

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD in Education, Education Policy Specialization

EDUC 870 (001) - *Education Policy: Process, Context and Politics*
3 Credits, Fall 2016
Wednesday/4:30 Thompson 2020, Fairfax Campus

Faculty

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Prerequisites/Corequisites

Admission to the PhD in Education Program

University Catalog Course Description

Examines public policy decision-making in education at local, state, and national levels, and its impact on education institutions, students, and public. Focuses on government entities' authority over education decision-making, and resolution of competing policy arguments in political arena.

Course Overview

This course includes exposure to various theories used to study education policy and the methods used for this scholarship and analysis.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered using a Lecture format.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

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
4. Understand the various research frames and methodologies used to study education policy.

Professional Standards (There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. However, most, if not all standards for educators expect professionals to be aware of the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context of public education in the United States. Thus course provides students with that background and understanding)

Upon completion of this course, students will have met the following professional standards:
NA

Required Texts

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

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

Additional Resources and References

Brafman, O. & Brafman, R. (2008). *Sway: The irresistible pull of traditional behavior*. New York: Broadway Books.

Cross, C. (2003). *Political education: National policy comes of age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

DelFattore, J. (1992). *What Johnny shouldn't read: Textbook censorship in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

DelFattore, J. (2010). *Knowledge in the making: Academic freedom and free speech in America's schools and universities*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Education Policy Analysis Archives, available on line (<http://epaa.asu.edu>)

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

Kingdon, J.W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Ravitch, D. (2003). *The language police*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Sabiter, P.A. (Ed) (2007). *Theories of the political process* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, available on line (<http://www.schev.edu>).

Stone, D. (1997). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. New York: W.W. Norton.

The Constitution of the United States, available on line (<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>)

The Constitution of Virginia, available on line (<http://www.legis.state.va.us/laws/Constitution.html>)

United States Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.ed.gov>)

United States Supreme Court, available on line (<http://www.supremecourtus.gov>)

Virginia State Department of Education, available on line (<http://www.pen.k12.va.us>)

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

• Assignments and Examinations

1. *State constitution presentation*. Review and present to the class a brief summary (about 10 - 15 minutes) highlighting the education provisions in a state constitution other than Virginia (this is not a written assignment).
Presentation Date: Sept. 14. (10 points)
2. *Presidential candidate analysis*. Each student will be randomly assigned a candidate for President or Vice President of the United States. You must research the candidate's position/s on PreK-16 education (be sure to look at the party platform to see if the candidate's prior speeches align with it). You will have about 20 minutes to present your findings to the class. Please include a handout that summarizes key points. **Presentation Date: September 21. (20 points)**.
3. *Chapter 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. Prepare questions or tasks to use as you teach the content of this chapter to your classmates. You must provide a handout for everyone ds

and send a copy to the instructor before the session at which you present. Your presentation should be approximately 30 minutes (20 to present and 10 for Q&A). **Dates for the chapter presentations are: Oct. 12 and Oct. 19 (20 points).**

4. *Policy brief outline.* Prepare **a 1–2 page outline** for your final policy brief (see #6 below). The outline 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 theory or conceptual framework/s you are considering for your final paper and why (look ahead to Chapters 28 and 57 in Sykes et al. for policy theories or perspectives). **Due: Oct. 12. (This is part of the policy brief assignment).**
5. *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. **Please submit shortly after attending the event but no later than Nov. 30 (15 points).**
6. *Policy brief paper.* Your 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/s or theory/ies for understanding the policy issue. 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 10 double spaced pages: up to 1 page to outline the problem/issue, and the remainder to describe the policy framework and its empirical implications as presented in your outline. No personal pronouns should appear in the policy brief. **Due Dec. 07 (35 points)**

****Please email electronic copies of all written assignments to me by noon on the day**

- **Other Requirements**

Students are expected to read all assignments before class and if a class is missed to get notes and any handouts from a colleague.

Students are expected to participate in discussions of the readings (either in the class as a whole or in small groups) and treat one another with respect.

Students are expected to turn in all assignments on time unless prior arrangements are made.

Please turn off your cell phone during class (this is an IM, texting, email checking free class)

As a courtesy to other students, please munch on snacks at break rather than during class

- **Course Performance Evaluation Weighting**

See point distribution above.

- **Grading Policies**

Grading Scale (see rubric on last page of this syllabus):

| | | | |
|------|--------|------|--------------|
| A = | 96-100 | A- = | 92-95 |
| B+ = | 89-91 | B = | 80-88 |
| C = | 79-75 | F = | 74 and below |

Professional Dispositions

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

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and 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/>.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason 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.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/api/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/>.
- 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/>).
- 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/>).
- The George Mason University Office of Student Support staff helps students negotiate life situations by connecting them with appropriate campus and off-campus resources. Students in need of these services may contact the office by phone (703-993-5376). Concerned students, faculty and staff may also make a referral to express concern for the safety or well-being of a Mason student or the community by going to <http://studentsupport.gmu.edu/>, and the OSS staff will follow up with the student.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/>.

