Politics of American Education – EDUC 303
Spring 2006
Day: 4:30 – 7:10 pm
Location: RA 250

Instructor: Knutson
Mknutso2@gmu.edu; cell 202 329-3456

Course Description: This class is designed for students focusing on study of the American political system as well as students who may be interested in careers in education. How interactions between various levels and branches of government effect education decisions will be explored.

Student Outcomes: At the conclusion of this course, students will
- understand and be able to explain the connections between education and the political process in the United States;
- understand and be able to explain how authority for education is dispersed among local, state, and federal governments;
- understand and be able to discuss the different and often competing philosophies that inform education policy decisions;
- understand and be able to discuss the role of interest groups and of the media in influencing education decisions.

Relationship To Program Goals: This course links to the goals of the Center for Education Policy and the Graduate School of Education to prepare educators and others 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.


Course Requirements:
- Students will read all text assignments and be prepared to discuss the material in class
- Students will complete exercises using the Internet. (2 points each x 8 assignments = 16 points total)
- Students will attend and summarize a local school board meeting. The school board summary should be 3-5 pages long and include an original copy of the meeting’s agenda (6 points)
- Students will earn a satisfactory grade on each quiz (4 quizzes x 7 points each = 28 points total)
- Students will earn a satisfactory grade on the final examination (50 points)

Evaluation Criteria and Grading
Internet Assignments 16%
School Board Meeting Summary 6%
Quiz Grades 28%
Final Examination 50%

A 96% - 100% The student’s assignments exceed course requirements. Written assignments are error free, comprehensive in terms of the information presented, and well written. For each quiz and the final examination, the student is able to recognize and explain connections between various political and government entities regarding education issues. The impact of government on K-12 schools and higher education is clearly understood and discussed. All assignments are turned in on time and are complete.

A- 93% - 95% The student’s assignments meet or exceed course requirements. Written assignments are convincingly on target and demonstrate evidence of understanding and application. The reader is not distracted by grammar and/or spelling errors. The student’s quizzes and final examination demonstrate an understanding of the impact of government on K-12 schools and higher education. Assignments are complete and late only due to serious personal or family emergencies.

B+ 89% - 92% The student’s assignments provide evidence of understanding and application. Written work and class discussions indicate some lapses in organization and/or writing. Quiz and the final examination indicating moderate shortcomings, such as minor points or issues are not fully discussed or explained. Connections between elements of the political system and K-12 schools and higher education are noted but not deeply explained. Assignments are late more than once without prior conversation with the instructor.

B 85% - 88% For the most part the student’s assignments provide evidence of understanding and application. Although there is evidence of effort, one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed on written assignments, quizzes, and the final examination. Assignments are late more than two times without prior conversation with the instructor. Grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader.

B- 80% - 84% The student’s assignments provide some evidence of understanding and application but frequently major points are missed or not discussed. The student’s performance on quizzes and the final exam indicate laps in logic.
Assignments are late more than three times without prior conversation with the instructor. Grammar and/or spelling errors on written work distract the reader.

**C+  77% - 79%**
The student’s assignments provide limited evidence of understanding and application. Major and important points are not discussed or are inaccurately presented. The student’s performance on quizzes and the final exam indicate laps in logic. Assignments are late more than four times without prior conversation with the instructor. Grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader.

**C  73% - 76%**
The student’s assignments provide limited evidence of understanding and application. Assignments, in particular quizzes and the final examination, suggest that assigned material was not read or studied in depth. Assignments are chronically late. Grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader.

**C-  70% - 72%**
The student’s assignments provide very limited evidence of understanding and application. Obvious and important points are missed and key information is not included. Performance on quizzes and the final examination indicate little understanding of the material. Assignments are chronically late.

**D+  67% - 69%**
The student’s assignments indicate very limited evidence of understanding and application. Obvious and important points are missed and key information is not included. Assignments are chronically late or not submitted. One or more quiz is missed without excuse and performance on the remaining quizzes and final examination indicate little understanding of the material.

**D  64% - 66%**
The student’s assignments indicate almost no evidence of understanding and application and/or show little connection to course content and concepts. Few important points and key information are included in written assignments or found on quizzes or the final examination. Assignments are chronically late or not submitted. Writing skills are below those expected of undergraduate students.

**F  63% and below.**
The student’s work is unacceptable for credit. There is no evidence of understanding the material. Assignments are late or not submitted.

**Nature of the Course:**
Lecture and class discussion.

**Proposed Class Schedule:**
Week 1: January 26

Introduction and class overview

Assignment for Week 2: Online research: find and bring to class, a 1-2 page summary of the No Child Left Behind Act (2 points) (do not limit yourself to looking at the homepage for the U.S. Department of Education.) Locate and read a copy of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Where is the constitutional authority for a federal Department of Education? Watch the State of the Union address.

