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

EDUC 896 (001) – Critical Issues and Trends in Federal Education Policy  
3 Credits, Spring 2018  
Tuesday 16:30, Robinson Hall B218, Fairfax Campus

Faculty  
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Prerequisites/Corequisites

None.

University Catalog Course Description

Explores selected topics in education across all doctoral specializations. Offered by Graduate School of Education. May be repeated within the term for a maximum 6 credits.

Course Overview

This course examines the development of education policy at the federal level, with a focus on competing theories of the policy process, the political and policy dynamics of education reform, the role of institutions and interest groups, and the use of evidence in policymaking, to provide an in-depth understanding of how and why decisions are made, as well as their implementation and impact. Specifically, this course will:

- Provide historical context on the changing role of the federal government in education and the persistent and dynamic tension between federal and state authority.
- Review major federal laws and reforms, from early childhood through higher education, with a focus on current debates, critical issues, and key challenges.
- Identify the main policy actors in the federal education arena, both inside and outside of government, and examine their respective roles, authority, resources, strategies, and impact.
- Explore how different theories of the policy process can guide and facilitate the study of federal education developments and assess their comparative strengths and limitations.
- Compare the education policy positions of major political parties, track their evolution, and analyze how they have been shaped by evidence and ideology.
Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered using a lecture/seminar format.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

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

1. Understand the historical development and changing federal role in education policy, including major federal education laws and reforms.
2. Examine critical issues and trends in federal education policy, as well as the various actors and perspectives involved in education debates and decision-making.
3. Explore policy process theories and apply them to the analysis of federal education events.
4. Study in depth a federal education policy issue by examining its progress through the various stages of the policy process.

Professional Standards

Not Applicable.

Required Texts


(Available Online through Mason Libraries (ML) and for purchase through major retailers.)

Additional required reading assignments are listed under the Class Schedule.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor. Format: Times New Roman size 12 font, 1” page margins and 1.5 line spacing.

- Assignments and/or Examinations

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Assignment Due Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional Hearing</td>
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<td>Feb. 13</td>
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<td>Policy Presentation</td>
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<td>Policy Memo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Paper</td>
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<td>May 1</td>
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- **Class Participation:** Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. *(10 points)*

- **Congressional Hearing:** Watch online and/or read the official transcript (available through Mason Libraries) of a recent congressional hearing on any federal education issue and prepare a brief 2-page summary that describes the topic, the witnesses’ testimony and perspectives, the lawmakers’ statements, questions and discussion with their colleagues and the witnesses, and your commentary. *(10 points)*

- **Policy Presentation:** Prepare a short, 15-minute class presentation (in PowerPoint) on a major federal education policy development since 2005, such as a law, regulation or executive action. Discuss its history, significance, political context and policy impact, drawing on official records and media coverage, and answer any questions. *(15 points)*

- **Policy Memo:** Assume that you are preparing a memo for a federal policymaker (legislative or executive) on a federal education issue of your choice. The memo should include a) the purpose of the memo, b) issue background, context and recent developments, c) description of the policy problem and/or pending decision, d) discussion of options, including pros/cons and support/opposition, and e) your recommendation, along with a rationale. The memo should be 4-5 pages. *(25 points)*

- **Policy Paper:** Choose a federal education issue and analyze it through the lens of a policy process theory. The paper should a) discuss the federal policy issue and background, b) describe its progress through the stages of the policy process, and c) apply a policy process theory in understanding the developments around this issue area. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate a student’s understanding of both the chosen issue and the policy process theory. The paper should be no less than 10 pages. *(40 points)*

- **Resources for course assignments:**
  - U.S. Congress: [https://www.congress.gov/](https://www.congress.gov/)
  - U.S. Senate Committee: [https://www.help.senate.gov/](https://www.help.senate.gov/)
  - U.S. House Committee: [https://edworkforce.house.gov/](https://edworkforce.house.gov/)

- **Other Requirements**
  Students are expected to arrive on time, actively participate in discussions, read assignments prior to class, and meet deadlines. Please notify the instructor in advance if you are unable to meet any of these requirements. Phone/tablet use is not allowed during class.

