

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

EDUC 303 001: Politics in American Education  
3 Credits, Spring 2015  
Mondays 4:30 – 7:10 Robinson Hall A245

**PROFESSOR(S):**

Name: Nicole M. Togno

Office hours: Mondays 3-4 and by appointment.

Office location: N/A

Office phone: 717-422-1431

Email Address: [ntogno@gmu.edu](mailto:ntogno@gmu.edu)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

**A. Prerequisites/Co-requisites**

None

**B. University Catalog Course Description**

Focus on the study of the American political system. Designed for students studying the American political systems 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:

**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 TEXTS:

Ornstein, A., Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2013). *Foundations of education, 12th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:

- **Class Participation:** Each week after the first class, you will be asked to submit a question about or reaction to the required reading, and to post these on Blackboard no later than **midnight** of the day prior to class. You are welcome to raise these questions in class and post responses to others' questions or reactions, as long as these are respectful and constructive. Class attendance counts towards your class participation grade and you are expected to be in class on time. In the event of an absence, please notify me in advance. **[25 points]**
- **“In the News” Presentation:** Each week, 1-2 members of the class will be scheduled to bring in a newspaper article related to the field of education. You will have approximately 5 minutes to present the main points of the article and suggest what they see as the policy implications. The presenting student ***should have read and considered the policy implications of his/her article prior to coming to class***. Please be prepared to engage in each week's discussions, even if you are not the one presenting. **[5 points]**
- **State Constitution Summary:** Locate the constitution of a state of your choosing and find the passages that discuss education and how it will be administered and regulated. Prepare a summary that discusses these findings and the policy implications. **[5 points]**
- **Article Summaries:** You will complete two written summaries of an approved article about an educational issue of their choosing. Summaries should be two or more pages (double-spaced, 12pt font) and include both the main points of the article **and the policy implications**. This summary is intended to help you work on the analysis skills that will be necessary to write the policy paper. **[10 points each; 20 points total]**
- **Policy Brief Paper Outline:** In preparation of the policy paper, you will be asked to submit a general outline of the components of the paper. The outline should include the topic overview, the purpose of the brief and identification of the

stakeholders, the significance of the topic, the history of the topic, the salient points that support the aim (research to date), conclusions, and policy implications. [5 points]

- **School Board Summary:** Attend and summarize a local school board meeting or other approved policy event. The summary should be three or more pages (double-spaced, 12pt font) long, and an original copy of the meeting's agenda must be included. [10 points]
- **Policy Paper:** Throughout the semester, you will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources (newspapers, interest groups, politicians, etc.). In this assignment, write a policy brief/advocacy paper on a topic of their own choosing that demonstrates your 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.* [30 points]

## GRADING SCALE AND EVALUATION

A+ = 97-100	B+ = 87-89	C+ = 77-79	D = 60-69
A = 93-96	B = 83-86	C = 73-78	F = 59 and below
A- = 90-92	B- = 80- 82	C- = 70-72	

This course will be graded on a point scale of 0-100. Grades will be based on the quality of work, completeness of work, timeliness, and participation. Rubrics are assigned for each assignment and are posted on Blackboard. All assignments are due at the beginning of class.

## 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 in 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 by the course instructor 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 for 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 AND 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:**

- 1/19/15:       **NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY**
- 1/26/15:       Introduction and Class Overview  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 4 & 5; Find the U.S. Constitution and locate and read the passages that discuss educational authority.*
- 2/2/15:        History of American Education. Discuss prominent educational movements and major events in the development of the American educational system. How did we get where we are today?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 6.*
- 2/9/15:        **\*\*STATE CONSTITUTION SUMMARY DUE\*\* (5 POINTS)**  
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.?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 7.*
- 2/16/15:       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.
- 2/23/15:       **\*\*ARTICLE SUMMARY #1 DUE\*\* (10 POINTS)**  
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?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 9*
- 3/9/15:        **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**
- 3/16/15:       Federal Courts and Education. Discuss the U.S. Supreme Court and its role in influencing K-12 and higher education policy. What are the major Supreme Court decisions related to education? How have they influenced education policy at various levels, as well as the day-to-day lives of educators?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 8.*

- 03/23/15: Education Funding and School Finance. Discuss how education is funded in the United States.  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 10*
- 3/30/15: **\*\*ARTICLE SUMMARY#2 DUE\*\* (10 POINTS)**  
Social Influences on Education. Discuss the influence of family, peers, teachers, and other contextual factors on the education of individual students.  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 11.*
- 4/6/15: 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?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 12; Do an internet search to research the events in Prince Edward County, VA schools in April 1951, as well as what happened between 1959 and 1964. We will discuss these events on 4/13: be prepared!!*
- 4/13/15: Educational Opportunity. Discuss the achievement gap, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other efforts to level the educational playing field.
- 4/20/15: **\*\*POLICY PAPER OUTLINE DUE\*\* (5 points)**  
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?  
*Readings for Next Class: Ornstein, Chapter 13*
- 4/27/15: 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?
- 5/4/15: **\*\*SCHOOL BOARD SUMMARY DUE BY TODAY\*\* (10 points)**  
Putting the Pieces Together and Writing Lab. Review of the course and individual and peer writing workshop. Students should bring a draft of his or her final paper to class for review with the instructor and with peers.
- 5/11/15: **FINAL POLICY PAPER DUE**

