Course Title:  *Social Science Research and Education Policy*

EDUC 872 Sec:

Spring, 2004

Instructor:  Dr. Penelope M. Earley
Dr. David Goslin

Class Date & Time:  Thursday 4:30 – 7:10
Class Location:  Robinson A Room 329

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Office Hours (Earley):  By Appointment:  MTWRF 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Office Hours (Goslin):  By Appointment before or after class

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course focuses on the research base used to support education policy actions. Students will identify and critically review research for selected K-12 and higher education policy issues and through their analysis determine the strength of the undergirding evidence. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program and completion of EDUC 870 and 871 or equivalent doctoral-level policy coursework.

**STUDENT OUTCOMES**

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate ability to critique education research articles.
2. Objectively analyze policy options and determine what research would be necessary to support their claims.
3. Identify gaps in the evidence undergirding education policy options.
4. Understand and explain why certain education policy decisions have not had the desired outcome

**RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The conceptual framework for this course is linked to the goals of the Graduate School of Education and more specifically to the mission of the Center for Education Policy as outlined in its Charter: (1) Translate education research into policy options and
recommendations for a variety of audiences (decision makers, practitioners, and the 
public); (2) Conduct timely, sound, evidence-based analysis; and (3) Develop 
interdisciplinary and cross-sector policy networks. The student outcomes are linked to 
this mission, in particular to the importance of evidence-based analysis.

**NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY**

This course is taught using lectures and class discussions.

**TEXTS AND READINGS**


good, what’s not, and how to tell the difference.* Corwin Press (Sage 

Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), available on-line: [http://www.epaa.asu.edu](http://www.epaa.asu.edu)

*Educational Researcher*, available on-line: [http://www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will find research articles related to three education policy issues identified on 
this syllabus. (Students will select their topics during the first class.) Each student will be 
presented to the class an objective summary and critique of four to six research 
articles confirming or challenging the selected policy topics. Each presentation should be 
approximately 45 minutes long (not including time for Q&A). Students are expected to 
be creative in their presentations through the use of PowerPoint or other instructional 
tools and must provide handouts to supplement their presentation (please see grading 
rubric for additional information on expectations for this assignment). Following the 
student presentation, all students will constitute a consensus panel and (a) decide if the 
evidence supports a particular policy, or (b) if there are significant gaps in the research 
(approximately 45 minutes). If the research base is weak, the panel will offer alternative 
policy recommendations (approximately 30 minutes).

(1) Each student is expected to make three presentations and lead the discussion on the 
policy issue and related research (25 points each presentation). (2) Students will become 
familiar with the topics under discussion in classes when they are not leading the 
presentation so they can participate appropriately as members of the class consensus 
panel (3 points for each of the 8 consensus panel exercises). (3) Students will attend the 
spring Bowen Lecture on Public Policy (1 point).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Research Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Consensus Panel Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Attend Bowen Lecture</td>
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EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached.

Grading Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-95</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-91</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85-88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>76-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-75</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>72 and below</td>
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**Week-Class** | **Topic and Readings**

(1) 1-22-04 Course Introduction: Critiquing Educational Research. Basic concepts for reading and critiquing a research article will be presented. Students will be introduced to on-line sources of policy evidence. Students will critique a sample article offered by the instructor. **Assignment – Class #2:** Read McEwan, Chapters 1-4 and Girdin, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 9, and 10. Also please look at the class assignments in weeks 5-13 and bring to the next class a list of the five topics of most interest to you, rank ordered. If there is a topic not on the list that is of great interest to you and if it has an education policy components and a substantial body of research (pro/con) you may add that to your list and we will consider it. We will make every effort to give each student her or his first two topic choices.

(2) 1-29-04 Critiquing Educational Research: What are the important questions? Addressing validity and reliability. Reading and analyzing quantitative research. **Assignment – Class #3:** Read McEwan, Chapters 5-6 and Girdin, Chapters 2, 3, 4.

(3) 2-5-04 Critiquing Educational Research: Critiquing survey research. Reading and analyzing quantitative research. **Group Assignment – Class #4:** Students will be randomly assigned to find and be prepared to discuss either an article that supports or does not support the assertion that reducing K-12 class size results in higher student achievement.

(4) 2-12-04 Policy Issue: Does Reducing Class Size Improve Student Learning? Class activity: Students present and critique evidence. Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute the assertion that class size reduction increases student learning? How would you refute the assertion that class size has no impact on student learning? **Assignment – Class #5:** Find and be prepared to discuss articles that support or do not support the assertion that students perform better in small rather than large high schools. (Begin with but go beyond studies supported by the Gates Foundation.)
(5) 2-19-04 Policy Issue: School Size – What’s too Big and What’s Too Small? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute a policy proposal to create smaller learning environments? How would you refute school consolidation to create larger learning environments? Assignment – Class #6: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that endorse a particular method of preparing teachers. (One side of this issue is presented in The Secretary’s Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality, Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge available on the U.S. Department of Education’s web site. Look also at research done by Linda Darling-Hammond and the work she cites.)

