

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

Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics  
EDUC 870.001  
Spring 2016  
3 Credits

Thursday 4:30-7:10pm  
Thompson L028

Professor: Dr. Diana D'Amico  
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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. 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.

**Course Learning 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.

DelFattore, 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). (15 points)
2. ***Reading Lead.*** Once during the semester, students will pair up to lead a discussion of the assigned chapters. Students may decide to prepare their presentations together or to divide the readings on a particular evening and deal with them separately. In all, you will have no more than 40 minutes to offer an overview of the key points of the readings and the ways the various texts connect to one another, and also to raise questions for discussion. In addition to your presentation, you will provide a one page handout for the class that synthesizes the key points. You will also prepare a 3-5 page essay based on the readings. (10 points)
3. ***Event Summary and Analysis***
  - a. **Option A: 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. (15points)
  - b. **Option B: AERA panel summary and analysis.** Attending and participating in academic conferences is part and parcel of being an education researcher. This

year, the AERA conference is in Washington D.C. from April 8-12, 2016 (<http://www.aera.net/EventsMeetings/tabid/10063/Default.aspx>).

You may attend a panel that pertains to your own academic interests. In 2-3 pages, offer a summary and analysis of the panel, highlighting the research presented. What are the policy implications of this research? How might the findings be translated so that they are meaningful and usable for policymakers at various levels? In what ways did theoretical frameworks or disciplinary perspectives shape the research and/or the author's analysis? (15 points)

4. ***Policy framing proposal.*** Prepare a 1–2 page overview of your final policy framing paper (see #5 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. (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 discuss the problem/issue, and the remainder to describe and defend the policy framework and its empirical implications. (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 roundtable discussion. You must provide a handout for everyone who attends and send a copy to the instructor before the session at which you present. Presentations will take place during the last three classes of the semester. (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, 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/honor-code/>].
- 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:**

### **January 25 – 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
- Select Reading Lead dates.

### **February 1 – 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*)

### **February 8 – 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

### **February 15 – 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?

### **February 22 – Economics, political science and education policy theories**

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

### **February 29 – 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***

### **March 14 – 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?

### **March 21 – Work Night**

**March 28 – 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.).

**April 3 – Policy Researcher Panel and Writing Workshop**

- *Bring a draft of your policy framing paper to class.*
- 4-6 advanced doctoral students present their policy research.

**April 11 – AERA**

- **No class; attend conference.**

**April 18 – Policy Framing Paper Discussions**

- *AERA Event Summary and Analysis Due*

**April 25 – Roundtable Discussions**

**May 2 – Roundtable Discussions and Course Wrap-Up**

- *Policy Framing Paper Due*

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 no 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