

George Mason University  
College of Education and Human Development  
Graduate School of Education

Course Title: Contemporary and Emerging Issues in Education Policy  
EDUC 875  
Summer 2012

Instructor: Penelope M. Earley, Ph.D.  
Class Date & Time: Summer B Tuesday & Thursday 7:30 – 10:00  
Class Location: Innovation Hall, Room 316

Contact Information:

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Office Hours By Appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course focuses on the forces and factors that lead to the emergence of initiatives on the Pre/K-16 policy agenda. Students will consider topics that have emerged in recent years (such as federally mandated school and teacher accountability programs) and identify and analyze sources of new education policy ideas. These will include but not be limited to: studies published in on-line publications; education blogs; articles in the mass media; and statements by candidates for office. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program and completion of EDUC 870 or equivalent doctoral-level policy coursework.

## **STUDENT OUTCOMES**

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

1. Demonstrate the ability to critique new education proposals.
2. Be able to locate and evaluate a variety of sources of education proposals.
3. Be able to implement and manage a system to track new education proposals.
4. Demonstrate ability to connect education proposals to policy options

## **RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. The conceptual framework for this course is linked 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 (in particular 3, 4, and 5) are linked to this mission as are the analytic assignments.

## NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is taught using lectures and class discussions

## TEXTS AND READINGS

Johnson, C.A. (2010). *The information diet: A case for conscious consumption*. Sabastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media, Inc.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Presentation of data source (15 points)
2. Analysis of article with demographic data (10 points)
3. Claims & Evidence write up (70 points)
4. Citizenship (05 points)

## EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached. All written work must be completed on a word processor and must be within the page limits established by the instructor.

Grading Scale:

A =	96-100	A- =	92-95	B+ =	89-91
B =	85-88	B- =	80-84	C =	75-79
F =	74 and below				

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY:

***Presentation of data source (15 points)***. Select one of the publicly available data sources on the attached list. Provide a one page brief on the data source (with URL) for each class member and the instructor. You will have 7-10 minutes to describe the data source so focus on the information available and how a policy analyst or researcher could use the data to inform policy.

***Presentation of demographic data (10 points)***. Select an article from a non-education publication that includes demographic data. Please do not use an article that is merely a re-write of a press release from the data source. Be prepared to very briefly summarize your article (2-3 minutes) and then discuss what you see as the possible policy implications of the data presented in the article (this is not a written assignment).

***Identification and analysis of policy claims (70 points)***. Each student will be responsible for analyzing specific education policy proposals by presidential and vice presidential candidates. The analysis will focus on whether or not the policy claim can be supported by empirical literature.

***Citizenship: (5 points)***. The outcome of this class will be a document placed on the Center for Education Policy and Evaluation web site. Everyone will have an assignment

(from organizing text to proof reading) to assure that the document is letter perfect (and APA perfect).

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Topics and Assignments

1. June 05 -- Overview:
  - a. Introduction & Housekeeping Issues
  - b. Syllabus and schedule review
  - c. Issues Sensing vs. Crystal Ball
  - d. Discussion of *The Information Diet*

*Assignment for June 07: Select a publicly available data source useful for identifying or tracking information on education (see attached list). Provide a one page brief on the data source (with URL) for each class member and instructor*
2. June 07—Data Sources (Inform & Predict Policy)
  - a. Presentation and discussion of data sources.
  - b. Discussion: What kinds of information does the data base provide? Where does it come from? Are there possible sources of bias? How might the data from this source be combined with other data sets to inform policy?
  - c. Using LexisNexis

*Assignment for June 12: Select an article from a non-education publication that includes demographic data. Please do not use an article written from a press release by a data gathering agency (such as the Census Bureau). Be prepared to summarize the article and present policy implications of it for Pre-K-16 schools*
3. June 12 – Demographics and policy decisions
  - a. Presentation and discussion of articles and implications
  - b. Discussion: Does the article give a complete picture? Are there implicit or explicit sources of bias? How might a policy analyst use this information
  - c. Sabato's Crystal Ball (<http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball>)

*Assignment for June 14: Review Sykes & Dibner paper (to be sent by instructor).*

*Assignment for June 19: Team A (four people) will identify the individuals who appear to be under consideration to become Romney's VP running mate. Be prepared to provide enough background on them so the group can decide the four individuals who will be included in the final analysis paper.*
4. June 14 – Evaluating policy claims
  - a. What is evidence and what is not evidence
  - b. Criteria for weighing evidence
  - c. Evaluation tools
  - d. Identifying sources of bias
5. June 19 – Likely Republican VP candidates
  - a. Presentation by Team A on VP candidates
  - b. Selection of four VP candidates to study

