

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development

Course Title: *Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics*
EDUC 870
Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. Penelope M. Earley
Class Date & Time: Wednesday 4:20 – 7:10
Class Location: Robinson A 243
Contact Information:

Penelope Earley
2101 West Hall
E-mail: pearley@gmu.edu
P: (703) 993-3361
F: (703) 993-2013

Office Hours: By Appointment: M-F 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines theories of and research on public policy decision making in education at the local, state, and national levels and its impact on education institutions, students, and the public. Particular attention is given to which government entities have authority over education decision making and the resolution of competing policy arguments within the political arena. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program or permission of instructor.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

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

1. Understand and explain the responsibilities of various levels of government for pre-K – 16 education.
2. Analyze and describe the impact of social, legal, and political forces on the functioning of education in the United States.
3. Analyze and articulate differing policy arguments and perspectives regarding education.
4. Understand the various research frames and methodologies used to study education policy.

RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. However, most, if not all standards for educators expect professionals 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.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is taught using lectures and discussions.

TEXTS, READINGS, AND RESOURCES

Required

Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D.N. (Eds.) (2009). *Handbook of Education Policy Research*. New York: Routledge.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association*

* If you have the 5th edition, you may use it for this class HOWEVER, you should invest in the new edition as soon as possible.

Additional Resources and References

Allington, R. L. (2002). *Big brother and the national reading curriculum: How ideology trumped evidence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Brafman, O. & Brafman, R. (2008). *Sway: The irresistible pull of traditional behavior*. New York: Broadway Books.

Cross, C. (2003). *Political education: National policy comes of age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

DeFattore, J. (1992). *What Johnny shouldn't read: Textbook censorship in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Education Policy Analysis Archives, available on line (<http://epaa.asu.edu>)

Heck, R.A. (2004). *Studying educational and social policy: Theoretical concepts and research methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kingdon, J.W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Ravitch, D. (2003). *The language police*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Sabiter, P.A. (Ed) (2007). *Theories of the political process* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, available on line (<http://www.schev.edu>).

Stone, D. (1997). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. New York: W.W. Norton.

The Constitution of the United States, available on line
(<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>)

The Constitution of Virginia, available on line
(<http://www.legis.state.va.us/laws/Constitution.html>)

United States Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.ed.gov>)

United States Supreme Court, available on line (<http://www.supremecourtus.gov>)

Virginia State Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.pen.k12.va.us>)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Students are expected to read all assignments before class and if a class is missed to get notes and any handouts from a colleague.
- Students are expected to participate in discussions of the readings (either in the class as a whole or in small groups)
- Specific assignments:
 1. Review and present to the class the education provisions in a state constitution (not Virginia) selected Sept. 09, **due Sept. 16 (15 points)**
 2. Analysis paper 1. Read a chapter in the Sykes et al. text not assigned for class (EXCLUDING the commentaries). Prepare a review and critique of it. The summary of the chapter should be no more than one page and the analysis/critique no more than 4 pages (total 5 pages). Please use subheads to differentiate between summary and critique. **Analysis paper 1 is due September 30. Each student will make a short presentation on the selected chapter (20 points).**
 3. Analysis paper 2. Read a chapter in the Sykes et al. text not assigned for class (EXCLUDING the commentaries). Prepare a review and critique of it. The summary of the chapter should be no more than one page and the analysis/critique no more than 4 pages (total 5 pages). Please use subheads to differentiate between summary and critique. **Analysis paper 1 is due October 28. Each student will make a short presentation on the selected chapter (20 points).**
 4. Attend and present a summary and analysis of either a local school board meeting or other policy event (the latter must be approved in advance). If you do not attend a school board meeting, the policy event must be open to the public and one at which you are not a participant. **Due Dec 02. (20 points)**
 5. Present a policy issue/topic/problem and identify and defend the policy framework you would use to research and/or analyze it. Please draw upon readings for the course for this assignment. Your paper should be no more than 5 pages: ½ to one to outline the problem/topic and the remainder to describe and defend the framework. **Due Dec. 09 (25 points)**

EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached. All written work must be completed on a word processor and must be within the page limits established by the instructor. All papers must be formatted according to the *APA Manual of Style*.

