

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
Education Policy

EDPO 303 (001) – Politics of American Education
3 Credits, Spring 2021
Wednesdays, 7:20 – 10:00 p.m. Planetary Hall, Room 206, Fairfax Campus

Faculty

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Course Website: Blackboard

Prerequisites/Co-requisites

None.

University Catalog Course Description

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

Course Overview

Not applicable.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered in hybrid format. Students will have the option of appearing in-person or joining remotely on a week-by-week basis.

Course content will be presented using a lecture and class discussion format with option occasional online discussions and assignments, guest appearances from education leaders and elected officials involved in education and in-class exercises, all drawing on the instructor's professional experiences in the politics of American education.

COVID-19 Planning

Regardless of how many students choose to attend in-person, precautions will be made to create safe, socially-distanced learning spaces in the classroom. Students, instructors, and guest presenters will be required to wear masks at all times. Disinfectant will also be available.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to:

- 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 key issues in education policy at all levels of government and the different and often competing philosophies that inform education policy decisions;
- acquire the background and ability to think critically about public education issues relevant to all students, parents, voters and taxpayers in America, and to discuss same respectfully with people with different perspectives;
- enhance their ability to write well in concise formats; and
- Gain exposure to potential careers in education.

Course Website

This class uses Blackboard in order to enhance the online learning experience of students. This website contains the class syllabus and the class assignments. Note that the syllabus is subject to revision. The class assignments will be listed on a week-by-week basis on Blackboard -- if the Blackboard listings differ from the syllabus, follow the Blackboard listing.

All written materials are to be submitted via the class blackboard site no later than midnight on the assigned day unless otherwise specified. Late submissions will be penalized unless prior arrangements are made with the professor, which will be allowed only for good cause.

Professional Standards

Not Applicable.

Required Readings

Text and Resources

Tough, Paul (2016). *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. **This text is available online for free, with supplemental materials, so no need to purchase unless you prefer hardcopy.** <http://www.paultough.com/helping/>

With Good Reason (WGR) Virginia Humanities Podcast Series: Degrees of Separation Parts I -VI, Aired March 24, 2017 through August 25, 2017
<https://www.withgoodreasonradio.org/degrees-of-separation/>

Articles:

As current events are an important part of this course and education policy is in constant motion, other articles may be assigned throughout the semester. All articles are posted in this course's Blackboard site. You are responsible for finding articles on your own if Blackboard is inaccessible or if the linked files are not in your preferred format.

Baker, A. (2013, September 28). Culture warrior, gaining ground: E.D. Hirsch sees his education theories taking hold. *The New York Times*.

Baker, B. (2014). Evaluating the recession's impact on state school finance systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(91), 1-33.

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

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

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

Hoff, D. J. (2008, August 27). Democrats air dueling ideas on education. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01dems.h28.html?qs=NCLB+stalled>

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), *Low Performing Schools in Urban High Poverty Communities, Report to the Governor and General Assembly of Virginia*, (June 2014) <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt454.pdf>

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

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.

Nicholes-Barrer, I., Gill, B.P., Gleason, P., Tuttle, C.C. (2014). Does student attrition explain KIPP's success? *Education Next*, 14(4), 62-70.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time using Blackboard. Details will be shared in class. All due dates will be announced well in advance.

Assignments and/or Examinations

- **Current Education Events (5 points):** Each week 1-2 students will bring in a news item related to the field of education. Students will have approximately 3-5 minutes to outline the main points of the article and suggest any policy implications. We will create a schedule at our first class meeting.

Note: This is not a formal presentation. It is not necessary to prepare handouts or slides. The goal is to lead a discussion on educational implications of the news story. Presenting students should not only have read the article in its entirety but should also have spent some time considering the impact and importance of the article on education policy and specific topics we've been discussing in class.

- **Weekly Reflection (2 points each = 20 points total):** Students will reflect on what they have learned from class readings, lectures and discussions in writing via the Blackboard Discussion Board. Twelve class meetings will have substantive information on which to reflect. Students need only write 10 reflections. I strongly encourage students to start reflections immediately after class or the next morning, while the material is fresh in your mind. *In any case, please complete your reflections by Tuesday evening so I can read them beginning 8:00 a.m. Wednesday morning.*
- **Article Summary (5 points):** Students will complete a written summary of a news item about an educational issue. The summary should be 1-2 pages long and include both the main points of the article as well as policy implications. This summary is intended to help students work on the analysis skills necessary to write the policy paper. You may use the same news item as the *Current Education Events* assignment if the topic interests you.
- **State Constitution Homework Assignment & Presentation (5 points):** Students will locate the state constitution of an assigned state (determined in class). Prepare a brief, 3-5 minute presentation for class on the assigned date. More details on expectations will be shared in class.
- **Policy Paper (25 points):** Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources (academic journals, newspapers, interest groups, etc.).

