

ECON 350: School and Church in Contemporary America

Fall 2026

Credit Hours:	3
Prerequisites:	None
Class Location:	Pangborn G022
Time:	Monday/Wednesday 12:40 PM–1:55 PM

Instructor:	Dr. Catherine R. Pakaluk
Office:	Maloney 122
E-mail:	Pakalukc@cua.edu
Office Hours:	By appointment — e-mail me and we will find a time. I am generally on campus Mondays and Wednesdays around our class meeting.

Course Description

Besides the family, the educational and religious environments we experience make the greatest contribution to the individuals we become. What does social science contribute to our understanding of the nature of schools and churches, and their role in the lives of individuals, families, and society?

This course is a broad introduction to contemporary social research for non-majors, with a focus on schools, education, and religion and related social trends in America today—especially inequality and mobility. Students will be introduced to the most important theoretical ideas in the social science of education and religion through the exploration of a comprehensive set of research papers. The course will also look at important aspects of religious practice, becoming familiar with the primary data sources, metrics, and methods for the analytical study of religion and religious institutions.

Specific topics include: public/private schools; externalities/neighborhood effects; educational equity and school finance; literacy; equality of opportunity; racial and ethnic achievement gaps; early education; peer effects; class size; school expenditures (Does money matter?); vouchers and charter schools; teacher quality; merit pay; religious schools; churches; religiosity; and faith-based institutions.

Throughout, students will engage with enduring questions that are foundational for an integrated understanding of reality: what does our body-soul reality mean for how we are formed to live as members of society? What does it mean to know, what and how much can we know, and how do we know that we know? Can we measure what we know and what we believe? What role do schools and religious institutions play in shaping what we know, and how will we know if they are advancing a good human life? Students will complete this course with a strong grasp of the major debates and puzzles in the social analysis of education and religion, and a deepened appreciation for the liberal tradition in education.

Required Texts

When you need each book. All four titles have been ordered through the campus bookstore. You do *not* need all four in the first week. **Caplan is first assigned Wed Sep 9; West on Wed Oct 21; Burge on Mon Nov 30; Bullivant on Wed Dec 9.** Week 1 readings (Oakeshott and Illich) are posted on the LMS. Buy Caplan now and the rest at your convenience; used copies are entirely acceptable.

Please purchase the following texts:

- Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education*, Princeton University Press (2018; paperback 2019) — first assigned Wed Sep 9
- E. G. West, *Education and the State: A Study in Political Economy*, Third edition, Liberty Fund (1994) — first assigned Wed Oct 21
- Ryan P. Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going*, Fortress Press (2021) — first assigned Mon Nov 30
- Stephen Bullivant, *Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America*, Oxford University Press (2022) — first assigned Wed Dec 9

Additional articles will be provided online (see course schedule).

Recommended

- Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (1971)
- John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*
- John Henry Newman, *Idea of a University*
- Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, Liberty Fund (2001 ed.; orig. Yale University Press, 1989)
- Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, Collected Works Vol. 2, ICS Publications (1996) — assigned chapters provided via the LMS; full volume optional
- Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II*, Oxford University Press (2019)

Course Requirements

Grading

Attendance and discussion	10%
Midterm exam	35%
Final exam	35%
In-class essay	20%

*The instructor reserves the right to change or modify this course and the syllabus subject to appropriate and timely notice to the students enrolled in this class.

Attendance & Participation

Class attendance is required. This class will be taught seminar style, with discussions centered around close readings of text. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss readings. I reserve the right to drop your overall course grade for each unexcused absence, 1/2 of a letter grade.

Exams

The midterm and final exam may contain a variety of the following: multiple-choice questions drawn from the key terms and topics discussed in class, identifications drawn from key passages of the required readings, and short essay questions.

The final exam must be given on the day and time assigned by the Registrar. Final examinations, if required, must be administered in the final examination period. Please plan accordingly for travel, work or appointments.

A student having an exam scheduling conflict such as: (1) two or more exams scheduled for the same time period or (2) three or more exams scheduled for one day must report to her/his school's Academic Dean's Office no later than fourteen calendar days before the end of classes. The dean will assist the student in rescheduling the exam(s) for the courses having the lowest enrollment(s). All make-up exams must be completed at the earliest possible time during the final examination period.

