

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**  
College of Education and Human Development

**School Reform in the U.S.: Politics and Policies**

EDUC 886.001

Fall 2015

3 Credits

**Monday 4:30 pm - 7:10 pm**

**Robinson Hall A249**

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Office Hours: By Appointment

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**Course Description:**

- A. Prerequisites/Corequisites:  
Admission to PhD in education program, or permission of instructor.
  
- B. Catalog Course Description: Explores a broad range of reform initiatives shaping public education and examines the ways politics infuses education policy. Investigates the disciplinary and methodological frameworks scholars have used to study school reform.
  
- C. Expanded Course Description: The nation's public schools exist within and are shaped by a complex nexus of political forces. In various ways, administrators, teachers, parents and even students behave as political actors at the local, state and federal levels in concert with elected officials. Public schools socialize the nation's youth, affirming and imparting lessons about citizenship and power. In today's political milieu, education debates surrounding school choice, curricula, teachers, standards and equity assume center stage. The goal of this course is to expose students to critical themes and debates in American education and position them to consider how stakeholders and forces beyond the school shape policy and resulting reforms.

**Student Outcomes:**

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

1. Demonstrate a detailed and sophisticated understanding of major reform issues in U.S. education.
  
2. Analyze and describe the political and social forces that influence decision making on these issues.
  
3. Understand and explain the intersection of school reform and educational policy at various levels (local, state, federal).
  
4. Analyze existing scholarship around school reform initiatives and develop a new research agenda.

### **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 in a seminar style through discussions and brief lectures.

### **Texts, Readings and Resources:**

*All readings will be made available through the course blackboard page.*

- Arum, R. (2009). Law and Disorder in the Classroom. *Education Next*, 9(4).
- Brown, C. A., & Wright, T. S. (2011). The Rush Toward Universal Public Pre-K: A Media Analysis. *Educational Policy*, 25(1), 115–133. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0895904810386601>
- Buckley, J., & Schneider, M. (2006). Are Charter School Parents More Satisfied with Schools?: Evidence from Washington, DC. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(1), 57–78. Retrieved from <http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ733812&site=ehost-live>
- Clapp, J. M., Nanda, A., & Ross, S. L. (2008). Which school attributes matter? The influence of school district performance and demographic composition on property values. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63(2), 451–466. doi:[10.1016/j.jue.2007.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2007.03.004)
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Fries, M. K. (2001). Sticks, Stones, and Ideology: The Discourse of Reform in Teacher Education. *Educational Researcher*, 30(8), 3–15. doi:[10.3102/0013189X030008003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030008003)
- Cuban, L. (1990). Reforming Again, Again, and Again. *Educational Researcher*, 19(1), 3–13. doi:[10.3102/0013189X019001003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019001003)
- Dhar, P., & Ross, S. L. (2012). School district quality and property values: Examining differences along school district boundaries. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 71(1), 18–25. doi:[10.1016/j.jue.2011.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2011.08.003)
- Diamond, J., & Spillane, J. (2006). High-Stakes Accountability in Urban Elementary Schools: Challenging or Reproducing Inequality? *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1145–1176.
- Dougherty, J., Harrelson, J., Maloney, L., Murphy, D., Smith, R., Snow, M., & Zannoni, D. (2009). School Choice in Suburbia: Test Scores, Race, and Housing Markets. *American Journal of Education*, 115(4), 523–548. doi:[10.1086/599780](https://doi.org/10.1086/599780)
- Fenning, P., & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American Students in Exclusionary Discipline The Role of School Policy. *Urban Education*, 42(6), 536–559.
- Gormley, W. T., & Phillips, D. (2005). The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma: Research Highlights and Policy Implications. *Policy Studies Journal*, 33(1), 65–82. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2005.00092.x>
- Grissom, J. A., & Herrington, C. D. (2012). Struggling for Coherence and Control: the New Politics of Intergovernmental Relations in Education. *Educational Policy*, 26(1), 3–14. doi:[10.1177/0895904811428976](https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811428976)
- Harris, D., & Sass, T. (2009). What Makes for a Good Teacher and Who Can Tell? CALDER, The Urban Institute.