In this assignment, students will write a 3-5 page policy brief/advocacy paper on a topic of their own choosing. Students should demonstrate their knowledge of their chosen topic, as well as the understanding they have developed of effective policy writing. Students will submit a **First Version (10 points)** which will be graded and edited, and a **Final Version (15 points)**, which must demonstrate effective use of the suggested edits from the First Version. Additional information and expectations will be provided in class.

- **School Board Summary (5 points):** Students will attend and **summarize** a virtual local school board meeting. The summary should be 1-2 pages long. Additional information and expectations will be provided in class.
- **Midterm Exam (15 points):** The midterm will assess understanding and comprehension of material from the textbook, class discussions, homework assignments and quizzes. We will have an in-class review activity prior to the midterm. More information and expectations will be provided in class.
- **Final Exam (20 points):** The final exam will assess understanding and comprehension of material from the textbook, class discussions, homework assignments, quizzes, and the midterm exam. It is therefore a cumulative examination. We will have in-class reviews and discuss optional study sessions. GMU also provides Reading Days one class meeting prior to finals week. More information and expectations will be provided in class.
- **Class Participation (Priceless):** Active engagement with classmates and the instructor during class meetings is critical to your understanding and comprehension of the material in this course. You will not be assessed on your engagement directly. Students who demonstrate positive engagement at every course meeting will certainly do well on graded assessments. Students **WILL** be assessed on attendance – virtually or in-person. Since the course meets just once per week, a single absence means significant missed content.

Hybrid Notes:

- Due to the COVID-19 epidemic and in an effort to protect student health this course has a virtual option.
 - The instructor will ask students to commit to attending in-person or virtual attendance at the beginning of the class with the understanding that things may change as students' needs change.
 - If students commit to in-person and need to change to virtual, either temporarily or permanently, *please let the instructor know as soon as possible.*
- **Preparation and Positive Relationships:** It is also critical that every student comes to class well prepared, ready to interact with classmates, and prepared to ask relevant questions and share perspectives. In this course we assume positive intentions no matter what experiences students might be coming from. In any course associated with politics there is likely to be a wide range of perspectives. This is good! It allows for rich discussion and opportunities to explore a broad range of opinions. Open mindedness, listening, and a willingness to understand each other are vital to positive outcomes.

- **Grading:** Please see rubric below for grading scales and assignment expectations. Specific rubrics will be provided for each major assignment as needed.

Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/>.

Class Schedule

This schedule is subject to change without advanced notice to students. Please check your GMU email and/or Blackboard daily for possible changes. Preparatory Assignments are to be done ahead of the class meeting.

Prior to January 27, please read syllabus and scan the news for current education topics.

1. Jan 27 Introduction and Class Overview
 - Introductions
 - Review syllabus and course description
 - Organize & schedule presentations

Current Status of American Education

 - Brainstorm education current events
 - Discussion of U.S. education issues, challenges, strengths, connection to U.S. in general

Homework:

 - 1st Weekly Reflection
 - Listen to With Good Reason, Degrees of Separation (2017), [Part I](#)
 - Research an education philosopher (assigned in class)
2. Feb 3: History, Purpose, & Philosophies of American Education – Part I
 - Discuss prominent educational movements and major events in the development of the American educational system
 - Discuss major philosophies and theories that underpin American education.
 - Purpose of education, knowing successes and failures

Homework:

 - 2nd Weekly Reflection
 - Read Baker, A. (2013) article.
 - Read Cross (2015)
3. Feb 10: History, Purpose, & Philosophies – Part II
 - Continue discussion of historical and philosophical underpinnings
 - Purpose continued – cultural literacy, other types of literacy
 - Educating ALL students

Homework:

- 3rd Weekly Reflection
- Read Tough, Helping Children Succeed, Chapters 1-9
- State Constitution research – presentations next time

4. Feb 17: Policy Structures – Federalism

State Constitution Presentations today

- Government structures and the education system – state vs. federal responsibilities
- State Constitution Presentations

Homework:

- 4th Weekly Reflection
- Listen to With Good Reason, Degrees of Separation [Part II](#).
- Read Tough, Helping Children Succeed, Chapters 10-16.

