**Week 1**: Milton Friedman, Chap. IV, “The Role of Government in Education”

1. What is Friedman’s argument for government intervention in education?  What other reasonable arguments can be made?

2. What educational interventions by government are justified according to Friedman?

3. The current U.S. educational system evolved in ways that Friedman does not detail (but which we will discuss in Ec980b).  What would he say is wrong with the current system and what might he suggest to make the system operate better?

**Week 2**: *Ashenfelter and Rouse, “Schooling, Intelligence, and Income in America: Cracks in the Bell Curve”*

1. More-educated individuals earn more in the labor market than less-educated individuals.  Does the positive relationship between education and earnings always reflect a causal impact of education on earnings and productivity?  Why else might there be a positive relationship between education and earnings?

2. Do comparisons of differences in the earnings and educational attainment of identical twins (within twins estimates) provide the ideal natural experiment for estimating the causal effect of education on earnings?

3. What are the strengths and limitations of using randomized field experiments (such as the Perry Preschool and Tennessee STAR class size reduction experiments) to evaluate the impact of education policies?

**Week 3:** Heckman, “Schools, Skills, and Synapses”

1. What is the economic case for or against a government role in the funding or provision of early childhood interventions for children from disadvantaged families?

2. Among the following which would be the most effective way to improve the long-run well-being of disadvantaged children: (1) increased income transfers to their families; (2) direct provision of early childhood education and health and nutrition programs; (3) programs to improve the parenting practices of those with infants; or (4) later interventions to improve K-12 education and college access?

3.  How important are improvements in cognitive vs. noncognitive skills in the economic returns to education?

**Week 4**: Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*

Using Chapters 1, 4, and 6 in Kaestle, discuss the following:

(1) Why was the provision of schooling to the masses different in the United States than in its main colonial power, England? That is, why was schooling widespread and broad-based (with the exception of the US South and particularly with respect to slaves) in the US but not in Europe?

(2) What were the goals of the common-school system in the early nineteenth century?

(3) What was meant by “common-school reform” in the 1840s and 1850s? Which of the common-school reformer arguments are similar to those made today by school reformers?

**Week 5:**

1. What is the role of school quality in the growth of the Black-White achievement gap as children progress through school?

2. Why does the Black-White achievement gap grow as children progress through school but the Hispanic-White gap narrows and rich-poor gap is relatively stable?

3. Why do you think the school achievement gap between children from high-income and low-income families has grown substantially over the last several decades?

4. How important are parents vs. neighborhoods vs. schools in explaining SES gaps in educational performance and long-run economic and social outcomes?

**Week 6:**

1. What is the basis of the case for the $320,000 Kindergarten teacher, as explained by David Leonhardt in the *New York Times* article?

2. What was Tennessee Project STAR and how can it inform the economic impact of Kindergarten teachers?

3. How do the estimates at the end of Krueger’s paper, which is an earlier evaluation of Tennessee Project STAR, compare with those in the Chetty article, which uses highly restricted data (from the IRS) with adult outcomes? (you can try to answer this, but it isn’t required)

**Week 7:**

1. What are the differences between Charter Schools and Pilot Schools in Boston and why might one expect them to have different impacts on student performance?

 2. What is the rationale for, and what are the benefits of, using lottery-based approaches to estimating the impacts of charter schools on student performance? What are the limitations of lottery-based estimates?

 3. Should U.S. states be encouraged to remove restrictions on the number of charter schools?

**Weeks 8 & 9:**

1. How can one assess the roles of supply, demand, and institutional factors in changes in the U.S. wage structure?

2. Why did so much of the narrowing of the U.S. wage structure in the 20th century occur during the decades of World War I and World War II?

3. What do you think are the driving forces behind the rapid growth in U.S. relative skill supplies over much of the 20th century and slowdown since 1980?

4. How important has immigration been in changes in U.S. wage inequality?

**Week 10:**

These questions refer to Caroline Hoxby, “The Changing Selectivity of American Colleges,” *JEP* (Fall 2009)

1. Describe how the author constructed Figure 1 and explain what the figure implies for “the changing selectivity of American colleges.”

2. What changed in the economy and society that produced the changing selectivity? In addition, what changed with regard to colleges that also furthered selectivity?

3. Explain why the author believes that these changes have been for the aggregate “good” and have resulted in greater allocative and productive efficiencies.

**Week 11:**

Questions on C. Goldin, L. Katz, and I. Kuziemko, “The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap”

1. List the proximate determinants of the reversal of the college gender gap (they are mentioned in the paper). What are the long-run reasons for the changes in the proximate determinants?

2. Is the new college gender gap a U.S. phenomenon only?  What are the implications of your answer?

3. The U.S. college gender gap began its reversal long ago. Why did the popular press pick up on the subject at a much later date (e.g., *Newsweek* had a cover story on the topic in 2003)?

4. Why are females from lower SES families graduating from college at higher rates than lower SES males, compared with females and males from higher SES families? The reverse had been the case.