GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Education

Course Title: *Social Science Research and Education Policy*
EDUC 872 Sec: 001
Spring 2010

Instructor: Penelope M. Earley, Ph.D.
Class Date & Time: 7:30 – 10:00 Thursday
Class Location: Innovation 139
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Office Hours By Appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the research base used to support education policy actions. Students will identify and critically review research for selected K-12 and higher education policy issues and through their analysis determine the strength of the undergirding evidence. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program and completion of EDUC 870 and 871 or equivalent doctoral-level policy coursework.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate ability to critique education research articles.
2. Objectively analyze policy options and determine what research would be necessary to support their claims.
3. Identify gaps in the evidence undergirding education policy options.
4. Understand and explain why certain education policy decisions have not had the desired outcome

## RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The conceptual framework for this course is linked to the goals of the Graduate School of Education and more specifically to the mission of the Center for Education Policy as outlined in its Charter: (1) Translate education research into policy options and recommendations for a variety of audiences (decision makers, practitioners, and the public); (2) Conduct timely, sound, evidence-based analysis; and (3) Develop interdisciplinary and cross-sector policy networks. The student outcomes are linked to this mission, in particular to the importance of evidence-based analysis.

## NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is taught using lectures and class discussions.

## TEXTS AND READINGS

Jones, W.Paul & Kottler, Jeffrey A. (2006). *Understanding research: becoming a competent and critical consumer.* Pearson Education, Inc, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Locke, Lawrence F., Silverman, Stephen J., & Spirduso, Waneen Wyrick (2004). *Reading and Understanding Research, 3nd Ed.* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

McEwan, Elaine K. & McEwan, Patrick J. (2003). *Making sense of research what's good, what's not, and how to tell the difference.* Corwin Press (Sage Publications). Thousand Oaks, CA.

Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), available on-line: http://www.epaa.asu.edu

*Educational Researcher*, available on-line: http://www.aera.net

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Four presentations. Students will find research articles related to four education policy issues (one will be a team presentation and three will be individual presentations). Three issues will be selected from the list included with this syllabus and one identified by the student. Each student will be prepared to present to the class an objective summary and critique of a minimum of four to six research articles **confirming or challenging the selected policy topics**. Each of the four presentations should be approximately 45 minutes long (not including time for Q&A). Students are expected to be creative in their presentations through the use of PowerPoint or other instructional tools and **must** provide handouts to supplement their presentation (please see grading rubric for additional information on expectations for this assignment). Each student will complete an evaluation sheet to be given to the presenter at the conclusion of each class; these evaluations are intended to help students hone their evaluation skills as well as to help the presenter (they will not be reviewed by the instructor). Students grade will be determined by the quality of their analysis of the research, not on the quality of the studies themselves.

(1) Each student is expected to make four presentations (one as part of a team and three individually) and lead the discussion on the policy issue and related research (20 points each presentation). (2) Students not presenting will be prepared to ask appropriate questions and provide a careful written critique of the presentations.

| | |
|---|---|
| 80% | Research Presentations (4) – one team; three individual |
| 20% | Review Panel Participation |

EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached.
Grading Scale:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A = | 96-100 | A- = | 92-95 |
| B+ = | 89-91 | B = | 85-88 |
| C+ = | 80-87 | C = | 73-79 |
| F = | 72 and below | | |

**Week-Class** **Topic and Readings**

(1) 1/21/10 Course Introduction: Critiquing Educational Research. Basic concepts for reading and critiquing a research article will be presented.
**Assignment – Class #2: Read McEwan, Chapters 1 - 4 and Jones, Chapters 2 – 4. Also please look at the list of possible topics for presentations that accompanies this syllabus. Be thinking of a topic that is of interest to you that could be used for one of your presentations. The topic should have an education policy component and a substantial body of research (pro/con). At the next class students will select topics from the list included with this syllabus (have a second choices in mind) and offer a self-identified topic.**

(2) 1/28/10 Critiquing Educational Research: Framing Questions and Identifying Answering Tools. Reading and analyzing research.
Students select topics for their team and individual presentations. A schedule for these presentations will be set at this time.
**Assignment – Class #3: Read Jones Chapters 5 – 7 (note in particular pp. 149-150) and Locke, Part II, Part III or both.**

(3) 2/04/10 Critiquing Educational Research: Using the Jones and Locke frameworks for evaluating research articles.
**Assignment – Class #4 Read McEwan pp. 13, 48, 69, 86, and 105**

(4) 2/11/10 Policy Issue: Does Reducing Class Size Improve Student Learning?
Class activity: Students will be randomly assigned to two groups and using Jones or Locke's framework, critique evidence presented in the McEwan book on class size reduction. Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute the assertion that class size reduction increases student learning? How would you refute the assertion that class size has no impact on student learning?

(5) 2/18/10 Work Break

(6) 2/25/10 Team One and Two Presentations

(7) 3/04/10 Student Presentations 1/2

(8) 3/11/10 No Class Spring Break

(9) 3/18/10 Student Presentations 3/4

(10) 3/25/10 Student Presentations 5/6

(11) 4/01/10 Student Presentations 7/8

(12) 4/08/10 Student Presentations 9/10

(13) 4/15/10 Student Presentations 11/12

(14) 4/22/10 Student Presentations 13/14

(15) 5/29/10 Student Presentation 15

(In case of a cancellation due to weather, the schedule will slip one week and conclude May 6 – reading/exam week)

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL GSE STUDENTS

The Graduate School of Education (GSE) expects all students to ***read*** and abide by the following:

- ✓ Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See www.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.
- ✓ Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full Honor Code.
- ✓ Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See http://mail.gmu.edu and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.
- ✓ Students with disabilities who see accommodations in a course must b e registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/students/drc or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.