Week 2: February 2

Connecting Education Policy and Politics. Discuss the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). What is the intent of NCLB? What problems is it designed to address? What solutions are proposed? Discuss the U.S. Constitution and education. If the 10th Amendment reserves to the states authority not specifically given to the federal government, how can we justify having a cabinet level Department of Education? Discuss the State of the Union address.

Assignment for Week 3: Read Garfield, Chapter 1 and 2. Online research: find one liberal and one conservative education interest group, bring in the web site for the organization and be prepared to explain how the political perspective of the organization can be determined by its web site (2 points).

Week 3: February 9

Political Philosophies in Education and the President’s budget. Discuss assigned readings in Garfield. Students will share information on the political philosophies of various education interest groups. How are these groups involved in education policy and political decision-making? Discuss the President’s budget. What is it? How does it affect education funding at the federal level.

Assignment for Week 4: Read Garfield, Chapter 3.

Week 4: February 16

No Class. Students are to attend a local country school board meeting and write a summary of what occurs. A copy of the official agenda for the meeting must be attached to the summary.

Week 5: February 23

Congress and Education. Discuss the role of the Congress in making and influencing education laws. Consider why some members of Congress are more powerful than others in education policy making.

Assignment for Week 6: Read Garfield, Chapter 5. Online Research: Compile and bring to class a list of members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate who you believe are important education policy decision makers. Be prepared to discuss why you selected these individuals (2 points).

Week 6: March 2

Congress and Education (continued). Continue discussion of congressional powerbrokers. Discuss pending education bills and the likelihood that they
will become law. What factors predict the potential passage of an education bill?

Assignment for Week 7: Online Research: Identify and bring to class a list of key congressional staffers for education policy (include name and position). Prepare and bring to class a list of pending education bills in the U.S. Congress. Include the bill’s name; its number and the name of the legislator who introduced the measure. (2 points)

Week 7: March 9
Congress and Education (continued) Continue discussion of Congress and education, emphasizing the budget and appropriations process. What are the politics of funding legislation?

Assignment for Week 8: Read Garfield, Chapter 6. Online Research: Review and compare the two political parties on education issues. What are the major themes in their respective education agendas? How are the Republicans and Democrats the same? How are they different? Summarize your findings (two pages maximum) (2 points)?

Spring Break: March 16

Week 8: March 23
Executive Branch and Education. Discuss the role of the Executive Branch and where the major political parties stand on education.

Assignment for Week 9: Compile and bring to class the names of the U.S. Secretary of Education, Under Secretary of Education, Deputy Secretary of Education, and all the Assistant Secretaries of Education. Be prepared to discuss the roles of these individuals (2 points)?

Week 9: March 30
Executive Branch and Education (continued). Discuss the roles and responsibilities of U.S. Department of Education officials for elementary, secondary, and higher education in the United States.

Assignment for Week 10: Read Garfield, Chapter 7. Online Research: find and be prepared to discuss the biography of one of the nine members of the U.S. Supreme Court (2 points).

Week 11: April 6
Federal Courts and Education. Discuss the make-up of the U.S. Supreme Court and its role in influencing K-12 and higher education policy. What are the backgrounds of the justices?

Assignment for Week 12: Read Garfield, Chapter 8. Online Research: Prepare and bring to class a directory of key education officials in Virginia. Include the agency in Virginia responsible for elementary and secondary education; the agency in Virginia responsible for higher education; the agency in Virginia responsible for community colleges; the person who is Virginia’s Secretary of Education; and the names of at least two local school superintendents. (2 points)

Week 11: April 13
Role of States and Localities in Education Policy. Discuss the authority of states and localities for Education in the United States.

Week 12: April 20
Election Results and Implications for Education. Discuss upcoming November Elections (congressional, governors races) and implications for education.

Assignment for Week 13: Read Garfield, Chapter 10.

Week 13: April 27
Coalitions and Negotiating Political Decisions. What education coalitions are important in the 109th Congress. What coalitions are important to the ‘President/administration? What are associations’ role in policy making. Discuss grassroots lobbying.

Assignment for Week 14: Read Garfield, Chapters 11 and 12.

Week 14: May 4
Influence of Public Opinion and Special Interests in Education Politics and Policy. Putting the Pieces Together and Course Review.

Exam Week: May 11

HONOR CODE

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of George Mason University and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the members of George Mason University, have set forth the following code of honor. Any individual who is caught in the act of cheating, attempting to cheat, plagiarizing, or stealing will be brought forth before a council of their peers. In the event that the individual is found guilty, he or she will be punished accordingly. For further information, please refer to the University Catalog or Website at: http://www.gmu.edu.

This syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class and/or weather interruptions. The American with Disabilities act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the series, programs, or activities of all State and local governments. Under ADA a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as: learning, working, walking, speaking, hearing, breathing, and/or taking care of oneself. If a student has a disability and needs course adaptations or accommodations because of that disability, it must be established with the faculty, in writing, at the beginning of the semester so arrangements can be made. Please call the Disability Resource Center for required documentation (703) 993-2474.