- Kane, T., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2008). What does certification tell us about teacher effectiveness? Evidence from New York City. *Economics of Education Review*, 27, 615–631.
- Koyama, J. P. (2012). Making Failure Matter Enacting No Child Left Behind’s Standards, Accountabilities, and Classifications. *Educational Policy*, 26(6), 870–891. doi:[10.1177/0895904811417592](https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811417592)
- Losen, D., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project.
- Payne, C., & Kaba, M. (2007). So Much Reform, So Little Change: Building-Level Obstacles to School Reform. *Social Policy*, (Spring/Summer), 30–37.
- Polikoff, M. S., Porter, A. C., & Smithson, J. (2011). How Well Aligned Are State Assessments of Student Achievement With State Content Standards? *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(4), 965–995. doi:[10.3102/0002831211410684](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211410684)
- Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. (2011). Common Core Standards The New U.S. Intended Curriculum. *Educational Researcher*, 40(3), 103–116. doi:[10.3102/0013189X11405038](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11405038)
- Rouse, C. E. (1998). Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement: An Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 113(2), 553–602. doi:[10.1162/003355398555685](https://doi.org/10.1162/003355398555685)
- Superfine, B. M., Gottlieb, J. J., & Smylie, M. A. (2012). The Expanding Federal Role in Teacher Workforce Policy. *Educational Policy*, 26(1), 58–78. doi:[10.1177/0895904811435722](https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811435722)
- Supovitz, J. (2009). Can high stakes testing leverage educational improvement? Prospects from the last decade of testing and accountability reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10(2-3), 211–227. doi:[10.1007/s10833-009-9105-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-009-9105-2)
- Tyack, D. (1991). Public School Reform: Policy Talk and Institutional Practice. *American Journal of Education*, 100(1), 1–19. doi:[10.2307/1085650](https://doi.org/10.2307/1085650)
- Weihner, G. R., & Tedin, K. L. (2002). Does choice lead to racially distinctive schools? Charter schools and household preferences. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 21(1), 79–92. doi:[10.1002/pam.1041](https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.1041)
- Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2003). Big City Mayors and School Governance Reform: The Case of School District Takeover. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 78(1), 5–32. doi:[10.1207/S15327930PJE7801\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930PJE7801_2)
- York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What Do We Know About Teacher Leadership? Findings From Two Decades of Scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255–316. doi:[10.3102/00346543074003255](https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074003255)

### **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. **Topic Proposal and Bibliography:** In a brief essay (3-4 pages, not including bibliography), identify a reform initiative or program that will form the foundation of your final paper. Offer a detailed description of the reform. Where does it play out? Who is affected by it? What problem is it attempting to solve or treat? What does it do? Where does this reform come from? What are the relevant policies? As you close your essay, propose questions for further inquiry: what do you want to know more about? Include a list of at least 10 relevant scholarly, peer reviewed sources that will inform your inquiry. **(20pts)**
2. **Annotated Bibliography:** Provide brief annotations highlighting argument and contributions for at least 10 scholarly, peer reviewed sources that pertain to your selected reform. In addition, provide a brief discussion (no more than 1 page) of how you see the literature fitting together. **(10pts)**
3. **Reading Response Essay:** Select a group of readings from the syllabus and write a brief essay (5-6 pages) that explores the ways this literature fits together. While some summary may be important, you should devote your attention to an analysis of the texts. Craft an argument about how the articles fit together, why they matter and what can be learned. Essays are due the day they are assigned on the syllabus. Late assignments will not be accepted. **(25pts)**
4. **Final Paper:** In an 18-20 page essay, examine the state of knowledge pertaining to an educational reform of your choice and propose a research project. Begin by offering an examination of a particular educational reform. Next, offer a detailed review of the relevant literature examining key themes and arguments. Your task is not to summarize existing research but to analyze it. Finally, design a research project that simultaneously builds off of and contributes to the relevant research. Discuss the significance of your proposed research. Please refer to the final page of this syllabus for a grading rubric. **(35pts)**
5. **Paper Presentation:** Students will deliver a presentation of their final papers to the class that highlights the specific educational reform in question, the state of pertinent research, and the proposed research project. **(10pts)**

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

**Evaluation:**

All papers must be typed and formatted according to the *APA Manual of Style, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed.*

**Grading Scale:**

A = 96-100

A- = 92-95

B+ = 89-91

B = 80-88

C = 75-79

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/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].
- 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 31 – Course Introduction**

#### **September 14 – School Reform: New Experiments or More of the Same?**

- Cuban, “Reforming Again, Again and Again”
- Payne and Kaba, “So Much Reform, So Little Change: Building-Level Obstacles to School Reform”
- Tyack, “Public School Reform: Policy Talk and Institutional Practice”

#### **September 21 – School Control and Governance**

- Grissom and Herrington, “Struggling for Coherence and Control: the New Politics of Intergovernmental Relations in Education”
- Timar, “The ‘New Accountability’ and School Governance in California”
- Wong and Shen, “Big City Mayors and School Governance Reform: The Case of School District Takeover”

#### **September 28 – Discussion of Student Topics**

- **Topic Proposal and Bibliography Due**
- Discussion of annotated bibliographies

#### **October 5 – Zoning: Who Goes to School Where (and who decides)?**

- Clapp et al., “Which School Attributes Matter? The Influence of School District Performance and Demographic Composition on Property Values”
- Dhar and Ross, “School District Quality and Property Values: Examining Differences along School District Boundaries”
- Dougherty et al., “School Choice in Suburbia: Test Scores, Race, and Housing Markets”

#### **October 13\* – Accountability, Achievement and Equity: NCLB and Testing**

- Diamond and Spillane, “High Stakes Accountability in Urban Elementary Schools: Challenging or Reproducing Inequality?”
- Koyama, “Making Failure Matter: Enacting No Child Left Behind’s Standards, Accountabilities, and Classifications”
- Supovitz, “Can High Stakes Testing Leverage Educational Improvement? Prospects from the Last Decade of Testing and Accountability Reform”

#### **October 19 – Parental Choice: Charter Schools and Voucher Programs**

- Buckley and Schneider, “Are Charter School Parents More Satisfied with Schools? Evidence from Washington, DC”
- Rouse, “Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement: An Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program”
- Weiher and Tedin, “Does Choice Lead to Racially Distinctive Schools? Charter Schools and Household Preferences”

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\* Class meets on Tuesday.

