

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
School of Education
Education Policy

EDPO 303-001—Politics of American Education
3 Credits, Fall 2019
Mondays 7:20 p.m., Planetary Hall 127, Fairfax Campus

Faculty

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Prerequisites/Corequisites

None

University Catalog Course Description

Focus on the study of the American political system. Designed for students studying the American political system and students interested in careers in education. Explores how interactions between various levels and branches of government affect education.

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to the historical, social, and cultural influences that have shaped political decisions affecting education in the United States. It considers the key institutions (i.e., branches of government, state education agencies, and school districts) and actors (i.e., elected and appointed officials, unions, philanthropists, businesses, communities, parents, and students) that influence education systems. Course content covers historical conflicts over education governance and policies, and examines the challenges facing present-day reform efforts.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered using both lecture and seminar formats, including small group discussions and multimedia presentations.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

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

- understand and explain the connections between education and the political process in the United States;
- understand and explain how authority for education is dispersed among local, state, and federal governments;
- understand and discuss the different and competing ideologies that inform education policy decisions;
- recognize the influence of institutions outside education in the formation and implementation of education policy and reform efforts; and,
- think critically and write about public education issues.

Professional Standards

Not Applicable

Required Texts

The following text is available for purchase through the GMU bookstore or online stores.

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016). *Foundations of Education, 13th Edition*. Boston, MA: Cengage.

All other readings will be available as links or PDFs on the course website on Blackboard. As current events are a significant part of this course and education policy is in constant motion, other articles may be assigned throughout the semester.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time, via Blackboard, in the manner outlined by the instructor. Late submissions will be penalized unless prior arrangements are made with the professor.

All assignments must be completed in APA format.

- **Class Participation**
Students are expected to attend every class and actively engage all discussions in a constructive manner. This includes reading the required material before class and participating in discussions, debates, and teacher inquiries during class. [**10 points**]
- **Weekly Reflection**
Students are required to submit a reflection on readings for the current week by 2:00 p.m. on the day of class. Each reflection must be between 500-700 words in length and include: a brief summary (a paragraph) of the readings; the student's overall impression of the

content—including specific points of agreement and/or disagreement that are accompanied by thoughtful explanations; questions and ideas to consider; and an explanation of how the week’s readings connect to prior readings. **[10 points]**

- **Current Issues Oral Presentation**

Students are expected to follow coverage of education issues in newspapers (e.g. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*) and education-specific news sources (e.g. *Education Week*, and the growing education blogosphere). Each student will present an article related to an educational issue that aligns with the content of this course. Students will have 10 minutes to present the main points of the article, state why the issue is important, relate the article to course content, consider policy implications, and answer questions from the class. Presenters should provide a printed copy of the article for each student and the professor on the day of the presentation. **[10 points]**

- **Midterm Examination**

The midterm examination will consist of content from the textbook, assigned readings, and class lectures. It will include material that was covered from the beginning of the semester to the date of the exam. The examination will include multiple choice, short answer, and brief essay questions. **[20 points]**

- **School Board Summary**

Students will attend a local school board meeting during the semester and submit a 500-word summary of the meeting events including the issues discussed, key statements and perspectives of participants, policy decisions made at the meeting, and the student’s overall thoughts and reactions. Students must also present an original copy of the meeting agenda. This assignment is due by December 2. **[10 points]**

- **Policy Memo**

Students will complete one policy memo. Potential prompts and topic ideas will be presented during class throughout the semester. The purpose of the memo is to help students practice the analytical skills that will be necessary to write the policy analysis paper. The memo should be approximately 2 pages in length. **[10 points]**

- **Policy Analysis Paper and Presentation**

Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources. In this assignment, students will select a contemporary education issue and analyze its development through the policy process. The paper should: discuss the policy issue and its background; identify the key policy actors and interest groups, and their respective positions and perspectives; describe the development and current status of the issue; and provide a nuanced analysis of its political complexity. The paper must be a minimum of 4,500 words and no more than 5,000 words (excluding references).