5. Feb 24: Policy Structures – Local and State Education Systems

- Local vs. state responsibilities
- School Boards – types, responsibilities, politics
- Challenges in promoting Success for All

Homework:

- 5th Weekly Reflection
- Article Summary due next time
- Read Baker (2014)

6. Mar 3: Education Finance – State and Local Budgets

Article Summary due today

- Education finance history, policies, current issues
- Challenges in financing public schools

Homework:

- 6th Weekly Reflection
- Tough, Helping Children Succeed, Chapters 17-23
- Read Hoff (2008)

7. Mar 10: Education Finance – Federal Budgets

- Federal education policy and budgets
- Republican & Democratic party education platforms
- Paper consultations – one-on-ones to discuss topics

Homework:

- No reflection this week
- Work on paper

8. Mar 17: Achievement Gaps
- Race in education
 - Types of achievement gaps
 - Challenges and solutions
- Homework:*
- Study for midterm
9. Mar 24: Midterm
- Directions and topics will be discussed well ahead of this date
- Homework:*
- With Good Reason, Degrees of Separation, [Part III](#).
10. Mar 31: School Board Meeting
- In lieu of a class meeting, students will attend a virtual school board meeting. Instructions and details to be announced.
- Homework:*
- JLARC, *Low Performing Schools* (2014), excerpts TBA.
 - Work on paper
11. Apr 7: Teachers: Shortages, Salaries, Unions.
- Discussion of teacher workforce challenges
 - Right to Work vs. Collective Bargaining
 - Current issues in teaching
 - One-on-one paper consultations and post mid-term review
- Homework:*
- 7th Weekly Reflection
 - With Good Reason, Degrees of Separation, [Part V](#).
12. Apr 14: Education Reform Wars – Part 1
First Version of policy paper due today
- Accountability Approach: Common Core, Testing, School Turnarounds Approach
 - Realities of who is in charge of education reform
- Homework:*
- 8th Weekly Reflection
 - Nichols-Barrier et al. (2014)
13. Apr 21: Education Reform Wars – Part 2
- Choice, Charters, Privatization
 - Achievement gaps in detail

Homework:

- 9th Weekly Reflection
- With Good Reason, Degrees of Separation, [Part VI](#).

14. Apr 28: Education Reform Wars – Part III

- Innovations in teaching – Project-Based Learning, Alternative Pathways, Technology

Homework:

- Final Weekly Reflection due
- Study for Final Exam

15. May 5: Final Exam

- Directions and topics will be discussed well ahead of this date

16. May 12: ***Final Version of Policy Paper due by midnight tonight***

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/Schar Policy on Plagiarism

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus, any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the Schar School. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable. **Plagiarism is the use of another's words or ideas presented as one's own.** It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another's work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one's professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the Schar School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For international students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g., F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

<http://schar.gmu.edu/current-students/masters-advising/academic-policies-forms/>

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 <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.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/> .

Assessment Rubric

| Grade/Pts. | Quality of Work | Completeness | Timeliness | Participation |
|-------------|---|--|---|--|
| A 94-100 | Exceptional quality and insight; rare and valuable contributions to the field. | 100% complete and error free. | 100% on time. | Questions and comments reveal thoughtfulness; consistent class engagement; a class leader. |
| A- 90-93 | Very high quality; demonstrates evidence of significant reflection and evaluation; clear and convincing writing; work is almost entirely free of grammar and/or spelling and citation errors. | Accurate and seamless writing; virtually a complete product. | Nearly or always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations. | Excellent undergraduate student; 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. | Accurate and seamless writing; may have minor shortcomings. | Almost always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations. | Well above average undergraduate student; actively engaged in moving the group toward goal. |
| B 83-86 | 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 professor's ability to see the product as a whole. | Assignments late more than once or without adequate explanation; not necessarily chronic. | Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection; engaged almost all 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; follows rather than leads group activities. |

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|------------------|---|--|--|--|
| C 71-77 | Barley meets undergraduate level quality work; 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. | Several missed deadlines or excessively late or missing work and/or poor attendance. | Weak or minimal participation; passive; occasionally unengaged in class discussions or group work; sometimes sidetracks group because of lack of preparedness. |
| D 66-70 | Work is below undergraduate quality. 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 do 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 toward other points of view. |