GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development

Course Title: *Advanced Policy Issues in Education*
EDUC 871 Sec: 001
Spring, 2010

Instructor: Dr. Penelope M. Earley
Class Date & Time: Wednesday 4:30 – 7:10 p.m.
Class Location: Krug 3
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Office Hours: By Appointment: MTWRF 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on in-depth analysis and study of selected education policy issues. Review of various points of view on the issues is considered. Particular attention will be given to interactions and connections between selected education issues, and the similarities and differences in policy approaches at the K-12 and higher education levels. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program and completion of EDUC 870 or equivalent doctoral-level policy coursework.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

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

1. Demonstrate a detailed and sophisticated understanding of major policy issues.
2. Analyze and describe the legal and political forces that influence decision making on these issues.
3. Understand and explain the intersections of various policy issues.
4. Understand and explain how and why different levels of education may approach these policy issues in a different manner.
5. Demonstrate ability to describe and analyze the research bases for major policy issues.

RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. The conceptual framework for this course is linked 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 (in particular 3, 4, and 5) are linked to this mission as are the analytic assignments.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is taught using lectures and discussions supplemented with outside speakers.

TEXTS AND READINGS

Required

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

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. (6th Edition is fine)

Useful References

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

Cross, Christopher (2004). Political education: National policy comes of age. New York: Teachers College Press.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Identify a topic of interest to you (ideally, this topic should be related to your dissertation research). During the course of the semester you will explore all of the policy aspects of your topic including if and how it is influenced by local, state, or federal government actions and which interests groups are advocates for the issue. This work will culminate in a 20 – 30 page paper describing and analyzing the policy and summarizing policy research and/or evaluations on it. Drafts will be submitted during the course of the semester for feedback and the final paper should be in a form that ultimately may become part of your dissertation.

Assignment Submissions: Please submit assignments to me electronically.

EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached. All written work must conform to the APA 5th Ed. manual of style or 6th Ed..

Grading Scale:

A =	96-100	A- =	92-95	B+ =	89-91
B =	85-88	C =	75-84		
F =	74 and below				

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week-Class	**Topic and Readings**
January 20	**Introduction and Overview: What is a policy brief?** Assignment for 1/27: Read Heck Part I (cpts. 1-3).
January 27	**Policies, Policy Research, Policy Analysis & Evaluations** **Where will you find research on the problem the policy you study is intended solve?** Assignment for 2/03: Read Heck Part II (cpts 4-7).
February 03	**Policy Theories and Conceptual Frameworks** Assignment for 2/17: Read Heck Part IV (cpt. 12) Be prepared to briefly describe the policy you intend to research for your brief to the rest of the class (who, what, where, why)
February 17	**Discussion of Policy Topics and Constructing a Policy History** Assignment for March 03 (due before class): Prepare write up of the policy topic, who is governed by it and how, what problem it is intended to solve ***and*** what research has to say about that problem (remember, this isn't research on the policy, just the problem it is intended to solve). This may include data used to document the problem.
February 24	**No Class: time for individual meetings**
March 03	**Student presentations summarizing the policy & problem research. Discussion of constructing a legislative/policy history.** Assignment for March 24: Make revisions to the first part of your paper based on instructor feedback. Write-up of the policy/legislative history due before class on the 24th. Be prepared to discuss this in class.
March 10	**No Class: Spring Break**
March 17	**No Class: time for individual meetings**
March 24	**Student presentations of policy/legislative histories** **Discussion of evaluations and how to find & evaluate them.** Assignment for April 07: Summarize and critique all evaluations conducted of your policy. Revise your paper as needed based on feedback from instructor.
March 31	**No Class: time for individual meetings**
April 07	**Presentation of policy evaluations** Assignment for April 14: Who supports this policy and why? Who opposes it and why? Does this support/opposition influence the research or the evaluations you critiqued? How?

April 14 **The Role of Interest Groups: Student Presentations**
Assignment for April 21: Construct a conceptual framework to explain the policy (provide a page or so of narrative to explain it).

April 21 **Presentation of Conceptual Frameworks**
Assignment for April 28: Write the conclusion to your paper and an abstract. Check citations, read and proof carefully. The final product is due before class on April 28.

April 28 **So what? Now that you know everything about this policy, what do you expect will happen to it in the future?**

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: Advanced Policy Issues in Education

Grade/Points	Quality of Written Work	Completeness of Work	Timeliness	Team Assignments
A 96 – 100 A- 92 – 95	Exceptional quality and insight; a rare & valuable contribution to the field. 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.	100% complete Accurate & seamless writing; virtually a complete product	100% on time 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.	Outstanding; facilitates and promotes conversation focused on the topic; questions & comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Good team participant Well above average doctoral student; actively helps move group toward goal.
B+ 89 –91 B 85 – 88	Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity. Evidence of understanding presented but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations. .	Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor's ability to see the product as a whole. Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed.	Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with instructor; not necessarily chronic. More than half the assignments are late, but none are excessively late.	Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection. Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.
C 75 - 84	Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or not 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.
F 74 or below	Unacceptable	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.	Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.	No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.

Policy Brief Paper Components

I. What is the policy/program? (This must be an actual policy that is now in place)
   A. Describe the policy/program (a policy is the process by which a person or body makes a decision, a program is the vehicle to carry out that policy)
   B. What does it do and who is responsible for doing it?
   C. Are there rewards or sanctions for doing or not doing this?
   D. Is there some sort of reporting or accountability associated with it?
   E. What person or agency is responsible for oversight of the policy/program?
   F. Essentially, the reader will understand what the policy/program does, how, when, and why.

II. What does research tell us about the problem the policy is suppose to address or solve?
   A. What is the program (or problems) the policy/program is intended to address or fix?
   B. Look at research completed both before and after the policy was enacted and describe what these studies find. This should be a descriptive analysis of these studies (no "Research says…" paragraphs)
   C. If you find data on the effect of the problem gathered prior to enactment of the policy, include that.

III. What is the legislative history of the policy/program?
   A. When was the policy enacted and by whom (Congress, General Assembly, President's executive order etc.)
   B. Is the program funded? How? (General revenue, special tax, lottery money, special appropriation or earmark, etc.)
   C. What is the funding history for the life of the policy/program. That is, has support for it increased, decreased, or remained the same. This can be done in the form of a chart.

IV. Has the policy/program been evaluated and what did these evaluations find?
   A. Has the policy/program been evaluated and by whom?
   B. Did the evaluation/s follow rigorous standards for evaluation work?
   C. What were the findings of these evaluations?
   D. Note: governments often award think tanks or individuals grants to evaluate programs. These evaluations may or may not be published in scholarly journals so you may have to dig a bit.
   E. If you can document there has never been an evaluation of this policy/program, please develop a proposal to evaluate it.

V. Who supports this policy and why? Who opposes it and why?
   A. Specifically, what interest groups support or oppose this (there should be groups on both sides of the issue)
   B. Can you find evidence that pressure from these interest groups has influenced evaluations of the policy/program or how citizens and law makers perceive it?

VI. What do you predict will be the future of this policy?