During the planning phase, students will develop a proposal (250 words) outlining the topic of the paper and why the topic is relevant to both the student and education policy at-large. The topic must be approved by the instructor to proceed. **[30 points]**

- **Other Requirements**

Attendance at every class is expected. More than one absence, regardless of reason, will impact the final grade in a manner to be determined by the instructor. More than two absences will impact the final grade significantly.

Phone/computer/tablet use is not allowed during class.

• **Grading**

Grade/Pts.	Quality of Work	Completeness	Timeliness	Participation
A 94-100	Exceptional insight; rare and valuable contributions.	Accurate and seamless; 100% complete and error free in terms of structure and required components.	100% on time.	Questions and comments reveal thoughtfulness; consistent class engagement; a class leader.
A- 90-93	Demonstrates evidence of significant reflection and evaluation; clear and convincing writing; work is relatively free of grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.	Accurate and seamless; almost complete except for one minor shortcoming or omission.	Nearly or always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations.	Actively engaged; provides on-target and thoughtful responses; good team participant.
B+ 87-89	Convincingly on target; demonstrates evidence of understanding and application; clear and concise writing; very few distracting grammatical, spelling, or citation errors	Relatively accurate, not complete; includes minor shortcomings; missing more than one component.	Almost always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations.	Actively engaged in moving the group toward goal; engaged all the time.
B 83-86	Provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity.	Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the professor's ability to see the cohesion of the product.	Assignments late more than once or without adequate explanation; not necessarily chronic.	Reliable and steady participant; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection; engaged most of the time.

C+ 78-82	Evidence of understanding present 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.	Multiple assignments are late; no assignments are excessively late.	Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection; participates tangentially in group activities.
C 71-77	Unsophisticated submissions; assignments show little or no connection to course content or concepts.	Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.	Several missed deadlines or excessively late or missing work and/or poor attendance	Weak or minimal participation in class discussions or group work; passive; sometimes sidetracks group because of lack of preparedness.
D 66-70	Assignments do not meet minimum parameters for evidence or reflection.	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task due to lack of completion.	Several missed deadlines and assignments and/or poor attendance.	Minimum participation; often not engaged in class discussions or group work; often sidetracks group due to lack of understanding or preparedness.
F 65 or below	Unacceptable quality of work.	Incomplete work to the extent that it is unrecognizable as the assigned task.	Often misses deadlines and assignments; and/or poor attendance.	No constructive participation; destructive; intolerant of other points of view.

Professional Dispositions

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

Class Schedule

This schedule is subject to change without advance notice to students. Please check your GMU email and/or Blackboard daily for possible changes.

- August 26: **Introduction and Course Overview**
Review syllabus, course description, course goals, and textbook. Schedule presentations.

Examine current controversies at the intersection of politics and education.
- September 2: **NO CLASS: LABOR DAY**
- September 9: **History, Purpose and Underlying Philosophies of American Education**
Explore prominent educational movements and major events in the development of the American educational system, as well as major philosophies and theories of education

Readings:
Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapters 3, 4, & 5

Kaestle, C. (1983). *Pillars of the republic: Common schools and the American society*, pp. 3-29. Hill and Wang.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.
- September 16: **Philosophies of Education**
Examine major philosophies and theories of education.

Readings:
Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 6

Labaree, D.F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Education Research Journal*, 34 (1), p. 39-81.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.
- September 23: **Policy Structures: Local and State Levels**
Learn the role of local school boards and central administrative offices. Consider provisions for education in state constitutions. Review state responsibilities and activities related to education.

Readings:
Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 7

Aspen Institute (2015). Roles and responsibilities of the State Education Agency.