In-Class Essay

In place of a take-home paper, students will complete an in-class essay writing exercise during the final class meeting (Monday, December 14). Drawing on the readings and discussions across the semester, students will write a sustained analytical essay in response to a prompt provided that day. All writing will be done by hand in class, without electronic aids. Further guidance on format and expectations will be provided in advance.

Expectations and Policies

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is not merely avoiding plagiarism or cheating, but it certainly includes those things. More than anything, having academic integrity means taking responsibility for your work, your ideas, and your effort, and giving credit to others for their work, ideas and effort. If you submit work that is not your own – whether test answers, whole papers or something in-between – I have a responsibility to hold you accountable for that action. I also have a responsibility to treat you with respect and dignity while doing so.

The following sanctions are presented in the University procedures related to Student Academic Dishonesty:

“The presumed sanction for undergraduate students for academic dishonesty will be failure for the course. There may be circumstances, however, where, perhaps because of an undergraduate student's past record, a more serious sanction, such as suspension or expulsion, would be appropriate. ...In the more unusual case, mitigating circumstances may exist that would warrant a lesser sanction than the presumed sanction.”

At times, I may ask you to do group work for an in-class presentation or group project. For that specific assignment, you are allowed to share material, ideas and information; however, for any related work that is to be submitted on an individual basis, I expect your submission to be your own in its entirety.

For more information about what academic integrity means at CUA, including your responsibilities and rights, visit <http://integrity.cua.edu>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Support Services. Please contact Disability Support Services by e-mail at cua-dss@cua.edu, or call 202-319-5211 to make an appointment to discuss reasonable accommodations. DSS is located in PRYZ 127.

Academic Support Services

The university's primary academic support resources are located on the 2nd floor of Mullen Library, McMahon Hall, and at the Pryzbyla Center. These affiliated offices and services include:

The Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC) offers guidance to all undergraduates, especially first-year students, as they move toward their academic goals. The UAC is located in B 10 McMahon Hall. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

Phone: (202) 319-5545 · Email: cua-advising@cua.edu · Web: advising.cua.edu

The Center for Academic Success (CAS) provides academic support services for all students through a broad base of programs and services, including Tutoring Services, Workshops, Individual Skills Meetings, Peer Mentoring, and more. CAS is located at Mullen Library Second Floor.

Phone: (202) 319-5655 · Email: cua-academicssuccess@cua.edu · Web: success.cua.edu

The Writing Center is an excellent resource for any student, committed to supporting the writing needs of students at all stages of the writing process. If, at any point in the semester, you feel that you are struggling to draft, revise, or properly reference sources in a writing assignment, make an appointment at <http://english.cua.edu/wc>; we also welcome walk-in appointments at the Writing Center, located in 219 Mullen Library.

Phone: (202) 319-4286 · Email: cua-writingcenter@cua.edu · Web: english.cua.edu/wc/

The Math Center is staffed with Math Faculty and Tutors trained to assist students struggling in areas ranging from the basics to complex problems in calculus and statistics. Any student who feels he or she may need assistance is welcome to visit the Math Center Monday through Thursday between 4:00 and 10:00pm. No appointment is necessary and services are free. The Math Center is located at Mullen Library Second Floor.

Phone: (202) 319-5655 · Email: cua-academicssuccess@cua.edu

The Office of Disability Support Services provides reasonable accommodations for the classroom and testing environment for students with documented disabilities. DSS is located in Pryz 127. Office hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 8:00am–5:00pm, and Tuesday and Thursday 8:00am–6:30pm.

Phone: (202) 319-5211 · Email: cua-dss@cua.edu · Web: dss.cua.edu

The Counseling Center provides free individual and group counseling services, psychiatric consultation, alternative testing, and emergency services to CUA students. In addition, we provide consultation services and outreach programs to

the CUA community. Appointments can be scheduled in person in 127 O'Boyle Hall, or by phone.

