

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development

Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics
EDUC 870.A02
Summer 2017
3 Credits

Monday/Wednesday 7:20-9:35
Aquia Building 219
Tuesday/Thursday
Online

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.

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. *Late work will be penalized by 2pts/day, unless prior arrangements are made.*

Specific assignments:

1. ***Policy Framing Proposal.*** Prepare a 1–2 page overview of your final policy framing paper (see below). The proposal will present the focus of the education policy you intend to examine in the final essay and describe the policy level at which decisions about this policy are being made. The paper will also highlight the essential tension or problem you wish to engage. (10 points)
2. ***State Constitution Presentation.*** Review and present to the class a brief summary highlighting the education provisions in a state constitution other than Virginia. Students will share presentations in an online format. (5 points)
3. ***Reading Lead.*** During the semester, each student will lead a discussion of a chapter of his/her choosing from the Sykes *Handbook* (excluding those assigned on the syllabus and commentary essays) in an online session. We will select chapters and dates during the first course session. In presentation videos of no more than 20 minutes (to be posted on the course Blackboard page), students will begin with a brief overview of the selected reading, highlighting key points and devote the majority of the presentation to a discussion of the broader implications of the reading. Students might consider how the selected topic might inform future research on a policy issue or how other scholars have engaged with the issue. In addition to the presentation, students will prepare a 1-page handout (to be posted online) highlighting the key elements of the reading AND pose 1

discussion question for classmates to consider on the online discussion board. The presenting student will be responsible for reading classmates' comments and responding to them. (20 points)

4. **Reading Response Essay.** Once during the semester (excluding days when students present readings), students will write a 5-7 page response essay to a group of assigned readings of their choice. Successful essays will synthesize the assigned readings and put them into conversation. This assignment does NOT call on students to summarize the readings but to offer an analysis of them and to consider the broader implications of the readings, considered as a whole. Essays are due *before* the class session in which the readings will be discussed. (20 points)
5. **Final Policy Framing Paper.** Your policy framing paper will be written as a call for research addressed to 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 or disciplinary perspective 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 and explore a methodological approach to examine the core policy problem. 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 10 pages: up to 1 page to discuss the problem/issue, and the remainder to describe and defend the policy framework and its empirical implications. (25 points)
6. **Conference-Style Presentations.** Students will deliver a 15-minute conference-style presentation of their final papers. (10 points).
7. **On-Line Participation and Contributions.** Several times over the course of the semester, class will be held in a hybrid format on-line. The success of these sessions will depend on your active participation. Though the various sessions will vary, in each case you will be asked to respond to different prompts, primary sources, video lectures, and/or readings. At times, you will also present brief presentations. I expect students to engage with peers in the on-line setting, posing questions, answers and responding to one another. We will discuss these sessions in more detail during our first session and throughout the semester. (10 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
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). Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor [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/>].
- h. Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursesupport.gmu.edu/>.
- i. The Student Support & Advocacy Center staff helps students develop and maintain healthy lifestyles through confidential one-on-one support as well as through interactive programs and resources. Some of the topics they address are healthy relationships, stress management, nutrition, sexual assault, drug and alcohol use, and sexual health (see <http://ssac.gmu.edu/>). Students in need of these services may contact the office by phone at 703-993-3686. Concerned students, faculty and staff may also make a referral to express concern for the safety or well-being of a Mason student or the community by going to <http://ssac.gmu.edu/make-a-referral/>.

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:

Date/Location	Topic	Readings/Assignments
M. 5/22 (campus)	Course Introduction	
T. 5/23 (online)	Education Policy Research and Education Policy Advocacy: Relationships and Challenges	Chapter 7: Weimer, “Making Educational Research more Policy-Analytic.” Chapter 10: Orland, “Separate Orbits: The Distinctive Worlds of Educational Research and Policymaking.”
W. 5/24 (campus)	The Federal Government and Role of Law in Local Education Policy	Chapter 23: Mead, “The Role of Law in Educational Policy Formation, Implementation, and Research.” Chapter 57: Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, “New Approaches to Understanding Federal Involvement in Education.”
Th. 5/25 (online)	Policy Actors: States, Districts and the Public	<i>State Constitution Presentations</i> Chapter 58: McDermott, “The Expansion of State Policy Research.” Chapter 59: Sykes, O’Day & Ford, “The District Role in Instructional Improvement.” Chapter 25: Jacobson, “The Voice of the People in Education Policy.”
T. 5/30 (online)	Student Presentation of Chapters	Readings TBD
W. 5/31 (campus)	Education Policy Theories	Chapter 22: Rosen, “Rhetoric and Symbolic Action.” Chapter 21: Stovall, “Race(ing), Class(ing), and Gender(ing) Our Work: Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, Epistemology, and New Directions in Educational Policy Research Chapter 28: Datnow and Park, “Conceptualizing Policy Implementation: Large Scale Reform in an Era of Complexity.”

