

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
PhD Education, Program in Education Policy**

EDUC 870 001: Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics  
3.0 Cr - Spring 2015  
Tuesdays, 4:30 – 7:10pm West 1004

**PROFESSORS(S):**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

**A. Prerequisites/Co-requisites**

Admission to PhD program or permission of instructor.

**B. University Catalog Course Description**

Advanced study of selected topics in education preparing students for doctoral studies or who have been admitted to the PhD program in education.

Notes: May be repeated for credit with GSED approval.

**C. Expanded Course Description**

This education policy course examines public policy decision-making in education at local, state, and national levels, and its impact on education institutions, students, and public. The course focuses on government entities' authority over education decision-making, and resolution of competing policy arguments in the political arena. Course readings are designed to provide students with gain introduction to public policy and education with a particular focus on federal, state, and local authority for education in the U.S. In addition, course readings encourage students to think critically about education policy theories, methodologies, and the challenges of policy research and analysis. Course assignments are designed to assist students in understanding education provisions in the context of state constitutions, analyze policy articles, summarize policy events, and develop and frame policy proposals, presentations, and papers. Importantly, the course will expose students to the actors, processes, dynamics, contexts, theories, paradoxes, and implications of policy making, setting, and analysis in education institutions within the United States.

**LEARNER OUTCOMES or OBJECTIVES**

This course is designed to enable students 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; and
4. Understand the various research frames and methodologies used to study education policy.

**PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS:**

The course is a required course of the PhD in Education (Education Policy specialization) and is linked to the goals of the Graduate School of Education (GSE) and the mission of the Center for Education Policy and Evaluation (CEPE). Additionally, student outcomes are both linked to the mission and values of GSE and CEPE. Refer to the GSE website (<http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>) and the CEPE website (<http://cehd.gmu.edu/centers/edpolicy/home>) for more information about their goals, core values, and mission.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

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

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC. American Psychological Association.

Recommended and additional texts and readings to be provided during course Blackboard site as needed.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:**

You will be expected to complete several assignments that constitute your course grade. Each of the following is described briefly below, with more discussion and additional specifics as questions arise in class:

1. **State constitution presentation.** Review and present to the class a brief summary highlighting the education provisions in a state constitution other than Virginia (this is not a written assignment). (10 points)
2. **Article summary and analysis.** Select an article of your choice from a peer reviewed journal. Write a one page summary of the research and the author/s' findings and one page presenting policy implications of the research. (10 points)
3. **Policy event summary and analysis.** Attend and write a 2-3 page 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. Watching a school board meeting or other event on TV does not count as attending. (15 points)
4. **Policy framing proposal.** Prepare a 1–2 page outline for your final policy framing paper (see #6 below). The proposal will present the focus of your policy problem or issue and describe the policy level at which decisions about this policy are being made. It will also describe the framework/s you are considering for your final paper and why. (5 points).
5. **Policy framing paper.** Your policy framing paper will be written as a policy brief for a hypothetical policymaker at the local, state, or federal level. (Be sure to specify which level you are targeting.) The paper will first present the policy problem or issue you have chosen to address, including the nature of the problem and the nature of the debate about the problem. It will then present and defend a policy framework for interpreting evidence about the debate. Based on that framework, it will discuss what types of evidence one would need to make a sound policy recommendation. It may be useful to provide examples of strong or weak evidence as related to your topic, if such examples exist. The paper should draw upon and cite relevant course readings and should be no more than 5 pages: up to 1 page to outline the problem/issue, and the remainder to describe and defend the policy framework and its empirical implications. (30 points).
6. **Poster session presentation.** Read a chapter in the Sykes et al. text not assigned for class (EXCLUDING the commentaries). Prepare a brief summary, review, and critique of the chapter in the form of an academic poster presentation or roundtable discussion. You must provide a handout for everyone who attends and send a copy to the instructor before the session at which you present. Presentations will take place during the last three classes of the semester. (20 points).
7. **Course participation write up.** You will be expected to provide a 1 – 2 page response to your participation in class based on key criteria you provide in the beginning of the semester. (10 points).

The following grading scale will be used for all class assignments:

A	94 - 100
A-	90 - 93
B+	87 - 89
B	83 - 86
B-	80 - 82
C+	77 - 79
C	70 - 76
F	Below 70

## **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 (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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic/Learning Experiences</b>	<b>Readings and Assignments</b>
January 20	<b>Topic 1: Introduction to public policy, education, and policy studies in education</b>	Discussion of U.S. Constitution and authority for K-16 education
January 27	<b>Topic 2: Federal, state &amp; local authority for education in the U.S</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Mead: Ch. 23 and Cohen-Vogel & McLendon: Ch. 57) <i>HW: Selection of state constitutions, chapter and date for poster/round table presentation</i>
February 3	<b>Topic 3: Does the tail wag the dog? (What's the dog and what's the tail?)</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (McDermott: Ch. 58, Sykes, et.al: 59, and Jacobsen: 25) <i>HW: Presentation of state constitutions, Review of poster and policy assignments</i>
February 10	<b>Topic 3: Education policy theories: role of economics, political science, history</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Hanushek: Ch. 3, Datnow & Park: Ch. 28, and McDonnell: Ch. 4)
February 17	<b>Topic 4: Education policy theories: critical race and social justice</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Mickelson: Ch. 20, Farkas: Ch. 51, Jones: Ch. 69)
February 24	<b>Topic 5: Education policy research methodologies</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Borman: Ch. 11, Desimone: Ch. 16, McDonald: Ch. 16, and Pigott: Ch. 13) <i>HW: Policy framing proposal due</i>
March 3	<b>Topic 6: Challenges of policy analysis and policy research</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Weimer: Ch. 7, Orland: Ch. 10, and Rosen: Ch. 22)
March 17	<b>Topic 7: Policy research and research to inform policy</b>	Read Sykes, et.al (Honig: Ch. 27, West: Ch. 29, Plecki, et.al: Ch. 36, Reteille, et.al: Ch. 47)
March 24	<i>Policy researcher panel</i> • 4-6 advanced doctoral students present their policy research	<i>HW: Article Summary and Analysis paper due</i>
March 31	<i>Writing workshop</i>	Read Sykes, et.al (Vinovskis: Ch. 1, Lauren & Tyson: Ch. 5, Dixon, et.al: Ch. 6)
April 7	<i>Policy research site visit</i>	<i>HW: Policy event and summary analysis paper due</i>
April 14	<i>Roundtable Discussion I</i>	Read Sykes, et.al (Plank, et.al: Ch. 53, Fuller Ch. 67)
April 21	<i>Roundtable Discussion II</i>	<i>HW: Policy framing paper due</i>
April 28	<i>Roundtable Discussion III</i>	
May 5	<i>Roundtable Discussion IV and Course Wrap up</i>	<i>HW: Course participation write ups due</i>

## Grading Guidelines

	<b>Levels of Performance</b>			
	<b>(F) Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>© Basic</b>	<b>(B) Proficient</b>	<b>(A) Distinguished</b>
<b>Quality of Work</b>	Unacceptable	Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or no connection to course content or concepts.	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	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.
<b>Completeness of Work</b>	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.	Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.	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.	100% complete and error free Accurate & seamless writing; virtually a complete product
<b>Timeliness</b>	Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.	Excessively or repeatedly late.	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.	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.