Phone: (202) 319-5765 · Web: counseling.cua.edu

University Grades

The University grading system is available at <http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/gradesfull.cfm#II> for undergraduates and <http://policies.cua.edu/academicgrad/gradesfull.cfm#iii> for graduate students. Reports of grades in courses are available at the end of each term on <http://cardinalstation.cua.edu>.

Key Dates at a Glance

Date	What it is
Mon Aug 31	First class meeting
Wed Sep 9	Caplan, <i>The Case Against Education</i> , first assigned
Fri Sep 11	Last day to add, and last day to drop without record (Cardinal Students)
Wed Oct 14	Midterm exam , in class
Fri Nov 13	Last day to withdraw with a “W” (Cardinal Students)
Fri Nov 20	Last day to request pass/fail (undergraduates; dean's permission required)
Mon Dec 14	Last class — in-class essay , written by hand, no electronic aids
Wed Dec 16	FINAL EXAM, 8:00–10:00 AM — set by the Registrar and not moveable. Plan travel accordingly.

Two dates to put in your phone now. Friday, September 11 is the last day to add or drop this course without a record, and **Wednesday, December 16 at 8:00 AM** is the final exam. The University does not permit final exams to be given outside the examination period, so book any December travel after the 16th.

Course Materials Online

All articles, primary sources, and scanned chapters listed in the *Supporting Readings* column are posted on the **course website**, in the readings room. This includes the Week 1 readings (Oakeshott and Illich) and the two assigned chapters from Edith Stein's *Essays on Woman* (Nov 4 and Nov 9), which are provided as scans; the full volume is optional.

The readings room requires a sign-in with the e-mail address on your course registration — enrolled students only. You will be sent a one-time code; there is no new password to create. **Readings are posted at least one week before the session for which they are assigned.** If something is missing or will not open, e-mail me rather than assuming it is deliberate.

Where things live. The course website carries the schedule, the readings, and this syllabus. **Class announcements and any schedule changes are sent by text message** — the join instructions are given on the first day. Grades are posted in Cardinal Students.

Course Schedule

Fall 2026 dates built from the official academic calendar. All Monday/Wednesday class days are listed (28 sessions). Holidays are blocked out: *Labor Day* (Mon Sep 7), *Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day* (Mon Oct 12), and the *Thanksgiving recess* (Wed Nov 25). No administrative day-swaps fall on a Monday or Wednesday this term. Last day of classes is Mon Dec 14; the final exam is Wed Dec 16, 8–10 AM.

How to read the two tracks. The old Topic column is folded into the readings. The **Main Reading** column gives the book read straight through (Caplan → West → Burge/Bullivant), with each chapter or section title in **bold**. The **Supporting Readings** column leads with the session **topic in bold**, followed by the assigned articles and primary sources. Where a session lists selected chapters to be announced, the specific selection will be posted to the LMS at least one week in advance.

Note: Dates, topics, and readings are subject to change based on the needs of the class, and with appropriate notice. Our in-class midterm is **Wednesday, October 14**. The University's calendar marks the administrative midpoint of the term in the same week; it is not an exam date and does not affect our schedule.

Date & Week	Main Reading (book)	Supporting Readings (topic & articles/sources)
Aug 31 (Mon) Week 1	M. Oakeshott, “ The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind ” in <i>Rationalism in Politics</i> (Excerpts)	Intro; Greetings and Overview
Sep 2 (Wed)	I. Illich, <i>Deschooling Society</i> (Selections)	What is Education? Trends in Education; A Nation at Risk — U.S. Dept. of Education, <i>A Nation at Risk</i> (1983); C. Goldin, “The Human Capital Century,” <i>Education Next</i> 3(1):73–78; Baum et al., <i>Education Pays</i> , College Board, 2013; methods: self-selection; 3 steps to good data work
Sep 7 (Mon) Week 2 NO CLASS — <i>Labor Day</i>		
Sep 9 (Wed)	B. Caplan, Introduction & Ch. 1 “ The Magic of Education ”	Empirical Strategies & Peer Effects; Identification Problems & Linearities — C. F. Manski, “Identification Problems in the Social Sciences and Life,” 2006; B. Sacerdote, “Peer Effects with Random Assignment: Results for Dartmouth Roommates,” QJE, 2001

