

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development

Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics
EDUC 870.001
Fall 2013
3 Credits

Wednesday 4:30 pm - 7:10 pm
Robinson Hall A243

Professor: Dr. Diana D'Amico
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Office Hours: By Appointment

Office: 2106 West Hall
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Course Description:

- A. Prerequisites/Corequisites:
Admission to PhD in education program, or permission of instructor.
- B. Course description from the university catalog:
Examines public policy decision-making in education at local, state, and national levels, and its impact on education institutions, students, and public. Focuses on government entities' authority over education decision-making, and resolution of competing policy arguments in political arena.

Student Outcomes:

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

1. Understand and explain the responsibilities of various levels of government for pre-K – 16 education.
2. Analyze and describe the impact of social, legal, and political forces on the functioning of education in the United States.
3. Analyze and articulate differing policy arguments and perspectives regarding education.
4. Understand the various research frames and methodologies used to study education policy.

Relationship to Program Goals and Professional Organizations:

There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. However, most, if not all standards for educators expect professionals to be aware of the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context of public education in the United States. This course provides students with that background and understanding.

Nature of Course Delivery:

This course is taught using lectures and discussions.

Texts, Readings and Resources:

Required

Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D.N. (Eds.) (2009). *Handbook of Education Policy Research*. New York: Routledge.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Additional Resources and References

Allington, R. L. (2002). *Big brother and the national reading curriculum: How ideology trumped evidence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Brafman, O. & Brafman, R. (2008). *Sway: The irresistible pull of traditional behavior*. New York: Broadway Books.

Cross, C. (2003). *Political education: National policy comes of age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

DeFattore, J. (1992). *What Johnny shouldn't read: Textbook censorship in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Education Policy Analysis Archives, available on line (<http://epaa.asu.edu>)

Heck, R.A. (2004). *Studying educational and social policy: Theoretical concepts and research methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kingdon, J.W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Ravitch, D. (2003). *The language police*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Sabiter, P.A. (Ed) (2007). *Theories of the political process* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, available on line (<http://www.schev.edu>).

Stone, D. (1997). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. New York: W.W. Norton.

The Constitution of the United States, available on line (<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>)

The Constitution of Virginia, available on line (<http://www.legis.state.va.us/laws/Constitution.html>)

United States Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.ed.gov>)

United States Supreme Court, available on line (<http://www.supremecourtus.gov>)

Virginia State Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.pen.k12.va.us>)

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to:

- Attend all classes. Please provide advance notice, when possible, if you must miss a class. On these occasions, please get notes and any handouts from a colleague.
- Read all assignments prior to class and bring copies (either hard or electronic copy) to class.
- Actively participate in class discussions and activities and to treat one another with respect.
- Submit all assignment on time, unless prior arrangements are made.

Specific assignments:

1. ***State constitution presentation.*** Review and present to the class a brief summary highlighting the education provisions in a state constitution other than Virginia (this is not a written assignment). Presentations will take place on September 11th. (15 points)
2. ***Article summary and analysis.*** Select an article of your choice from a peer reviewed journal. Write a one page summary of the research and the author/s' findings and one page presenting policy implications of the research. Papers are due October 23rd. (10 points)
3. ***Policy event summary and analysis.*** Attend and write a 2-3 page summary and analysis of either a local school board meeting or other policy event (the latter must be approved in advance). If you do not attend a school board meeting, the policy event must be open to the public and one at which you are not a participant. Watching a school board meeting or other event on TV does not count as attending. Papers should be submitted shortly after the event and no later than November 6th (15 points)
4. ***Policy framing proposal.*** Prepare a 1–2 page outline for your final policy framing paper (see #6 below). The proposal will present the focus of your policy problem or issue and describe the policy level at which decisions about this policy are being made. It will also describe the framework/s you are considering for your final paper and why. Proposal is due October 2nd. (5 points)

5. ***Policy framing paper.*** Your policy framing paper will be written as a policy brief for a hypothetical policymaker at the local, state, or federal level. (Be sure to specify which level you are targeting.) The paper will first present the policy problem or issue you have chosen to address, including the nature of the problem and the nature of the debate about the problem. It will then present and defend a policy framework for interpreting evidence about the debate. Based on that framework, it will discuss what types of evidence one would need to make a sound policy recommendation. It may be useful to provide examples of strong or weak evidence as related to your topic, if such examples exist. The paper should draw upon and cite relevant course readings and should be no more than 5 pages: up to 1 page to outline the problem/issue, and the remainder to describe and defend the policy framework and its empirical implications. Papers are due November 6th. (35 points)

6. ***Poster session presentation.*** Read a chapter in the Sykes et al. text not assigned for class (EXCLUDING the commentaries). Prepare a brief summary, review, and critique of the chapter in the form of an academic poster presentation or round table. You will present your poster at a session held throughout the semester. You must provide a handout for everyone who attends and send a copy to the instructor before the session at which you present. Your presentation should last approximately 45 minutes (30 to present and 15 for Q&A). (20 points).

