

Politics of American Education – EDUC 303

Fall 2009

Mondays 4:30 – 7:10 pm

Location: West 1007

Instructor: Bridget Thomas, M.A.

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Office Hours: Mondays 3-4 and by appointment.

Course Description: Examination of the American political system for students studying the American political system, and those interested in a career in education. Explores how interactions between various levels and branches of government affect education.

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.

Required Text: Ornstein, A., & Levine, D. (2008). *Foundations of Education, 10th Edition*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Course Requirements:

- Students will read all text assignments and be prepared to discuss the material in class.
- Students will complete homework assignments and article summaries.
- Students will attend and summarize a local school board meeting.
- Students will learn the essential elements of policy writing and will complete an original policy paper.
- Students will earn a satisfactory grade on two short quizzes, the midterm, and the final examination.

Course Assignments:

- **“In the News”:** Each week, 1-2 members of the class will be scheduled to bring in a newspaper article related to the field of education. Students will have approximately 5 minutes to tell the class the main points of the article and to suggest what they see as the policy implications. *Please note:* This is not an official presentation per se (no handouts are necessary) but instead an informal discussion of where and how we see policy issues emerge. However, a presenting student ***should have read and considered the policy implications of his/her article prior to coming to class.*** The rest of the class should be prepared to engage in each week’s discussions. **[3 points]**
- **Homework assignments:** Throughout the semester, students will complete several short assignments. Expectations for these assignments will be provided in class prior to each assigned date. Students will discuss the information they have located for each assignment in class on the due date. **[points vary; 12 points total]**
- **Article Summaries:** Twice during the semester, students will complete a written summary of a newspaper article about an educational issue of their choosing. Summaries should be 1-2 pages long and include both the main points of the article **and the policy implications.** **[4 points each = 8 points total]**
- **Policy Paper:** Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources (newspapers, interest groups, politicians, etc.). In this assignment, students will write a policy brief/advocacy paper on a topic of their own choosing, using President Obama as their intended audience. Students should demonstrate their knowledge of their chosen topic, as well as the understanding they have developed of effective policy writing. *Additional assignment information/expectations will be given later in the semester.* **[15 points]**
- **School Board Summary:** Students will **attend** and summarize a local school board meeting. The summary should be 3-5 pages long, and an original copy of the meeting’s agenda must be included. **[10 points]**
- **Quizzes:** Students will have two short quizzes during the semester. Each will include material covered in the textbook, class discussions, and homework assignments since the previous quiz or examination. **[6 points each = 12 points total]**
- **Midterm Examination:** The midterm examination will include material covered in the textbook, class discussions, and homework assignments from the beginning of semester to the date of the exam (including material covered on the previous quiz). Students will have an in-class review activity the week before the midterm. **[15 points]**
- **Final Examination:** The final examination will include information covered in the textbook, class discussions, and homework assignments over the course of the semester. Students will have an in-class review activity the week before the final. **[25 points]**

ALL EXAMINATIONS (QUIZZES, MIDTERM, AND FINAL) MAY INCLUDE MULTIPLE CHOICE, SHORT ANSWER, AND BRIEF ESSAY QUESTIONS.

Evaluation Criteria and Grading

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached (page 7). All assignments are considered performance-based and are evaluated based on this rubric. Percentages for the various assignments are the following:

“In the News”	3%	School Board	
Homework Assignments	12%	Meeting Summary	10%
Article Summaries	8%	Quiz Grades	12%
Policy Paper	15%	Midterm	15%
		Final Examination	25%
TOTAL		100%	

Nature of the Course: Lecture and class discussion.

Extra credit policy: At selected times during the semester, there may be opportunities for small amounts of extra credit to be added to a student’s overall point total. These opportunities are at the discretion of the instructor, and students **must be present and participating** to receive them. Alternate opportunities for students who miss the activity will **not** be offered.

Important Information for all students

The College of Education and Human Development expects all students to abide by the following:

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].

Please note that:

- Plagiarism encompasses the following:
 1. Presenting as one’s own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
 2. Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
(from Mason Honor Code online at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>)
- Paraphrasing involves taking someone else’s ideas and putting them in your own words. When you paraphrase, you need to cite the source.
- When material is copied word for word from a source, it is a direct quotation. You must use quotation marks (or block indent the text) and cite the source, including the appropriate page number.
- Electronic tools (e.g., SafeAssign) may be used to detect plagiarism if necessary.
- Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are treated seriously and may result in disciplinary actions.

- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University 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 must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].

Campus Resources

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles.