Sep 14 (Mon)	Week 3	B. Caplan, Ch. 2 “The Puzzle is Real: The Ubiquity of Useless Education”	Returns to Education; OLS, 2SLS, IV Regressions — Angrist & Krueger, “Does Compulsory School Attendance Affect Schooling and Earnings?” QJE 106(4), 1991; E. Duflo, “Schooling and Labor Market Consequences of School Construction in Indonesia,” AER 91(4), 2001
Sep 16 (Wed)		B. Caplan, Ch. 3 “The Handsome Rewards of Useless Education”	Human Capital & Signaling — G. Becker, “Investment in Human Capital,” JPE 70(5), 1962; M. Spence, “Job Market Signaling,” QJE 87(3), 1973
Sep 21 (Mon)	Week 4	B. Caplan, Ch. 4 “The Signs of Signaling”	Equity and Education — C. Jencks, “Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to be Equal?” <i>Ethics</i> 98(3), 1988; C. Murray, “Education, Intelligence, and America’s Future,” 2007
Sep 23 (Wed)		B. Caplan, Ch. 5 “The Selfish Return to Education”	Overview: History of Economic Research on Education — J. S. Coleman et al., <i>Equality of Educational Opportunity</i> , 1966; <i>A Nation at Risk</i> , 1983, and follow-ups
Sep 28 (Mon)	Week 5	B. Caplan, Ch. 6 “The Social Return to Education”	Black-White Achievement Gap — Hanushek & Rivkin, “School Quality and the Black-White Achievement Gap,” NBER, 2006; Fryer & Levitt, “The Black-White Test Score Gap Through Third Grade,” 2006; “The Unravelling of Affirmative Action,” WSJ, Oct 13, 2012
Sep 30 (Wed)		B. Caplan, Ch. 7 “We Need Lots Less Education”	Early Childhood & Family vs. School; Mechanisms — J. Currie, “Early Childhood Education Programs,” JEP 15(2), 2001; McEwan & Shapiro, “The Benefits of Delayed Primary School Enrollment”
Oct 5 (Mon)	Week 6	B. Caplan, Ch. 8 “We Need More Vocational Education”	Does Money Matter? — E. Hanushek, “The Failure of Input-Based Schooling Policies,” <i>Economic Journal</i> 113(485), 2003

Oct 7 (Wed)		B. Caplan, Ch. 9 “ Nourishing Mother: Is Education Good for the Soul? ”	Does Class Size Matter? — A. Krueger, “Experimental Estimates of Education Production Functions,” QJE 114(2), 1999 (Project STAR); Angrist & Lavy, “Using Maimonides’ Rule to Estimate the Effect of Class Size on Scholastic Achievement,” QJE 114(2), 1999
Oct 12 (Mon) <i>NO CLASS — Columbus Day / Indigenous Peoples’ Day</i>	Week 7		
Oct 14 (Wed)		MIDTERM EXAM — in class, Pangborn G022, 12:40–1:55 PM · Columbus Day (Mon Oct 12) gives a full prep day beforehand. Covers Weeks 1–6: Oakeshott, Illich, Caplan Intro–Ch. 9, and all supporting articles through Oct 7.	
Oct 19 (Mon)	Week 8	B. Caplan, Ch. 10 “ Five Chats on Education and Enlightenment ”; Conclusion & Afterword	Do Teachers Matter?; Do Peers Matter?; Models & Variation — Chetty, Friedman & Rockoff, “Measuring the Impacts of Teachers,” AER 104(9), 2014; (peer effects covered Sep 9 via Sacerdote)
Oct 21 (Wed)		E. G. West, Ch. 1 “ State Protection of Minors in Theory ”	Vouchers & School Choice — C. Hoxby, “How New York City’s Charter Schools Affect Achievement,” 2009; C. Tiebout, “A Pure Theory of Local Public Expenditures,” JPE 64(5), 1956
Oct 26 (Mon)	Week 9	E. G. West, Ch. 2 “ ...in Practice: The Education Act of 1944 ”	Accountability — C. Rouse et al., “Feeling the Florida Heat?” AEJ: Economic Policy 5(2), 2013; B. Jacob, “Accountability, Incentives and Behavior,” JPubE 89, 2005
Oct 28 (Wed)		E. G. West, Ch. 3 “ The Neighbourhood Effects Argument ”	Trends in Higher Education — Dale & Krueger, 2011, “Estimating the Return to College Selectivity”; resources: College Trends; What Works Clearinghouse; case study (California); affirmative action
Nov 2 (Mon)	Week 10	E. G. West, Ch. 4 “ Education to Make Democracy Work ”	Special Topics in Higher Education; 2SLS Regression — S. Dynarski, “The Consequences of Lowering the Cost of College,” AER 92(2), 2002; Singell & Stone, 2007, “For Whom the Pell Tolls”; Rothstein & Rouse, 2011, “Constrained After College”