# Student Presentation Topics (select one)

**1. Do students perform better in small rather than large high schools? (Begin with but go beyond studies supported by the Gates Foundation.)**
Policy Issue: School Size – What's too Big and What's Too Small?
Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute a policy proposal to create smaller learning environments? How would you refute school consolidation to create larger learning environments?

**2. What is the best method to prepare new teachers? (One side of this issues is presented in *The Secretary's Third Annual Report on Teacher Quality, Meeting the HighlyQualified Teachers Challenge* available on the U.S. Department of Education's web site. Look also at research done by Linda Darling-Hammond and the work she cites.)**
Policy Issue: Are Certain Models of Preparing Teachers Better than Others? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute a policy that supports a particular teacher preparation model?

**3. How Does the United States' Education System Compare with Other Nations? (Gerald Bracey's work will provide one perspective, but also look for others.)** Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute assertions that students in U.S. schools are less competent than students in other nations? How would you refute the assertion that the heterogeneous nature of education in the U.S. makes cross national comparisons useless?

**4. Is there a successful strategy to address and curb school violence? (Journals for school administrators and counselors are a good place to begin.)**
Policy Issue: What Strategies Have Been Found to Reduce or Curtail School Violence? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gap?

**5. Does grouping students by ability promote student achievement? (The special education literature presents one perspective on this, however other research should be reviewed. The body of literature on this topic is large – be selective.)**
What Are the Benefits or Liabilities of Grouping Students for Instructional Purposes (tracking, grouping within classes, gifted and talented programs, special education)? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute the decision to group students for instructional purposes? How would you refute a decision not to group students?

**6. Are single sex K-12 schools a successful strategy for promoting student achievement? (Look at research regarding single sex colleges, but do not limit yourself to this body of scholarship. )**
What are the Benefits or Liabilities of Creating Single Sex Schools? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

**7. Select and evaluate one or more strategies to promote diverse learning environments. (Look at literature pertaining to both K-12 and higher education settings. Don't forget the Supreme Court.).**
Are there Effective Models to Achieve Diversity in Educational Institutions (K-16)? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

**8. Is licensing (or certifying) teachers and/or school administrators a measure of teacher competence? (Fredrick Hess at the American Enterprise Institute opposes teacher licensure while Linda Darling-Hammond at Stanford University thinks licenses are a good idea. What evidence do they rely on?)**
Should K-12 Teachers and Administrators be Required to Hold a State License? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

**9. Is school choice (vouchers etc.) a good option for students and their families? (Paul Peterson at Harvard has written extensively in this area, but his work is not without its critics. Also look at studies of Milwaukee and Cleveland programs.)**
Does School Choice Improve Student Achievement (vouchers, charter schools, magnet schools, etc.)? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

**10. Is "pullout" an effective strategy to help students who are struggling in particular areas (reading, mathematics, etc)? (Begin your research search looking at the Title I program, but do not limit your search to research on this program alone.)**
Is Pullout an Effective Way to Help Students Who are Weak in Particular Subjects? Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

**11. Does participation of children aged 3-5 in preschool result in higher achievement in elementary school?** Many policy makers are suggesting that universal preschool for children who are three and four years old will result in better learning outcomes once they enter elementary school. Does the evidence support this?

**12. What is the best tool to predict student success in postsecondary education?** In recent years some universities have dropped the requirement that students take and achieve a particular qualifying score on tests like the ACT and SAT. What evidence is available to support or not support the use of these exams or other measures to make college admissions decisions.

**Grading Rubric: Social Science Research and Public Policy**

| Grade/Points | Consensus Group | Research Summary Assignments |
|---|---|---|
| A<br>96 – 100 | Outstanding. Participates in and promotes conversation focused on the topic. Comments demonstrate a high level of understanding. | Exceeds Expectations; presentation of research is objective and demonstrates deep reflection; facilitation of class discussion is exceptional and promotes high level conversation on the topic. Work shows evidence of very strong analytic skills. Written material (hand outs etc.) are error free. |
| A-<br>92 – 95 | Well above the average doctoral student; actively advances the intellectual level of the discussion. | Well above average doctoral student; presentation of research is objective and on-target; good facilitation of class discussion, keeping discussion focused on the topic. Work shows evidence of strong analytic skills. Written material (hand outs etc.) is primarily error free. |
| B+<br>89 –91 | Reliable participant in discussions; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection. | Presentation of research is solid and objectives; during group discussions, questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection. Work shows evidence of solid analytic skills. Grammar or spelling errors on written materials (hand outs etc,) do not distract the reader. |
| B<br>85 – 88 | Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.<br><br>. | Presentation of research is solid but not always objective or complete; one or more key points are not covered. Analytic work is generally sound but may have some gaps in logic. Grammar or spelling errors on written materials (hand outs etc.) do not distract the reader. |
| C+<br>80-87<br><br>C<br>73-79 | Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group. | Presentation of research is incomplete and not objective. Multiple key points are not covered or are misrepresented. Important studies are not referenced. Written materials are unclear. Facilitation of class discussion strays from the topic.<br><br>Presentation of research is incomplete and not objective. Important studies are not referenced or are misrepresented. Written materials (hand outs etc.) are not presented or are unrelated to the topic. Weak facilitation of the discussion as evidenced by lack of focus on the topic. Written materials have multiple spelling and grammar errors. |
| F<br>72 and below | No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view. | Assignments are not done or are significantly incomplete. |