

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

EDUC 303 001: Politics of American Education
3 Credits, Spring 2016
Monday 4:30 – 7:10 Robinson Hall A205

PROFESSOR(S):

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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

This course examines the politics of education in the United States. It considers the key institutions (e.g. school districts, state educational agencies, Congress, the executive branch, and the courts) and actors (e.g. elected officials, teachers, unions, corporations, parents, and the general public) shaping the American K-12 education system in order to shed light on recent reforms and the consequences for students. We will explore past conflicts over education, as well as current policy debates.

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 AND READINGS:

Krist, M. W. & Wirt, F. M. (2009). *The political dynamics of American education, 4th Edition*. Stanford, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Spring, J. (2011). *The politics of American education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Additional readings will be required at the discretion of the instructor. The following materials will be provided to students via blackboard:

Arum, R. (2003). *Judging school discipline: The crisis of moral authority*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press. (selected excerpt)

Cross, C. (2003). *Political education comes of age*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. (selected excerpt, p. xiii-xv)

Dunn, J. M., & West, M. R. *From schoolhouse to courthouse*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution (2009). (selected excerpt)

Fiel, J. (2013). Decomposing school resegregation: Social closure, racial imbalance, and racial isolation. *American Sociological Review*, 78(5), p. 228-248.

Gandara, P., & Rumberger, R. (2009). Immigration, language, and education: How does language policy structure opportunity? *Teachers College Record*, 111, p. 750-782.

Kaestle, C. (1983). *Pilars of the republic: Common schools and American society, 1780-1860*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (selected excerpt)

Ushomirsky, N., & Williams, D. (2015). Funding gaps 2015. *The Education Trust*. Retrieved from: <https://edtrust.org/resource/funding-gaps-2015/>

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY:

This course will be delivered in a face-to-face environment, and will consist of a combination of lecture-based instruction, large and small group discussion-based

instruction, as well as cooperative learning, media, Internet assignments, and individual presentations.

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. **[20 points]**
- **“In the News” Presentation:** Each week, 2-3 members of the class will be scheduled to bring in a newspaper article related to the field of education. You will have approximately 10 minutes to present the main points of the article, state why this issue is of importance, and answer questions from the class. The presenting student *should have considered the policy implications of his/her article prior to coming to class*. Should you choose an article from a non-vetted news source (i.e. blog, editorial), you must be prepared to justify the source (i.e. written by a scholar/expert in the field, parent, administrator, etc.). Please be prepared to engage in each week's discussions, even if you are not the one presenting. **[10 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]**
- **Policy Memos:** You will complete two short papers (with an option to complete a third) in the form of policy memos about an approved educational issue of your choosing. Paper prompts/topic ideas will be distributed during class. Two papers are required; you may write a third, if you choose, in which case I will drop the lowest grade of the three. This memo is intended to help you work on the analysis skills that will be necessary to write the policy paper. Each should be 3-4 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font). **[10 points each; 20 points total]**
- **School Board Summary:** Attend and summarize a local school board meeting or other approved policy event. The summary should be 3-4 (double-spaced, 12pt font) long, and an original copy of the meeting's agenda must be included. **[10 points]**
- **Policy Paper- Examining the policy making process for a particular education policy:** Throughout the semester, you will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources (newspapers, interest groups, politicians, etc.). Working in groups, choose a policy or a single policy component of a state

or federal law (Like Every Student Succeeds or IDEA). Write a policy paper of about 15 (no more than 20) double-spaced pages (12 pt font) demonstrating your knowledge of the chosen topic, as well as the understanding you have developed of effective policy writing. You will provide a presentation of your paper to the class during on either 4/25/16 or 5/02/16 You will Possible policy topics include:

- School choice, vouchers, charter schools
- Accountability policies (like ESSA, but select some aspect to examine)
- Student retention (vs. social promotion)
- Teacher certification, professional standards, tenure
- Teacher merit pay
- School discipline
- Universal Pre-K
- Bilingual education

Additional assignment information/expectations will be given later in the semester. [Paper: 30 points/Presentation: 5 points = 35 points total]

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.

TK20 PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Every student registered for any Education Policy course with a required performance-based assessment is required to submit this assessment to Tk20 through Blackboard (regardless of whether the student is taking the course as an elective, a onetime course or as part of an undergraduate minor). Evaluation of the performance-based assessment by the course instructor will also be completed in Tk20 through Blackboard. Failure to submit the assessment to Tk20 (through Blackboard) will result in the course instructor reporting the course grade as Incomplete (IN). Unless the IN grade is changed upon completion of the required Tk20 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:

1/18/16: **NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY**

1/25/16: Introduction and Class Overview.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 1*
- *Spring, Chapter 1*
- *Kaestle, p. 3-29 (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

2/01/16: History and Expansion of Mass Education in the U.S. 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:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 2*
- *Spring, Chapter 2*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

2/08/16: Competing Philosophies of Education. Discuss major conflicts and theories of education. How do these affect policy? What influences to they have on curriculum, how students are treated, etc.?

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapters 3, 5, & 8*
- *Spring, Chapter 3*
- *This American Life (Weblink)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

2/15/16: Policy Structures: Local Levels. Discuss the role of local school boards and central administrative offices.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapters 9 & 10*
- *Find the U.S. Constitution and locate and read the passages that discuss educational authority and be prepared to present your findings.*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

2/22/16: ****STATE CONSTITUTION SUMMARY DUE IN CLASS** (5 POINTS)**

Policy Structures: State Levels. Discuss provisions for education in state constitutions. Discuss state responsibilities and activities related to education.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 11*
- *Cross, p. xiii-xv (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

2/29/16: ****POLICY MEMO #1 DUE by 11:59pm** (10 POINTS)**

Policy Structures: Federal Level. Discuss the role of Congress in creating education policy and reform efforts and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA).