Nov 4 (Wed)		Edith Stein, “Fundamental Principles of Women's Education” (<i>Essays on Woman</i> , Ch. 4) [posted on the course site]	Catholic Thought on Education — Pius XI, <i>Divini Illius Magistri</i> ; Pius XII, <i>Mit Brennender Sorge</i> (Excerpts)
Nov 9 (Mon)	Week 11	Edith Stein, “Problems of Women's Education” (<i>Essays on Woman</i> , Ch. 5) [posted on the course site]	Catholic & Religious Schools — John Paul II, <i>Ex Corde Ecclesiae</i> (Excerpts); C. R. Pakaluk, “The Seton Option”; Evans & Schwab, “Finishing High School and Starting College: Do Catholic Schools Make a Difference?” QJE 110(4), 1995; D. Neal, “The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling,” JLE 15(1), 1997; C. R. Pakaluk, “What Good is a Good Fit?” WP 2012; E. Lehrer, “Religion, Human Capital Investments, and the Family,” 2009
Nov 11 (Wed)		E. G. West, Ch. 5 “Equality of Opportunity”	Economics of Religion — L. R. Iannaccone, “Introduction to the Economics of Religion,” JEL 36(3), 1998; Azzi & Ehrenberg, “Household Allocation of Time and Church Attendance,” JPE 83(1), 1975
Nov 16 (Mon)	Week 12	E. G. West, Ch. 6 “Education and the Quest for Common Values”	The Stricter, the Stronger?; Rational Actor Analysis — L. R. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches are Strong,” AJS 99, 1994
Nov 18 (Wed)		E. G. West, Ch. 7 “Education and Economic Growth”	The Church vs. the Mall — Gruber & Hungerman, “The Church versus the Mall,” QJE 123(2), 2008
Nov 23 (Mon)	Week 13	Film: <i>Waiting for ‘Superman’</i> (dir. Davis Guggenheim, 2010) — screened in class; no advance reading	Crowd-Out — Gruber & Hungerman, “Faith-Based Charity and Crowd-Out During the Great Depression,” JPubE, 2007
Nov 25 (Wed)		NO CLASS — Thanksgiving recess begins	
Nov 30 (Mon)	Week 14	R. Burge, <i>The Nones</i> , Part I “Where They Came From”	The Rise of the Nones I
Dec 2 (Wed)		R. Burge, <i>The Nones</i> , Part II “Who They Are”	The Rise of the Nones II
Dec 7 (Mon)	Week 15	R. Burge, <i>The Nones</i> , Part III “Where They Are Going”	The Rise of the Nones III

Dec 9 (Wed)		S. Bullivant, <i>Nonverts</i> , Introduction & selected chapters — specific chapters to be announced on the LMS at least one week in advance	Nonverts: Leaving Christian America
Dec 14 (Mon) Last class	Week 16	In-class essay writing exercise — no reading; bring writing materials	
Dec 16 (Wed)	Finals	FINAL EXAM — Wednesday, December 16, 8:00–10:00 AM	

Dr. Catherine R. Pakaluk · Busch School of Business · The Catholic University of America · Maloney 122 · Pakalukc@cua.edu
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