**** Please email assignments to me before the start of class on the date due. ****

Evaluation:

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached to this syllabus. All papers must be typed and formatted according to the *APA Manual of Style, 6th Ed.*

Grading Scale:

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

GMU Policies and Resources for Students:

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

- b. Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].

- c. 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.

- d. 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/>].
- e. 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/>].
- f. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- g. 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/>].

Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles. <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

Course Calendar:

August 28 – Introduction to public policy and education

- Introductions
- Review of syllabus & class schedule
- Introduction to policy studies in education
- Discussion of the U.S. Constitution and authority for K-16 education

September 4 – Federal, state & local authority for education in the U.S.

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 23 (Mead) and Chapter 57 (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon).
- Education policy & the legal system
- Selection of state constitutions
- Selection of chapter and date for poster/round table presentation (*be sure to have backups in mind*)

September 11 – Does the tail wag the dog? (What's the dog and what's the tail?)

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 58 (McDermott), Chapter 59 (Sykes, et al.) Chapter 25 (Jacobsen); *and* Read the constitution for the state you selected and be prepared to give a 10 minute report on the provisions in it.
- ***Presentation of state constitutions***: What is similar and what is different?
- Review and discuss poster assignment and policy paper assignments
- Discussion of state and local role in education policy decisions

September 18 – Challenges of policy analysis and policy research

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 7 (Weimer), Chapter 10 (Orland), & Chapter 22 (Rosen).
- How does or can research inform policy?
- How do you identify advocacy based policy analysis?

September 25 – Economics, political science and education policy theories

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 3 (Hanushek), Chapter 28 (Datnow and Park), & Chapter 4 (McDonnell).

October 2 – Education policy research methodologies

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 11 (Borman), Chapter 14 (Desimone), Chapter 16 (McDonald), & Chapter 13 (Pigott).
- The very political nature of education policy research.
- ***Policy Framing Proposal Due***

October 9 – Education policy and social justice

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 20 (Mickelson), Chapter 51 (Farkas), & Chapter 69 (Jones et al.).
- Does policy have a moral purpose?

October 16 – Policy Research and Research to Inform Policy

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 27 (Honig), Chapter 29 (West), Chapter 36 (Plecki et al.), & Chapter 47 (Reteille et al.).

October 23 – Policy Researcher Panel

- *Article Summary and Analysis Paper Due*
- 4-6 advanced doctoral students present their policy research.

October 30 – Writing Workshop

November 6 – Policy Framing Paper Discussions

- *Deadline for all papers*

November 13 – Roundtable Discussions

November 20 – Roundtable Discussions

November 27 – No Class: Happy Thanksgiving

December 4 – Putting the pieces together

- **Read in Sykes et al.**: Chapter 53 (Plank et al.) & Chapter 67 (Fuller).
- A common theme in educational policy studies is the tension between state autonomy vis a vis the goals and expectations of schools and federal interest and oversight.
 - Plank and Kessler discuss the ebb and flow of state authority in the US and other countries. Fuller argues that we can learn a great deal by studying decentralized reforms. How do these respective points of view help frame and inform policy debates?

Grading Guidelines
EDUC 870 Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics

| Grade/Points | Quality of Work | Completeness of Work | Timeliness | Participation |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| A 96 – 100 A- 92 – 95 | Exceptional quality and insight; a rare & valuable contribution to the field. 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. | 100% complete and error free Accurate & seamless writing; virtually a complete product | 100% on time 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. | Outstanding; facilitates and promotes conversation focused on the topic; questions & comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Good team participant Well above average doctoral student; actively helps move group toward goal. |
| B+ 89 –91 B 80 – 88 | Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity. Evidence of understanding presented but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations. | Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor’s ability to see the product as a whole. Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed. | Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with instructor; not necessarily chronic. More than half the assignments are late, but none are excessively late. | Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection. Doesn’t contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities. |
| C 75 - 79 | Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or not connection to course content or concepts. | Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find. | Excessively or repeatedly late. | Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group. |
| F below 74 | Unacceptable | Difficult to recognize as the assigned task. | Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up. | No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward others |