Class Schedule

Class 1 Aug. 31—Introduction to public policy and education

- Introductions
- Review of syllabus & class schedule
- APA tip of the week
- Introduction to policy studies in education
- Discussion of the U.S. Constitution and authority for K-16 education
- **Assignment:** Read in Sykes, et al. Chapter 23 (Mead), Chapter 28 (Datnow & Park) and Chapter 57 (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon).

Class 2 Sept. 07—Federal, state & local authority for education in the U.S.

- Education policy & the legal system
- Overview of Federal policy history in K-12 education
 - Cohen-Vogel presents three frameworks to explore the enactment of NCLB, which one do you think is best (most helpful for understanding)? What isn't accounted for in these theoretical frameworks?
 - Compare these frameworks with those presented by Datnow and Park.
- Selection of state constitutions
- Selection of chapter and date for chapter presentation (be sure to have backups in mind)
- Review and discuss poster assignment and policy paper assignments
- **Assignment:** Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 58 (McDermott), Chapter 59 (Sykes, et al.) Chapter 25 (Jacobsen); and (2) Read the constitution for the state you selected and be prepared to give a 10 to 15 minute report on the provisions in it.

Class 3 Sept. 14— Does the tail wag the dog? (What's the dog and what's the tail?)

- Presentation of state constitutions: What is similar and what is different?
- Discussion of state and local role in education policy decisions
 - What are the challenges for using state/district-level governments to form national education policy?
 - Has the historic role of district- or community-level governance of K-12 education outlived its usefulness?
 - What are the implications of the work by McDermott, Sykes, et al., and Jacobsen for efforts to create national K-12 standards, curricula, and examinations
 - Randomly assign President and VP candidates for class 4 presentations

Class 4 Sept. 21—Presidential and VP positions on PreK-16 education

- Student Presentations
- **Assignment:** : Read in Sykes, et al.: Chapter 7 (Weimer), Chapter 10 (Orland), & Chapter 22 (Rosen).

Class 5 Sept. 28—Challenges of policy analysis and policy research

- *Additional time for Class 4 presentations if needed*
- How does or can research inform policy? Lessons from School Board Member research
- How do you identify *advocacy based* policy analysis?
 - Both Weimer and Orland describe a distinction between policy research and policy analysis: What are sources of possible bias in each?
 - Rosen presents a different lens to look at education policy and the scholarship that supports it. How does Rosen's approach differ from Weimer and Orland? Which approach makes the most sense of the policy world as you know it?
- **Assignment:** Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 3 (Hanushek), & Chapter 4 (McDonnell).

Class 6 Oct. 05—Economics, political science and education policy

- Discussion of the politics of the forthcoming November elections
- Discussion of the strengths and limitations of using economic or political science frames.
 - What are the assumptions of an economic approach to studying policy? What are the assumptions of a political science approach to studying policy?
 - Are policy decisions rational?
 - What kinds of research methods do these analyses normally use?

Class 7 Oct 12— Chapter presentations discussions

- Policy Brief outline due.

Class 8 Oct. 19—Chapter presentations and discussions

- **Assignment:** Read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 20 (Mickelson), Chapter 51 (Farkas), & Chapter 69 (Jones et al.)

Class 9 Oct 25— Education policy and social justice

- Does policy have a moral purpose?
 - Chapters by Mickelson, Farkas, and Jones et al. each approach the policy challenges of equality from a different place. Does the education policy community have an obligation to study and formulate policy options to address social and economic inequalities? If so, what are ways to approach the issues?

Class 10 Nov 02—Policy Researcher Panel

- **Assignment:** Read all analyses of the election outcomes. Do you see trends? What might be the outcome for education policies at the local, state, and federal levels?

Class 11 Nov. 09—General Election Outcomes

- **Be prepared to discuss results of the presidential election, house and senate races, and any state house changes of interest**
- **Assignment:** For class 12, read in Sykes et al.: Chapter 11 (Borman), Chapter 14 (Desimone), Chapter 16 (McDonald), & Chapter 13 (Pigott). Policy Framing Proposal Due Oct 19.

Class 12 Nov. 16— Education policy research methodologies

- The very political nature of education policy research.
 - Borman discusses the political environment that led to decisions by the federal government to favor SBR over other types of empirical studies. Pigott suggests that research syntheses and meta-analysis are useful research strategies. What policy topic or topics might be studied using randomized trials? Why?
 - Desimone suggests there are a number of ways to think about education policy research. Think of some policy problems that might lend

themselves to her recommendations. McDonald discusses policy evaluation. Although evaluation studies are favored by many in the policy community, some scholarly journals will not accept them as examples of research. Why might that be?



Class 13 Nov. 23— No Class. Happy Thanksgiving Eve!

Class 14 Nov. 30—Discussion of students' policy briefs

Class 15 Dec. 07—Putting the pieces together

- A common theme in educational policy studies is the tension between state autonomy vis a vis the goals and expectations of schools and federal interest and over site.
 - Plank and Kessler discuss the ebb and flow of state authority in the US and other countries. Fuller argues that we can learn a great deal by studying decentralized reforms. How do these respective points of view help frame and inform policy debates?

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

Assessment Rubric(s)

Grading Guidelines: EDUC 870 Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics

| Grade/Points | Quality of Work | Completeness of Work | Timeliness | Participation |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 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 and error free 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 80 – 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 - 79 | 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 below 74 | 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. |