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 12*
- *Coleman, et al (Blackboard)*
- *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 3/14: be prepared!!*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

3/7/16: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

3/14/16: The Federal Courts and School Desegregation. Discuss the U.S. Supreme Court and its role in influencing K-12 education policy. Examine the major Supreme Court decisions related to education, and how they have influenced education policy at various levels.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Spring, Chapter 7*
- *Ushomirsky & Williams (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

03/21/15: Education Funding and School Finance. Discuss how education is funded in the United States.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Spring, Chapters 4 and 5*
- *Kahlenberg, p. 7-25 (Blackboard)*
- *Visit each website listed in the Web Links folder on Blackboard and be prepared to identify the following: Who are they? What do they do? What is their political orientation (right, left, bi-partisan, etc.)? Why are they important?*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

3/28/16: ****POLICY MEMO #2 DUE by 11:59pm** (10 POINTS)**

Social and Political Influences on Education. Discuss the influence of special interest groups, think tanks, teachers unions, parents, and other

actors on schooling. Examine the political ideologies that shape education policy.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Spring, Chapter 6*
- *Ravitch (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

4/4/16: The Business of Education. Discuss issues of market-based education reforms, including school choice, vouchers, charter schools, and public-private partnerships. Discuss the role the textbook industry and testing corporations.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Gandara & Rumberger (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

4/11/16: Educational Opportunity. Discuss the various achievement gaps and efforts to level the educational playing field. What are the provisions for students with disabilities and English language learners?

Readings for Next Class:

- *Arum (Blackboard)*
- *Dunn & West (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

4/18/16: Student Rights and School Discipline. Discuss the achievement gap, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other efforts to level the educational playing field.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Selected readings on the 2015 ESSA bill (Blackboard)*
- *See prompts for additional readings*

4/25/16: ****SCHOOL BOARD SUMMARY DUE by 11:59pm ** (10 points)**
Reauthorizing ESEA. Discuss the path to reauthorization ESEA.
Policy Paper Presentations

5/02/16: ****POLICY PAPER DUE by 11:59pm** (35 points)**
Policy Paper Presentations
Putting the pieces together: 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?

Class Participation Evaluation Rubric

Student participation is imperative to learning and a successful class. The following rubric outlines how student participation scores will be determined in this course. All students are expected to demonstrate specific characteristics throughout the semester. The quality and quantity of these actions will determine the points assigned for participation. Students who consistently demonstrate the following criterion throughout the semester will receive full points.

Students are expected to:

- a) Be punctual, present (in mind and body), and well prepared for class.
- b) Participate full in class activities and assignments - take an active part in small and large group discussions (without dominating the conversations) and pay attention to class lectures.
- c) Make insightful comments, which are informed by and demonstrate reflection of required readings. Specifically, submit timely weekly reflections via blackboard.
- d) Treat class activities and discussions as important components of the course, showing respect for fellow classmates and the course material.
- e) Complete assignments on time.

Policy Memo Evaluation Rubric

You will be expected to write two policy memos during the course of the semester, and may write an optional third. For all memos, the following rubric will be applied. The purpose of this assignment is to help students learn how to write academically rigorous, persuasive papers about a specific real world issue. Though there are commonalities, you should not approach writing a policy memo like you would an academic research paper. The objective in a policy memo is to provide a specific audience with the rationale for choosing a particular policy alternative or course of action.

- **Formatting, Organization, and Style (2 points)** [Memos under 3 pages or over 5 pages will be penalized]
 - Are all in-text citations present and properly formatted? (APA 6th Ed)?
 - Is the memo organized with a clear introduction (excluding the executive summary) that defines the problem, provides a roadmap for the memo, and summarizes the main recommendations?
 - Does the memo have a conclusion that draws together the key points?
 - Are there section headings, and do the section headings help the reader to follow the memo's "story"?
 - Is the memo free of spelling, grammatical, usage, and major stylistic errors? Is it clear and easy to read, yet written in a formal tone? Does it avoid jargon and state the problem and its solution in plain English? Note that the first-person ("We recommend...") is perfectly acceptable. Also

note that, with very limited exceptions, bullet-points should be avoided in favor of plain language.

- **Describing the Problem: The body of the memo (5 points)**
 - Does the memo demonstrate a grasp on the major issues and actors involved in the problem?
 - Does the memo accurately describe the scope of the problem, explaining to the reader why he or she should care?
 - Does the memo draw accurately and effectively on major social science research and informed (expert) opinion surrounding the problem?
 - Does the memo effectively summarize and explain the various (and often competing) positions taken by relevant actors on the problem?
 - Does the memo describe existing projects or proposals to address the problem, including those that run against the memo's recommendations?

- **Recommendations and Conclusions (3 Points)**
 - Does the memo clearly state their recommendations in a way that leaves no doubt as to the position of the authors?
 - Do the recommendations address competing proposals and potential counter-arguments?
 - Does the memo take its chosen audience into account, recommending actions that could plausibly be taken by the memo's recipient?
 - In general, are the recommendations plausible, taking into account the resources and circumstances necessary to carry them out?