

**George Mason University**  
**College of Education and Human Development**  
**Education Policy**

EDUC 303 (001) – Politics of American Education  
3 Credits, Spring 2018  
Mondays 4:30-7:10 p.m. Krug Hall, Room 242, Fairfax Campus

**Faculty**

Name: Matthew J. Ragone, Ph.D.  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Office Location: West 2100, Fairfax Campus  
Office Phone: 703-993-3679  
Email Address: [mragone@gmu.edu](mailto:mragone@gmu.edu)

**Prerequisites/Co-requisites**

None.

**University Catalog Course Description**

Focus on the study of the American political system as it relates to education. Designed for students studying the American political system and students interested in careers in education. Explores how interactions between various levels and branches of governments affect education.

**Course Overview**

Not applicable.

**Course Delivery Method**

This course will be delivered using a lecture and class discussion format with occasional online discussions and assignments.

**Learner Outcomes or Objectives**

This course is designed to enable students to:

- understand and explain the connections between education and the political process in the United States;
- understand and explain how authority for education is dispersed among local, state, and federal governments;
- understand and discuss the different and often competing philosophies that inform education policy decisions;
- understand and discuss the role of interest groups and of the media in influencing education decisions;

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the development and execution of education policy at all levels of government and over time.

## Professional Standards

Not Applicable.

## Required Readings

### Text:

Ornstein, A. Levine, D., Gutek, G., & Vocke, D. (2016). *Foundations of Education, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Boston, MA: Cengage.

### Articles:

*As current events are an important part of this course and education policy is in constant motion, other articles may be assigned throughout the semester. All articles are posted in this course's Blackboard site. You are responsible for finding articles on your own if Blackboard is inaccessible or if the linked files are not in your preferred format.*

Baker, A. (2013, September 28). Culture warrior, gaining ground: E.D. Hirsch sees his education theories taking hold. *The New York Times*.

Baker, B. (2014). Evaluating the recession's impact on state school finance systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(91), 1-33.

Cross, C.T. (2015). *The shaping of federal education policy over time*. The Progress of Education Reform, 16(2), Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Davidson, E., Reback, R., Rockhoff, J., & Schwartz, H.L. (2015) Fifty ways to leave a child behind: Idiosyncrasies and discrepancies in states' implementation of NCLB. *Educational Researcher*, 44(6).

Gamberg, D. (2016), March 29). What defines a good school? *Education Week*, 35(26).

Hoff, D. J. (2008, August 27). Democrats air dueling ideas on education. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01dems.h28.html?qs=NCLB+stalled>

Klein, Alison (2016, March 31). The Every Student Succeeds Act: An ESSA overview. *Education Week*.

Lynch, A., Lerner, R., & Leventhal, T. (2013). Adolescent academic achievement and school engagement: An examination of the role of school-wide peer culture. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(1), 6-19.

Nicholes-Barrer, I., Gill, B.P., Gleason, P., Tuttle, C.C. (2014). Does student attrition explain KIPP's success? *Education Next*, 14(4), 62-70.

Romans, A. (2013, December 9). People who say "college isn't for everyone" never mean their own kids. *Quartz*. Retrieved from: <http://qz.com/155397/americans-who-say-college-isnt-for-everyone-never-mean-their-own-kids/>.

## Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time using Blackboard. Details will be shared in class. All due dates will be announced well in advance.

## Assignments and/or Examinations

- **Current Education Events (2 points):** Each week 1-2 students will bring in a news item related to the field of education. Students will have approximately 5 minutes to outline the main points of the article and suggest any policy implications. We will create a schedule at our first class meeting.

*Note:* This is not a formal presentation. It is not necessary to prepare handouts or slides. The goal is to lead a discussion on educational implications of the news story. Presenting students should not only have read the article in its entirety, but should also have spent some time considering the impact and importance of the article on education policy and specific topics we've been discussing in class.