(6) 2-26-04 Policy Issue: Are Certain Models of Preparing Teachers Better than Others? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute a policy that supports a particular teacher preparation model? Assignment – Class #7: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that compare the United States’ education system favorably or unfavorably with other nations. (Gerald Bracey’s work will provide one perspective, but also look for others.)

(7) 3-4-04 Policy Issue: How Does the United States’ Education System Compare with Other Nations? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute assertions that students in U.S. schools are less competent than students in other nations? How would you refute the assertion that the heterogeneous nature of education in the U.S. makes cross national comparisons useless? Assignment – Class #8: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that provide evidence on strategies to address school violence. (Journals for school administrators and counselors are a good place to begin.)

(8) 3-18-04 Policy Issue: What Strategies Have Been Found to Reduce or Curtail School Violence? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? Assignment – Class #9: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that provide evidence for or against grouping students. (The special education literature presents one perspective on this, however other research should be reviewed. The body of literature on this topic is large – be selective.)
(9) 3-25-04 Policy Issue: What Are the Benefits or Liabilities of Grouping Students for Instructional Purposes (tracking, grouping within classes, gifted and talented programs, special education)? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? How would you refute the decision to group students for instructional purposes? How would you refute a decision not to group students? Assignment – Class #10: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that address policy strategies to promote diverse learning environments. (Look at literature pertaining to both K-12 and higher education settings. Don’t forget the Supreme Court.)

(10) 4-1-04 Policy Issue: What Are Effective Models to Achieve Diversity in Educational Institutions (K-16)? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? Assignment – Class #11: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that suggest certain learning incentive strategies are good or poor ways to promote student learning.

(11) 4-8-04 Policy Issue: What Policies Provide Incentives for Learning (rewards & punishments; intrinsic vs. extrinsic rewards)? Student presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? Assignment: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that offer evidence for an against the practice of licensing (or certifying) teachers and/or school administrators. (Fredrick Hess at the American Enterprise Institute opposes teacher licensure while Linda Darling-Hammond at Stanford University thinks licenses are a good idea. What evidence do they rely on?)

(12) 2-22-04 Policy Issue: Should K-12 Teachers and Administrators be Required to Hold a State License? Students presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps? Assignment – Class #13: Find and be prepared to discuss articles that offer evidence for or against one of the many forms of school choice. (Paul Peterson at Harvard has written extensively in this area, but his work is not without its critics. Also look at studies of Milwaukee and Cleveland programs.)

(13) 4-29-04 Policy Issue: Does School Choice Improve Student Achievement (vouchers, charter schools, magnet schools, etc.)? Student team presents and critiques evidence. Class activity: Is there sufficient evidence to reach consensus on this matter? If not, what evidence is missing and what research might be done to fill the gaps?

(14) 5-6-04 Wrap-Up. Discussion of strategies to promote evidence-based policy. (Tentative)
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.
Grading Rubric: Social Science Research and Public Policy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/Points</th>
<th>Consensus Group</th>
<th>Research Summary Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 96 – 100</td>
<td>Outstanding. Participates in and promotes conversation focused on the topic. Comments demonstrate a high level of understanding.</td>
<td>Exceeds Expectations; presentation of research is objective and demonstrates deep reflection; facilitation of class discussion is exceptional and promotes high level conversation on the topic. Work shows evidence of very strong analytic skills. Written material (hand outs etc.) are error free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A- 92 – 95</td>
<td>Well above the average doctoral student; actively advances the intellectual level of the discussion.</td>
<td>Well above average doctoral student; presentation of research is objective and on-target; good facilitation of class discussion, keeping discussion focused on the topic. Work shows evidence of strong analytic skills. Written material (hand outs etc.) is primarily error free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+ 89 –91</td>
<td>Reliable participant in discussions; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection.</td>
<td>Presentation of research is solid and objectives; during group discussions, questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection. Work shows evidence of solid analytic skills. Grammar or spelling errors on written materials (hand outs etc.) do not distract the reader.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B 85 – 88</td>
<td>Doesn’t contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.</td>
<td>Presentation of research is solid but not always objective or complete; one or more key points are not covered. Analytic work is generally sound but may have some gaps in logic. Grammar or spelling errors on written materials (hand outs etc.) do not distract the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- 80 – 84</td>
<td>Few meaningful contributions to class discussions. Little evidence of participation.</td>
<td>Although there is evidence of work, presentation of research is generally not objective or complete; multiple key points are not covered or are misrepresented. Grammar or spelling errors on written materials distract the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+ 76 – 79</td>
<td>Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group.</td>
<td>Presentation of research is incomplete and not objective. Multiple key points are not covered or are misrepresented. Important studies are not referenced. Written materials are unclear. Facilitation of class discussion strays from the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 73 – 78</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of research is incomplete and not objective. Important studies are not referenced or are misrepresented. Written materials (hand outs etc.) are not presented or are unrelated to the topic. Weak facilitation of the discussion as evidenced by lack of focus on the topic. Written materials have multiple spelling and grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 72 and below</td>
<td>No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.</td>
<td>Assignments are not done or are significantly incomplete.</td>
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