

**George Mason University**  
**College of Education and Human Development**

Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics  
EDUC 870.001  
Spring 2019  
3 Credits

Monday 4:30-7:10pm  
David King Jr. Hall 2054

**Faculty**

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**Prerequisites/Corequisites**

Admission to PhD in education program, or permission of instructor

**University Catalog Course Description**

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 Overview**

This course includes exposure to various theories used to study education policy and the methods used for this scholarship and analysis.

**Course Delivery Method**

This course will be delivered using a lecture format.

**Learner Outcomes or Objectives**

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

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 functions 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.

## **Professional Standards**

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.

Upon completion of this course, students will have met the following professional standards:  
Not Applicable

## **Required Texts**

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

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

## ***Additional Resources and References***

Arlington, 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.

DeFatorre, 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* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's school*. New York: Harper Collins.

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

Sabiter, P. A., (2007). *Theories of the political process* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boulder, C): Westview Press.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, available online (<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 Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

- **Assignments and/or Examinations**

1. *State constitution presentation*. Review and present to the class a brief summary highlighting the education provision in a state constitution other than Virginia (this is not a written assignment). (10 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 an evening and deal with them separately. In all, you will have 40 minutes to offer an overview of the key points of the readings, the ways the various texts connect to one another, and raise questions for discussion. In addition to your presentation, you will provide a 1-page handout for the class that synthesizes the key points, as well as prepare a 3-5-page essay based on the readings. (20 points).

3. *Policy framing proposal.* Prepare a 1-2-page overview of your policy framing paper (see below). The proposal will present the focus of the education policy you intend to examine in the essay and describe the policy level at which decisions about this policy are made. The paper will also highlight the essential tension or problem you wish to engage. (5 points).
4. *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 in which you are not a participant. Watching a school board meeting or other event on TV does not count as attending. (15 points).
5. *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 what level you are targeting). The paper will first present the policy problem or issues you have chosen to address, including the nature of the problem and 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 remaining pages to describe and defend the policy framework and the empirical implications. (30 points).
6. *Poster session presentation.* Read a chapter in Sykes, et al. not assigned for class (excluding commentaries) and prepare a brief summary, review, and critique of the chapter in the form of an academic posted presentation or roundtable discussion. You must provide a handout for everyone 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).

- **Other Requirements**

Students are expected to:

- Attend all classes and provide advance notice, if 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 electronic or hard copy) to class.
- Actively participate in discussions of the readings and treat one another with respect.
- Submit all assignments on time unless prior arrangements are made. Late work will be penalized by 2pts/day, unless prior arrangements are made.

- **Grading**

A grading 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 = 79-75

F = 74 and below

## Professional Dispositions

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>

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

## Class Schedule

January 28 – Introduction to public policy and education

- Introductions
- Review of syllabus and 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 4 – Federal, state, and local authority for education in the U.S.

- Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 23 (Mead) and Chapter 57 (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon).
- Education policy and the legal system.
- Overview of Federal policy history in K-12 education.
- Select state constitutions.
- Select chapter for reading lead and date for poster/roundtable presentation.

February 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?
- Discussion of state and local role in education policy decisions.
- Review and discuss policy paper assignment.

February 18 – Challenges of policy analysis and policy research

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

February 25 – Economics, political science, and education policy theories

- Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 3 (Hanushek), Chapter 28 (Datnow and Park), Chapter 4 (McDonnell).
- What are the strengths and limitations of using economic or political science frames?

March 4 – Education policy research methodologies

- Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 11 (Borman), Chapter 14 (Desimone), Chapter 16 (McDonald), and Chapter 13 (Pigott).
- The political nature of education policy research.
- *Policy framing proposal due.*

March 11 – Spring Break. No Class.

March 18 – Education policy and social justice

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

March 25 – Policy research and research to inform policy

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

April 1 – Policy researcher panel and writing workshop

- *Bring a draft of your policy framing paper to class.*
- Advanced doctoral students may present their policy research.

April 8 – History, sociology, anthropology, and education policy theories

- Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 1 (Vinovskis), Chapter 5 (Lauren & Tyson), and Chapter 6 (Dixon, et al.).

April 15– Tensions in education reform and the policy debate

- Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 53 (Plank, et. al.) and Chapter 67 (Fuller), and Chapter 70 (Lee, et al.).

April 22 – Poster/Roundtable session 1

- *Policy framing paper due*

April 29 – Poster/Roundtable session 2

May 6 – Poster/Roundtable session 3 and course wrap up

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

## Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and 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/>.

## GMU Policies and Resources for Students

### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/> ).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason 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 with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to [tk20help@gmu.edu](mailto: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/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

**For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/> .**

## Grading Rubric

### EDUC 870 Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics

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