Th. 6/1 (online)	Discussion of Policy Proposals	<i>Policy Proposals Due</i>
M. 6/5 (campus)	Education Policy and the Social Sciences, I	<p>Chapter 1: Vinovskis, “Historians and Educational Policy Research in the United States.”</p> <p>Chapter 5: Lauen and Tyson, “Perspectives from the Disciplines: Sociological Contributions to Education Policy Research and Debates.”</p> <p>Chapter 6: Dixon, Borman and Cotner, “Current Approaches to Research in Anthropology and Education.”</p>
T. 6/6 (online)	Student Presentation of Chapters	Readings TBD
W. 6/7 (campus)	Education Policy and the Social Sciences, II	<p>Chapter 3: Hanushek, “The Economic Value of Education and Cognitive Skills.”</p> <p>Chapter 4: McDonnell, “A Political Science Perspective on Education Policy Analysis.”</p>
Th. 6/8 (online)	Student Presentation of Chapters	Readings TBD
M. 6/12 (campus)	Education Policy and Social Justice	<p>Chapter 20: Mickelson, “Race, Gender, and Education.”</p> <p>Chapter 51: Farkas, “Closing Achievement Gaps.”</p> <p>Chapter 69: Jones and Schneider, “Social Stratification and Educational Opportunity.”</p>
T. 6/13 (online)	Student Presentation of Chapters	Readings TBD
W. 6/14 (campus)	Policy Research: Methodological Approaches and the Political Nature of Policy Scholarship	<p>Chapter 11: Borman, “The Use of Randomized Trials to Inform Educational Policy.”</p> <p>Chapter 14: Desimone, “Complementary Methods for Policy Research.”</p>

		Chapter 26: Lindle, “Assessment Policy and the Politics of Information.”
Th. 6/15 (tbd)	Individual Meetings	
M. 6/19 (campus)	Writing Workshop	<i>Bring a draft of final essay to class</i>
T. 6/20 (online)	Work-night	
W. 6/21 (campus)	Presentations	<i>Final Essays Due</i>

Rubric: Final Policy Framing Paper

<i>Criteria</i>	Outstanding	Competent	Minimal	Unsatisfactory
Introduction & Presentation of Policy Problem	The author provides a clear and succinct examination of a specific policy issue pertaining to education and/or schooling. The author calls attention to where the policy plays out, who is involved, implementation issue and other factors. The author clearly identifies the relevant issues or debates that surround this policy. The author clearly identifies the policymaker audience.	The author provides an examination of a policy issue pertaining to some aspect of education, but offers little specific detail.	The author offers a vague exploration of a policy issue.	The author does not offer an exploration of a policy issue that pertains to education.
Theoretical Framework/Disciplinary Perspective	The author provides a clear and succinct overview of a specific theoretical framework and/or disciplinary perspective. The author discusses how other scholars have used the specified theory or disciplinary vantage point to study other policy issues. The author makes a case for how the specified framework of disciplinary perspective could inform an examination of the core policy problem. The author discusses other theories or approaches that could be applied and makes a case for the importance of the one(s) selected.	The author provides an overview of a theoretical framework or disciplinary perspective and discusses how it might pertain to the core policy issue.	The author provides an overview of a theoretical framework or disciplinary perspective but its connection to the core policy problem is unclear.	The author does not offer an overview of a framework or perspective.
Methodological Approach to Studying Education Policy	The author outlines a specific and detailed methodological approach to studying the core policy issue that is clearly related to the selected theoretical framework or disciplinary perspective. The author discusses topics including appropriate	The author outlines a methodological approach that is connected to the theoretical perspective/disciplinary framework.	The author outlines a methodological approach but leaves unexamined how it pertains to the central theory or disciplinary perspective.	The author does not discuss a methodological approach.

	types of evidence, site selection, and modes of analysis.			
Policy Implications of Proposed Inquiry	The author offers a clear and compelling statement of the practical and scholarly implications of the proposed work. In addition, the author provides a clear and specific discussion of the potential policy outcomes of such research.	The author offers a general statement of how the proposed research project would engage and contribute to existing scholarship. The author offers general policy outcomes.	The author offers a vague statement of the proposed study's contributions to existing scholarship. The author offers a vague discussion of the ways in which such research might inform policy.	The author does not discuss the ways the proposed research project would contribute to existing scholarship. The author does not discuss how such research might inform policy.
Writing	The essay is 10 pages long. The writing is clear, error-free, and adheres to proper APA guidelines.			The essay disregards the length requirement. The writing is sloppy and/or grammatically incorrect. The author does not use correct proper APA guidelines.