

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Education Policy

EDUC 303 001: Politics of American Education
3 Credits, Fall 2013
Monday, 4:30-7:10 Robinson B 220

PROFESSOR(S):

Name: Bridget E. Thomas, PhD
Office hours: By appointment
Office location: N/A
Office phone: 703-407-6838
Email address: bthomas5@gmu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A. Prerequisites/Corequisites

None

B. University Catalog Course Description

Focus on the study of the American political system. Designed for students studying the American political system and students interested in careers in education. Explores how interactions between various levels and branches of government affect education.

C. Expanded Course Description

Not applicable

LEARNER OUTCOMES or OBJECTIVES:

This course is designed to enable students to:

- 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.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS (N/A):

Not applicable

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Ornstein, A., & Levine, D. (2010). *Foundations of Education, 11th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:

- **“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. **[2 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; 8 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**. These summaries are intended to help students work on the analysis skills that will be necessary to write the policy paper. **[5 points each = 10 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. 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.* **[20 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. **[5 points each = 10 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.

TASKSTREAM REQUIREMENTS

Every student registered for any Education Policy course with a required performance-based assessment is required to submit this assessment, N/A to TaskStream (regardless of whether a course is an elective, a onetime course or part of an undergraduate minor). Evaluation of the performance-based assessment by the course instructor will also be completed in TaskStream. Failure to submit the assessment to TaskStream will result in the course instructor reporting the course grade as Incomplete (IN). Unless the IN grade is changed upon completion of the required TaskStream submission, the IN will convert to an F nine weeks into the following semester.

GMU POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

- a. Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>).
- b. Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- c. 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.

- d. 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/>).
- e. 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/>).
- f. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- g. 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/>).

PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

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: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website <http://gse.gmu.edu/>.

PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE:

- 8/26/13: Introduction and Class Overview
Reading for 9/9: Ornstein, Chapter 6.
Homework: find and read the U.S. Constitution. Locate the passages that discuss educational authority.
- 9/2/13: **NO CLASS: LABOR DAY**
- 9/9/13: 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 9/16: 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)
- 9/16/13: History of American Education. Discuss major events in the development of the American educational system. How did we get where we are today?
Reading for 9/23: Ornstein, Chapter 7.
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 summary that discusses these provisions and the policy implications. (3 points)
- 9/23/13: ****QUIZ #1****
Policy Structures: Local and State Levels. Discuss provisions for education in state constitutions. Discuss state responsibilities and activities related to education. Discuss the role of local school boards and central administrative offices.
Homework for 9/30: Article Summary #1 (5 points)
- 9/30/13: Policy Structures: Federal Level. 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 10/7: Ornstein, Chapter 9
Homework: Supreme Court education summary (details to be posted on Blackboard) (3 points)
- 10/7/13: 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 10/15: Ornstein, Chapter 8.
Homework: Study for Midterm!

- 10/15/13: **PLEASE NOTE: CLASS IS ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK!!**
****MIDTERM EXAM****
Education Funding and School Finance. Discuss how education is funded in the United States.
Reading for 10/21: Ornstein, Chapter 10
- 10/21/13: Social Influences on Education. Discuss the influence of family, peers, teachers, and other contextual factors on the education of individual students.
Reading for 11/4: Ornstein, Chapter 11.
Homework: Article Summary #2 (5 points)
- 10/28/13: **NO CLASS**
- 11/4/13: Education of Various Groups. 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 11/11: Ornstein, Chapter 12.
- 11/11/13: ****QUIZ #2****
Educational Opportunity. Discuss the achievement gap, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other efforts to level the educational playing field.
- 11/18/13: ****POLICY PAPER DUE****
Influence of the Media, Public Opinion and Special Interest Groups in Education Politics and Policy. How does the presentation of the educational system in the media affect how it is viewed? Do the media only report bad news? How do special interest groups affect the policy process?
Reading for 11/25: Ornstein, Chapter 13
- 11/25/13: 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?
- 12/2/13: ****SCHOOL BOARD SUMMARY DUE BY TODAY****
Putting the Pieces Together and Course Review.
- 12/9/13: **Reading Day**
- 12/16/13: **FINAL EXAM 4:30-7:15 p.m.**

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC(S):

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	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	errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations. 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.