Camera, L. (2017, October 11). Big progress, small gains: A decade of mayoral control over D.C. schools. US News & World Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2017-10-11/big-progress-small-ginas-a-decade-of-mayoral-control-of-dc-public-schools>

View the documentary “Building the Machine”. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/97016931>

SPECIAL GUEST: Niki T. Hazel, Director, Department of Elementary Curriculum and District-wide Programs, Montgomery County Public Schools

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

September 30

Policy Structures: Federal Levels

Discuss the Constitution and provisions that relate to the education system. What is the role of the Congress in creating education policy? What is the role of the executive branch?

Readings:

Cross, C. T. (2015). The shaping of federal education policy over time. *The Progress of Education Reform*, Volume 16, Number 2. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Manna, P. (2007). Patterns of federal interest in education (Chapter 3) and Patterns of federal involvement in education (Chapter 4). In *School's in: Federalism and the national education agenda*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

SPECIAL GUEST: To Be Announced

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

October 7

Education and the Courts

Discuss the role of the courts, particularly the U.S. Supreme Court, in influencing K-12 and higher education policy. What are some of the important decisions of the Court and how have they influenced education policy?

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 9

Ten Supreme Court Cases About Education (weblink on Blackboard)

Fultz, M. (2004). The displacement of Black educators post-Brown: An overview and analysis. *History of Education Quarterly*, 44(1), 11-45.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

October 15: **CLASS MEETS ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK: ONLINE SESSION**
Please see Blackboard for detailed instructions.
Policy Memo is due **October 15** by 11:59 p.m.

October 21 **Education Funding and School Finance**
Discuss how education is funded in the United States.

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 8

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

October 28 **MIDTERM EXAM**

Social Influences on Education

Examine the influence of family, peers, teachers, and other contextual factors on the education of individual students.

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 10

Lynch, A., Lerner, R., & Leventhal, T. (2013). Adolescent academic achievement and school engagement: An examination of the role of school-wide peer culture. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(1), 6-19.

SPECIAL GUEST: Ann Dolin, Author, Speaker, and Founder of Educational Connections, Inc.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

November 4 **Education of Various Groups**
Discuss issues of social class and race/ethnicity and how they influence conversations on school achievement.

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 11

Romans, A. (2013, December 9). Americans who say “college isn’t for

everyone” never mean their own kids. Quartz. Retrieved from:
<http://qz.com/155397/americans-who-say-college-isnt-for-everyone-never-mean-their-own-kids/>.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

November 11

Educational Opportunity

Engage in nuanced discussion about the ‘Achievement Gap’, *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, *Race to the Top*, *Common Core*, *Every Student Succeeds Act*, and other efforts to purportedly level the education playing field.

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 12

Davidson, E., Reback, R., Rockoff, J., & Schwartz, H. L. (2015). Fifty ways to leave a child behind: Idiosyncrasies and discrepancies in states’ implementation of NCLB. *Educational Researcher*, 44(6), 347-358.

Klein, Alison. (2016, March 31). The Every Student Succeeds Act: An ESSA overview. *Education Week*.

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

November 18

Education Reform in America

Explore and consider major reform efforts over the past two decades.

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016); Chapter 16

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

November 25

Purposes of Education

How do views on the purpose of education affect the goals that are set? Have goals for American education changed over the past few centuries? How do different countries and cultures vary in their views of the purpose of education?

Readings:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016), Chapter 13

Gamberg, D. (2016, March 29). What defines a good school? *Education Week*, 35(26).

Weekly Reflection due by 2:00 p.m.

Policy Analysis Paper proposal is due.

December 2: **Putting the Pieces Together**
Examine how various educational stakeholders collaborate or conflict in the policy process. Who is ultimately in charge?

SPECIAL GUESTS: Panel Presentation and Discussion
School Board Summary is due by 2:00 p.m.

December 9: **READING DAY**
Students may schedule *optional* meeting with instructor to discuss progress on policy analysis paper.

December 16: **Policy Analysis Paper Due by 2:00 p.m.**
Policy Analysis Presentations

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 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/> .