- c. Random assignment of candidates to students and discussion of where to look for policy claims (Obama: 4 students; Romney: 1 student; Biden 1 student; Republican VP candidates: 4 students)  
*Assignment: for June 21 be prepared to present a list of all education policy claims associated with the candidate who you analyze.*
6. June 21 –Organizing the policy claims: Assigning claims to student analysts.  
*Assignment: **Due July 09.** Prepare a written analysis of evidence that supports or does not support the policy claim/s you are studying.*
7. July 10 – Discuss findings & identify themes or contradictions
  - a. Discussion of gaps or needed revisions  
*Assignment for Team B: Merge everyone’s work into one document. Write narrative connecting the policy claims and analyses.*
8. July 12-CLASS DOES NOT MEET  
*Assignment for Team B: Send each student a copy of the merged document no later than July 16.*  
*Assignment for all: Consider policy recommendations to accompany the document and points that should be included in the introduction and conclusion.*
9. July 17 –Discussion of policy recommendations, introduction, conclusion, and modifications to the document. Team C writes the intro, conclusion, and policy recommendations.  
*Assignment: Team C send next draft to other students by COB on Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup>.*
10. July 19 –Dreaded proof reading (please bring your copy of APA 6<sup>th</sup> to class)
11. July 24 –Critique of the final document. Agreement on distribution (or not).

### **Important Information for all students**

The College of Education and Human Development expects all students to abide by the following:

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].

Please note that:

- Plagiarism encompasses the following:
  1. Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
  2. Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.

(from Mason Honor Code online at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>)
- Paraphrasing involves taking someone else’s ideas and putting them in your own words. When you paraphrase, you need to cite the source.

- When material is copied word for word from a source, it is a direct quotation. You must use quotation marks (or block indent the text) and cite the source, including the appropriate page number.
  - Electronic tools (e.g., SafeAssign) may be used to detect plagiarism if necessary.
  - Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are treated seriously and may result in disciplinary actions.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
  - Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
  - Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
  - Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
  - Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.
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### *Campus Resources*

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

	<b>Work</b>	<b>of Work</b>		
A 96 – 100  A- 92 – 95	<p>Exceptional quality and insight; a rare &amp; valuable contribution to the field.</p> <p>Convincingly on target; demonstrates evidence of understanding and application; clear and concise writing; the reader is not distracted by grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.</p>	<p>100% complete</p> <p>Accurate &amp; seamless writing; virtually a complete product</p>	<p>100% on time</p> <p>Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such as serious personal or family illness). Instructor is notified in advance that a paper may be late.</p>	<p>Outstanding; facilitates and promotes conversation focused on the topic; questions &amp; comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Good team participant</p> <p>Well above average doctoral student; actively helps move group toward goal.</p>
B+ 89 –91  B 85 – 88  B- 80 – 84	<p>Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity.</p> <p>Evidence of understanding presented but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations.</p> <p>Barely passable for graduate credit; only enough to get by; little evidence of understanding; assignments lack clarity and organization; little evidence of proof reading. Citations absent or inaccurate.</p>	<p>Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor's ability to see the product as a whole.</p> <p>Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed.</p> <p>Barely sufficient; work is the least that could be done to justify graduate credit.</p>	<p>Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with instructor; not necessarily chronic.</p> <p>More than half the assignments are late, but none are excessively late.</p> <p>Excessively or repeatedly late.</p>	<p>Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection.</p> <p>Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.</p> <p>Few meaningful contributions to class discussions. Little evidence of participation.</p>
C 79 and below	<p>Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or not connection to course content or concepts.</p>	<p>Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.</p>	<p>Excessively or repeatedly late.</p>	<p>Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group.</p>
F	<p>Unacceptable</p>	<p>Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.</p>	<p>Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.</p>	<p>No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.</p>

## Data Sources

Population Research Bureau

<http://www.prb.org/>

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/research/en/>

UNESCO

[http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev\\_en.php?ID=2867\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev_en.php?ID=2867_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov/>

U.S. Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation

<http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_1OB?navid=DATA\\_STATISTICS&parentnav=EDUCATION\\_OUTREACH&navtype=RT](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?navid=DATA_STATISTICS&parentnav=EDUCATION_OUTREACH&navtype=RT)

National Center for Education Statistics – *Condition of Education*

<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

National Household Education Survey 2007 (U.S. Department of Ed)

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009024>

State Education Data (U.S. Dept. of Ed)

<http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/DataStatistics/>