake America in Their Image During Trump's Second Term, Author Says." *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/12/us/white-christian-nationalism-du-mez-cec/index.html>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.

Reading 11 (Read all)

- Avashia, Neema. "Why Landing on the 'Best Schools List' Is Not Something to Celebrate." *WBUR Cognoscenti*. <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2020/09/04/boston-magazine-best-high-schools-greater-boston-neema-avashia>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.
- Kamanetz, Anya. "School Is for Everyone." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/opinion/us-school-history.html>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.
- Mehta, Jal. "Make Schools More Human." *The New York Times*. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/23/opinion/covid-schools-vaccine.html>.
- Pressley, Ayanna and Dr. Subini Ancy Annamma and Vilissa Thompson. "Black Girls with Disabilities Are Disproportionately Criminalized." *Teen Vogue*. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/black-girls-disabilities-criminalized>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.
- Students at Fremont High. "What Grown Ups Don't Understand About School." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/opinion/us-high-school-oakland.html>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.

Reading 12

- Gonzalez, Jennifer. "Historically Responsive Literacy." *Cult of Pedagogy*. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/historically-responsive-literacy/>. Accessed 16 Jan. 2025.