Grading Scale:

A =	96-100	A- =	92-95
B+ =	89-91	B =	80-88
C =	79-75	F =	74 and below

COURSE SCHEDULE

September 02—Introduction to public policy and education

- Introductions
- Review of syllabus & class schedule
- Introduction to policy studies in education
- Discussion of the U.S. Constitution and authority for K-16 education
- **Assignment for Sept. 09: Read in Sykes, et al.” Chapter 23 (Mead) and Chapter 57 (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon).**

September 09—Federal, state & local authority for education in the U.S.

- Education policy & the legal system
 - ❖ *Guest Speaker: Dr. Susan Bon, Ph.D., JD., George Mason University*
- Overview of Federal policy history in K-12 education
 - Cohen-Vogel presents three frameworks to explore the enactment of NCLB, which one do you think is best (most helpful for understanding)? What isn't accounted for in these theoretical frameworks?
- Selection of state constitutions
- **Assignment for Sept. 16: Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 58 (McDermott), Chapter 59 (Sykes, et al.) Chapter 25 (Jacobsen); and (2) **Read the constitution for the state you selected and be prepared to give a 5-6 minute report on the provisions in it.****

September 16— Does the tail wag the dog? (What's the dog and what's the tail?)

- Presentation of state constitutions: What is similar and what is different?
- Discussion of state and local role in education policy decisions
 - What are the challenges for using state/district-level governments to form national education policy?
 - Has the historic role of district- or community-level governance of K-12 education outlived its usefulness?
 - What are the implications of the work by McDermott, Sykes, et al., and Jacobsen for efforts to create national K-12 standards, curricula, and examinations
- **Assignment for September 23: Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 7 (Weimer), Chapter 10 (Orland), & Chapter 22 (Rosen). **Chapter Analysis Paper 1 Due before class on the 30th.****

September 23—Challenges of policy analysis and policy research

- How does or can research inform policy?
 - Both Weimer and Orland describe a distinction between policy research and policy analysis: What are sources of possible bias in each?
 - Rosen presents a different lens to look at education policy and the scholarship that supports it. How does Rosen's approach differ from Weimer and Orland? Which approach makes the most sense of the policy world as you know it?
- Review of Chapter Analysis Assignment expectations
- **Assignment for September 30: Chapter Analysis Paper 1 Due before class next week (Sept. 30th). Be prepared to make a short presentation on the chapter you analyzed in class.**

September 30—Using conceptual frameworks in policy research and analysis

- How can analytic frameworks help make sense of policy research and actions in the policy community?
 - ❖ *Guest Speaker: Ms. Bridget Thomas, CEHD doctoral candidate.*
- Presentation of student papers
- **Assignment for October 07: Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 3 (Hanushek), & Chapter 4 (McDonnell).**

October 07—Economics, political science and education policy

- Discussion of the strengths and limitations of using economic or political science frames.
 - What are the assumptions of an economic approach to studying policy?
 - What are the assumptions of a political science approach to studying policy?
 - Are policy decisions rational?
- **Assignment for Oct. 21: Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 11 (Borman), & Chapter 13 (Pigott). Analysis paper 2 due Oct 28.**

October 14—No Class (Remember to attend a school board meeting or other policy event)

October 21— Education policy research methodologies

- The very political nature of education policy research.
 - Borman discusses the political environment that led to decisions by the federal government to favor SBR over other types of empirical studies. Pigott suggests that research syntheses and meta-analysis are useful research strategies. What policy topic or topics might be studied using randomized trials? Why?
- **Assignment for October 28: Read in Sykes et al.L Chapter 14 (Desimone) & Chapter 16 (McDonald). Analysis paper 2 due Oct 28. Be prepared to make a brief presentation on the chapter your analyzed in class.**

October 28—Education policy research methodologies

- Other ways to think about policy research

- Desimone suggests there are a number of ways to think about education policy research. Think of some policy problems that might lend themselves to her recommendations. McDonald discusses policy evaluation. Although evaluation studies are favored by many in the policy community, some scholarly journals will not accept them as examples of research. Why might that be?