- **Grading**
  This course uses the university-wide system for grading graduate courses. See [http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/](http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/) Cumulative points corresponding to each grade are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A+</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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Professional Dispositions

See https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/

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 https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/).

• 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/aero/tk20. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/.

• For information on student support resources on campus, see https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus

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

- Jan. 23: Introduction
  - Student & Instructor Introductions
  - Review of Syllabus
  - Introduction to Federal Education Policy Institutions & Processes
  - Discussion

- Jan. 30: The Evolving Federal Role in Education
  - Required readings:
    - Center for Education Policy. (1999). *A brief history of the federal role in education: Why it began and why it's still needed.* Available at: goo.gl/e6rZ9S
    - Cross, C. (2005). *The evolving role of the federal government in education.* Available at: goo.gl/aXh73s
  - Optional readings:

- Feb. 6: Theories of the Policy Process
  - Required readings:
  - Chapters 1 and 10 in *Theories of the policy process.*

- Feb. 13: Elementary and Secondary Education
  - Congressional Hearing Due
  - Required readings:
    - Chapters 2 and 3 in *Theories of the policy process.*


Optional readings:


- Feb. 20: Elementary and Secondary Education
  - Required readings:
    - Chapters 4 and 5 in *Theories of the policy process.*
  - Optional readings:
    - Education Commission of the States. (2016). *ESSA: Quick guides on top issues*. Available at: goo.gl/vY9ue4

- Feb. 27: Policy Presentations
  - Policy Presentations Due

- March 6: Special Education
  - Required readings:
    - Chapters 6 and 7 in *Theories of the policy process.*


U.S. Department of Education. (2010). Thirty-five years of progress in educating children with disabilities through IDEA. Available at: goo.gl/E7kfya

Optional readings:


U.S. Department of Education. (2016). 38th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2016. Available at: goo.gl/ mMnncD

Ujifusa, A. (2017). Full funding for special education? Lawmakers try for fifth straight Congress, Education Week. Available at: goo.gl/SYuF2Y

March 20: Early Childhood Education

Required readings:

Chapters 8 and 9 in Theories of the policy process.

Bassok, D., Magnuson, K., & Weiland, C. (2016). Building a cohesive, high-quality early childhood system. In M. Hansen & J. Valant (Eds.), Memos to the President on the Future of U.S. Education Policy. Available at: goo.gl/LQqVWb (ML)


Optional readings:


Muhlhausen, D. (2014). Why are we expanding the federal role in early-childhood education? The Atlantic. Available at: goo.gl/hPaJrm

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Expanding opportunities to support our youngest learners. Available at: goo.gl/uGuATk

• March 27: Teacher Preparation
  o Policy Memo Due
  o Required readings:
  o Optional readings:
    o Kreighbaum, A. (2016). New accountability for teacher prep, *Inside Higher Ed*. Available at: goo.gl/Tf3sKg

• April 3: Higher Education
  o Required readings:
    o Burke, L. (2014). *Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act - toward policies that increase access and lower costs*. The Heritage Foundation. Available at: goo.gl/U7MX1W
  o Optional readings:
April 10: Higher Education
  - Required readings:
  - Optional readings:

April 17: Career and Technical Education
  - Required readings:
- Kantrov, I. (2014). *Opportunities and challenges in secondary career and technical education*. Education Development Center, Inc. Available at: goo.gl/rfnmQL
- Optional readings:
  - Carnevale, A., Jayasundera, T., and Hanson, A. (2012). *Career and technical education: Five ways that pay on the way to the B.A.* Available at: goo.gl/nji1MS

- **April 24: Research & Privacy**
  - Required readings:
    - Harris, D. N. (2016). *Improving the federal role in education research*. In M. Hansen & J. Valant (Eds.), Memos to the President on the Future of U.S. Education Policy. Available at: goo.gl/Sbxnw6

- **May 1: Looking to the Future**
  - Policy Paper Due

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