Contact:

College of Education and Human Development:
 4400 University Drive MS4F3
 Fairfax, VA 22030
 703-993-2010
<http://cehd.gmu.edu>

Proposed Class Schedule (subject to adjustment as necessary and at the discretion of the instructor):

- 8/31/09: Introduction and Class Overview
Reading for 9/14: Ornstein, Chapter 5.
Homework: Do an internet search and prepare a one page summary of the events in Prince Edward County, VA schools in April 1951, as well as what happened between 1959 and 1964. (2 points)
- 9/7/09: **NO CLASS: LABOR DAY**
- 9/14/09: How Did We Get Here? History of American Education. Discuss assigned reading in Ornstein and events in Virginia during the 1950s.
Reading for 9/21: Ornstein, Chapter 6.
- 9/21/09: Philosophies of Education. Discuss major philosophies and theories of education. How do these affect policy? What influences do they have on curriculum, how lessons are taught, how students are treated, etc.?
Reading for 9/28: Find and read the U.S. Constitution. Locate the passages that discuss educational authority.
In addition, find the committees in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate that have primary responsibility for education policy. Then go to the U.S. Department of Education's web site (www.ed.gov) and find the names and titles of the Secretary, Undersecretary, Deputy Secretary, and all of the Assistant Secretaries. How do these people get their jobs?
- 9/28/09: ****QUIZ #1****
Who's in Charge? 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?
Reading for 10/5: Ornstein, Chapter 7.
In addition, go to the web site for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Who are the officials responsible for K-12 education? What about higher education? Who regulates pre-schools?
Homework: locate the constitution of your assigned state (determined in class). Find the passages that discuss education and how it will be administered and regulated. Prepare a 1-page summary that discusses these provisions and the policy implications. (2 points)
- 10/5/09: Who's in Charge? Education Policy Making at the State Level. Discuss provisions for education in state constitutions. Discuss state responsibilities and activities related to education.
Homework for 10/13: Article Summary #1 (4 points)
- 10/13/09: **PLEASE NOTE: CLASS IS ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK!!**
Who's in Charge? Education Policy Making at the Local Level. Discuss the role of local school boards and central administrative offices.
Reading for 10/19: Ornstein, Chapter 9.
Homework: Research the members of the U.S. Supreme Court. Prepare a one page summary of one of them (determined in class). (3 points)

- 10/19/09: 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? What are some of the important decisions of the Court and how have they influenced education policy?
Reading for 10/26: Ornstein, Chapter 8.
- 10/26/09: ****MIDTERM EXAM****
Who Pays the Bill. Discussion of how education is funded in the United States.
Reading for 11/9: Ornstein, Chapter 11.
Homework: Article Summary #2 (4 points)
- 11/2/09: **NO CLASS**
- 11/9/09: The Achievement Gap. Discuss issues of social class and race/ethnicity and how they relate to school achievement. What can schools do to address these issues?
Reading for 11/16: Ornstein, Chapter 12.
Homework: Go to the U.S. Department of Education's web site (www.ed.gov) and find out the major requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Check the web sites of educational organizations (e.g, National School Boards Association, National Education Association) to see these organizations' positions on NCLB. Pick any two education organizations and write a one page summary of their position on NCLB. Consider why a given organization would hold a particular position. (2 pages total, 3 points)
- 11/16/09: The Achievement Gap (continued) and No Child Left Behind. What are the policy options? Is NCLB the answer?
Reading for 11/23: Ornstein, Chapter 13
- 11/23/09: ****POLICY PAPER DUE****
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?
Homework for 11/30: Find a company or organization that does public opinion research. Summarize and analyze a recent poll on an education topic (2 points)
- 11/30/09: ****QUIZ #2****
Influence of the Media, Public Opinion and Special Interest Groups in Education Politics and Policy. How does the media presentation of the educational system affect how it is viewed? Do the media only report bad news? How do special interest groups affect the policy process?
- 12/7/09: ****SCHOOL BOARD SUMMARY DUE BY TODAY****
Putting the Pieces Together and Course Review.
- 12/14/09: **FINAL EXAM 4:30-7:15 p.m.**

Grading Guidelines: EDUC 303: Politics of American Education

Grade/Points	Quality of Work	Completeness of Work	Timeliness	Participation
A 94 – 100	Exceptional quality and insight; a rare & valuable contribution to the field.	100% complete and error free	100% on time	Outstanding; questions & comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Is often a leader in group activities.
A- 91 – 93	Very high quality; demonstrates evidence of significant reflection and evaluation; clear and convincing writing; work is free of grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.	Accurate & seamless writing; virtually a complete product	Nearly or always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such as serious personal or family illness). Assignments are late only in extreme circumstances and with the advance knowledge of the instructor.	Excellent undergraduate student; provides on-target and thoughtful responses. Good team participant.
B+ 88 –90	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 & seamless writing; may have minor shortcomings.	Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such as serious personal or family illness). Instructor is notified in advance that a paper may be late.	Well above average undergraduate student; actively helps move group toward goal.
B 83 – 87	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.
C+ 79 - 82	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 72 - 78	Barely meets undergraduate level and quality; 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.	Excessively or repeatedly late.	Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group.
D 66-71	Work is below undergraduate level and quality. Assignments do not meet minimum parameters for evidence and reflection.	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.	Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.	Absolute minimum of participation.
F 65 or below	Unacceptable	Not recognizable as assigned task.	Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.	No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.