- Assignment for Nov. 04: Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 20 (Mickelson), Chapter 51 (Farkas), & Chapter 69 (Jones et al.).

November 04—Education policy and social justice

- Does policy have a moral purpose?
 - Chapters by Mickelson, Farkas, and Jones et al. each approach the policy challenges of equality from a different place. Does the education policy community have an obligation to study and formulate policy options to address social and economic inequalities? If so, what are ways to approach the issues?
- Assignment for Nov. 11: (1) Be prepared to discuss the results of the Virginia gubernatorial election. (2) Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 27 (Hoing), & Chapter 29 (West).

November 11—Does research have the answer

- Discussion of the results of the VA gubernatorial election
 - What does the result of the election tell us about (a) the policy expectations of the people in the Commonwealth; (b) the policy presentations of the two candidates; and/or (c) the attitude of citizens to government policy overall? Do any of the chapters you have read help inform this discussion?
- Policy research themes and options
 - Honig implies that policy theory is context specific, how does this relate to the work of West on choice.
- Assignment for Nov. 18: Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 36 (Plecki et al.), & Chapter 47 (Reteille et al.).

November 18—Money and other incentives

- Is money the answer?
 - Many policy makers and others accept the assertion that good teachers influence student performance in a positive manner. They further argue that higher salaries will attract better teachers. How do the chapters by Pelecki et al. and Reteille et al. help us think about this policy challenge?
- Assignment for Dec. 02: Read in Sykes et al., Chapter 53 (Plank et al.) & Chapter 67 (Fuller). **Policy Framing assignment due Dec. 09**

November 25—Happy Thanksgiving Eve – University closed

December 02—Shifting federalism

- A common theme in educational policy studies is the tension between state autonomy vis a vis the goals and expectations of schools and federal interest and over site.

- Plank and Kessler discuss the ebb and flow of state authority in the US and other countries. Fuller argues that we can learn a great deal by studying decentralized reforms. How do these respective points of view help frame and inform policy debates?
- Remember to turn in your policy event summary/analysis this week
- **Assignment for Dec. 09: Policy Framing Paper & Presentation**

December 09—Pulling the pieces together

- Student presentation of policy framing assignments
-

Important Information for all students

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

- ✓ Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See www.gse.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.
 - ✓ Students must know and follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full Honor Code.
 - ✓ Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See <http://mail.gmu.edu> and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.
 - ✓ Students with disabilities to seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/students/drc or call 703-003-2474 to access the DRC.
-

Grading Guidelines: EDUC 870 Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics

Grade/Points	Quality of Work	Completeness of Work	Timeliness	Participation
<p>A 96 – 100</p> <p>A- 92 – 95</p>	<p>Exceptional quality and insight; a rare & valuable contribution to the field.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>100% complete and error free</p> <p>Accurate & seamless writing; virtually a complete product</p>	<p>100% on time</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Outstanding; facilitates and promotes conversation focused on the topic; questions & comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Good team participant</p> <p>Well above average doctoral student; actively helps move group toward goal.</p>
<p>B+ 89 –91</p> <p>B 80 – 88</p>	<p>Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity.</p> <p>Evidence of understanding presented but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations.</p>	<p>Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor's ability to see the product as a whole.</p> <p>Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed.</p>	<p>Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with instructor; not necessarily chronic.</p> <p>More than half the assignments are late, but none are excessively late.</p>	<p>Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection.</p> <p>Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.</p>
<p>C 75 - 79</p>	<p>Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or not connection to course content or concepts.</p>	<p>Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.</p>	<p>Excessively or repeatedly late.</p>	<p>Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group.</p>
<p>F below 74</p>	<p>Unacceptable</p>	<p>Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.</p>	<p>Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.</p>	<p>No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.</p>