

**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 2017
Monday 4:30 – 7:10 Robinson Hall A210

PROFESSOR(S):

Name: Nicole M. Togno
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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 is an introduction to the historical, social, and cultural influences that have shaped political decisions affecting education in the United States. It considers the key institutions (e.g., the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, state education agencies, and school districts) and actors (e.g., elected and appointed officials, unions, philanthropists and the business community, parents, and students). It will examine past conflicts over education governance, current policy debates, and the successes and challenges facing ongoing reform efforts. The curriculum focuses on local, state, and federal education policy.

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 ideologies that inform education policy decisions;
- Recognize the influence of institutions outside education in the formation of education policy and reform efforts.
- Demonstrate the skills needed to produce a policy analysis paper.

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:

The following texts are available for purchase through the GMU bookstore, or via Amazon, etc. A copy of each text will also be on reserve at Fenwick library.

Kirst, 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.

All remaining readings are available on the course website on Blackboard. Readings will be available directly as links on the Internet, or through electronic reserves at Fenwick Library.

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 EVALUATION:

- **Class Participation:** Each student is expected to attend every class and to contribute the discussions of the class in a constructive manner. This means reading the required material before class and participating in any discussions, debates, or teacher inquiries. Each student is expected to participate in the on-line forum via the threaded discussion tool on Blackboard. This is an online forum for the class where students are expected to share the insights and/or critiques of the reading, or debate issues discussed in class. Each student is expected to make a minimum of twelve substantive contributions to this online forum [**15 points**].
- **Current Issues Oral Presentation:** All students are expected to follow coverage of education issues in newspapers (e.g. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*) and in education-specific new sources (e.g., *Education Week*,

and the growing education blogosphere). Each week, 2-3 members of the class will be scheduled to present an article related to an educational issue that aligns with the class content found on the syllabus. You will have approximately 10 minutes to present the main points of the article, state why this issue is of importance, relate the article to the assigned course readings, and answer questions from the class. The presenting student *should have considered the policy implications of his/her article prior to coming to class*. Each student should be prepared to engage in all discussions, even if you are not the one presenting. **[15 points]**

- **Policy Memos:** You will complete two short papers 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 paper should be in the form of 1,000-word policy memos. **[15 points each; 30 points total]**
- **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 (journal articles, Congressional Service Reports, White Papers, etc.). Each student is required to develop a written analysis of an education policy issue. The paper must be a minimum of 4,500 words (excluding references) and no more than 5,000 words. **[Paper: 30 points]**

Detailed expectations for this assignment will be discussed in class and posted on the course website on Blackboard..

- **Policy Paper Proposal and Outline:** Each student is required to submit a 3-5 page proposal detailing the topic of their policy analysis paper and why this topic is relevant to the student of education politics. The student must also include an outline of the paper. The topic must be approved by the instructor to proceed. **[10 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 for each assignment will be 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

Policies

- a. Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-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 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.
- d. 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/>).
- e. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- a. Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/>.
- b. The 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/>).
- c. The 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/>).
- d. The Student Support & Advocacy Center staff helps students develop and maintain healthy lifestyles through confidential one-on-one support as well as through interactive programs and resources. Some of the topics they address are

healthy relationships, stress management, nutrition, sexual assault, drug and alcohol use, and sexual health (see <http://ssac.gmu.edu/>). Students in need of these services may contact the office by phone (703-993-3686). 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://ssac.gmu.edu/make-a-referral/>.

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/>.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

1/23/17: Introduction and Course Overview.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 1*
- *Spring, Chapter 1*
- Kaestle, C. (1983). *Pillars of the republic: common schools and the American society*, pp. 3-29. Hill and Wang.
- Kirst, M. W. (2004). Turning points: a history of American school governance, in N. Epstein (eds) *Who's in charge here? The tangled web of school governance and policy*, pp 14-41. Brookings Institution Press.

01/30/17: 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*
- Moe, T. (2000). The two democratic purposes of education. In L. M. McDonnell, P. M. Timpane, & R. Benjamin (Eds.) *Rediscovering the democratic purposes of education*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.

- Beach, J. M. (2007). The ideology of the American dream: Two competing philosophies in Education, 1776-2006
- Labaree, D, F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Education Research Journal*, 34(1), p. 39-81.

2/06/17: 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, & 7 (skim chapter 8 for context)*
- *Spring, Chapter 3*
- *This American Life podcast (Weblink)*

2/13/17: Policy Structures: Local Levels. Discuss the role of local school boards and central administrative offices.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapters 9 & 10*
- Fusarelli, L. (2009). Improvement or interference? Reenvisioning the “state” in education reform, in B. Fussarelli & B. Cooper (Eds.) *The rising state: How state power is transforming our nation’s schools*, pp. 243-270. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Aspen Institute (2015). Roles and responsibilities of the State Education Agency.

2/20/17: ****POLICY MEMO #1 DUE by 11:59pm****

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, C. (2003). *Political education: Nationla policy comes of age*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. pp. xiii-xv
- Manna, P. (2007). Patterns of federal interest in education (chapter 3) & Patterns of federal involvement in education (chapter 4). In *School’s In: Federalism and the national education agenda* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

2/27/17: Policy Structures: Federal Level. Discuss the role of Congress in creating education policy and reform efforts and the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA).

Readings for Next Class:

- *Kirst & Wirt, Chapter 12*
- Ten Supreme Court Cases About Education (weblink on Blackboard)

- Ryan, J. E. (2009). The real lessons of school desegregation. In M. West (Eds.) *From schoolhouse to courthouse: The judiciary's role in American Education*. Brookings Institution Press, pp. 73-95.
- *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. **Be prepared to discuss these events!!***

3/6/17: 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*
- Congressional Services Report on Education Funding
- Ushomirsky, N. & Williams, D. (2016). *Funding gaps 2015*. The Education Trust.
- Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C., & Persico, C. (2016). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: evidence from school finance reforms. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 157-218.

3/13/17: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

03/20/17: ****POLICY MEMO #2 DUE by 11:59pm****

Education Funding and School Finance. Discuss how education is funded in the United States.

Readings for Next Class:

- *Spring, Chapters 4 and 5*
- Reckhow, S. & Tompkins-Stange, M. (2015) "Singing from the same hymnbook" at Gates and Broad. In F. Hess & J.R. Henig (Eds.) *New Education Philanthropy* (chapter 3).
- Moe, T. (2011). The rise of the teachers unions
- *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?*

3/27/17: ****POLICY PAPER OUTLINE DUE by 11:59pm****

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*

- Au, W. & Hollar, J. (2016) Opting out of the education reform industry. *Monthly Review*, p. 29-37.

4/3/17: 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:

- Fiel, J. (2013). Decomposing school resegregation: social closure, racial imbalance, and racial isolation. *American Sociological Review*, 78(5), p. 828-848.
- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. & Noguera, P. (2010) The achievement gap and discipline gap: two sides of the same coin. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), p. 59-86.
- McKinsey & Company (2015). The economic impact of the achievement gap in America's schools.
- Goas, T. L., & Alexander, K. L. (2007). Family (dis)advantage and the educational prospects of better off African American Youth: How race still matters. *Teachers College Record*, 109(2), p. 285-321.

4/10/17: Educational Opportunity and the Achievement Gap. Discuss the various achievement gaps, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other efforts to level the educational playing field.

- *See in-class prompts for final reading assignments*

4/17/17: 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?

4/24/17: Student policy paper presentations.

5/01/17: ****POLICY PAPER DUE by 11:59pm**

Student policy paper presentations.

Course evaluation.

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 fully 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**
 - 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**
 - 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**
 - 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?