### **October 26 – Curricular Reform: The Common Core and Standardization**

- **Annotated Bibliography Due**
- In-Class Discussion/Exercise: Finding your voice in the literature
- Polikoff et al., “How Well Aligned are State Assessments of Student Achievement with State Content Standards?”
- Porter et al., “Common Core Standards: The New U.S. Intended Curriculum”

### **November 2 – School Discipline**

- Arum, “Law and Disorder in the Classroom”
- Fenning and Rose, “Overrepresentation of African American Students in Exclusionary Discipline: The Role of School Policy”
- Losen and Gillespie, “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School”

### **November 9 – Teachers: Certification and Evaluation**

- Cochran-Smith and Fries, “Sticks, Stones, and Ideology: The Discourse of Reform in Teacher Education”
- Superfine et al., “The Expanding Federal Role in Teacher Workforce Policy”
- Kane, “What does Certification Tell us about Teacher Effectiveness? Evidence from New York City,” *Economics of Education Review*.
- Harris and Sass, *What Makes for a Good Teacher and Who Can Tell?*

### **November 16 – The Expansion of Pre-K**

- Gormley and Phillips, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma”
- “Who Goes to Pre-School and Why Does it Matter?”  
[<http://www.nieer.org/resources/factsheets/18.pdf>]
- Brown, “The Rush Toward Universal Public Pre-K”

### **November 23 – Writing Workshop**

### **November 30 – Student Presentations**

### **December 7 – Student Presentations and Course Wrap-up**

- **Final Papers Due**

### Rubric: Final Essay

<i>Criteria</i>	<b>Outstanding (A)</b>	<b>Competent (B)</b>	<b>Minimal (C)</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (F)</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Author provides a clear overview of what the essay will accomplish and the themes to be examined. The author offers a specific thesis statement.	Author provides an overview of what the essay will examine. However, it is unclear why the author wishes to examine this topic or what he/she hopes to learn. The author offers a general thesis statement.	The author provides a general overview of the essay; however, the introduction lacks logic and clarity. The thesis statement is vague.	The author does not provide an overview of the essay. The thesis statement is absent.
<b>Presentation of Reform Initiative</b>	The author provides a clear and thorough examination of a specific educational reform. The author calls attention to where the reform plays out, who is involved, implementation issue in addition to other factors. The author clearly identifies the relevant issues or debates that surround this reform and related policies.	The author provides an examination of an educational reform, but offers little specific detail.	The author offers a vague exploration of a reform issue.	The author does not offer an exploration of an educational reform.
<b>Examination and Analysis of Existing Scholarship</b>	The author provides a logical and specific exploration of the relevant research highlighting methodologies and the state of knowledge. Beyond summarizing articles, the author offers an analysis of this body of literature. The author makes use of at least 10 scholarly, peer-reviewed sources (original research).	The author provides a summary of existing scholarship, but offers little analysis. The author offers a general examination of the state of knowledge. The author references at least 10 sources.	The author offers a general overview of the existing scholarship but speaks in vague terms.	The author offers an inaccurate overview of the existing scholarship, or an overview of the existing scholarship is absent.
<b>Research Agenda: Rationale and Design</b>	The author provides a clear rationale for a research agenda that emerges from the examination of existing scholarship. The author proposes a clear research study and highlights site selection, evidence, methodology and framing questions. The research study design is a logical outgrowth of the preceding sections of the paper.	The author calls for a research agenda, but precisely how it stems from existing scholarship is unclear. The author offers clear and specific details of the proposed project.	The author offers a general call for more research, but it is unclear how it pertains to relevant scholarship. The details of the proposed research are vague.	The author does not offer a specific call for more research that stems from existing scholarship. The author does not propose a research design.

<b>Conclusions and Implications</b>	The author offers a clear and compelling statement of what this proposed research study would reveal that current scholars do not yet know or have yet to consider.	The author offers a general statement of how the proposed research project would engage and contribute to existing scholarship.	The author offers a vague statement of the proposed study's contributions to existing scholarship.	The author does not discuss the ways the proposed research project would contribute to existing scholarship.
<b>Writing</b>	The writing is clear, error-free, and adheres to proper APA guidelines.			The writing is sloppy and/or grammatically incorrect. The author does not adhere to APA guidelines.