- **Weekly Reflection (1 point each = 10 points total):** Students will reflect on what they have learned from class lectures and discussions in writing via the Blackboard Discussion Board. Twelve class meetings will have substantive information on which to reflect. Students need only write 10 reflections. *All reflections are due prior to the start of the next class meeting.*
- **State Constitution Homework Assignment & Presentation (5 points):** Students will locate the state constitution of an assigned state (determined in class). Prepare a brief, 5 minute presentation for class on 2/12/18. More details on expectations will be shared in class.
- **Article Summary (5 points):** Students will complete a written summary of a news item about an educational issue. The summary should be 2-3 pages long and include both the main points of the article as well as policy implications. This summary is intended to help students work on the analysis skills necessary to write the policy paper. You may use the same news item as the *Current Education Events* assignment if the topic interests you.
- **Policy Paper (20 points):** Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to examples of policy writing from various sources (academic journals, newspapers, interest groups, etc.). In this assignment, students will write a policy brief/advocacy paper on a topic of their own choosing. Students should demonstrate their knowledge of their chosen topic, as well as the

understanding they have developed of effective policy writing. Additional information and expectations will be provided in class.

- **School Board Summary (8 points):** Students will attend and summarize a local school board meeting. The summary should be 2-3 pages long. Additional information and expectations will be provided in class. Please also turn in an original copy of the meeting's agenda.
- **Quizzes (5 points each = 10 points total):** Students will have 2 short quizzes during the semester. Each will include material from the textbook, class discussions, and homework assignments. Quizzes are intended to assess comprehension of content as well as to prepare you for the midterm and final.
- **Midterm Exam (15 points):** The midterm will assess understanding and comprehension of material from the textbook, class discussions, homework assignments and quizzes. We will have an in-class review activity prior to the midterm. More information and expectations will be provided in class.
- **Final Exam (25 points):** The final exam will assess understanding and comprehension of material from the textbook, class discussions, homework assignments, quizzes, and the midterm exam. It is therefore a cumulative examination. We will have in-class reviews and discuss optional study sessions. GMU also provides Reading Days one class meeting prior to finals week. More information and expectations will be provided in class.
- **Class Participation:** Active engagement with classmates and the instructor during class meetings is critical to your understanding and comprehension of the material in this course. You will not be assessed on your engagement directly. However, students who demonstrate positive engagement at every meeting will certainly do well on graded assessments.
- **Preparation and Positive Relationships:** It is also critical that every student comes to class well prepared, ready to interact with classmates, and prepared to ask relevant questions and share perspectives. In this course we assume positive intentions no matter what experiences students might be coming from. In any course associated with politics there is likely to be a wide range of perspectives. This is good! It allows for rich discussion and opportunities to explore a broad range of opinions. Open mindedness, listening, and a willingness to understand each other are vital to positive outcomes.
- **Grading:** Please see rubric on *pages 9 & 10* for grading scales and assignment expectations. Specific rubrics will be provided for each major assignment.

## Professional Dispositions

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

## Class Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change without advanced notice to students. Please check your GMU email and/or Blackboard daily for possible changes.*

1/22/18: Introduction and Class Overview. Get to know each other, review syllabus and course description, assign and schedule presentations and state constitution activity. Discuss the purpose of the learning about politics of American Education. Discussion on the status of American education today.

***Reading for 1/29/17:*** Ornstein, Chapters 4 & 5.

***Homework for 1/29/17:*** 1<sup>st</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 1/29/18.

1/29/18: 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 2/5/18:*** Ornstein, Chapter 6 & Baker, A. (2013) article.

***Homework for 2/5/17:*** 2<sup>nd</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 2/5/18.

2/5/18: 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?

***Reading for 2/12/18:*** Ornstein, Chapter 7.

***Homework for 2/12/18:*** State Constitution presentation due next time; 3<sup>rd</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 2/12/18.

2/12/18: **\*STATE CONSTITUTION PRESENTATIONS\***

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.

***Readings for 2/19/18:*** Cross, C.T. (2015) article; Hoff, D.J. (2008) article.

***Homework for 2/19/18:*** Study for Quiz #1; 4<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 2/19/18.

2/19/18: **\*QUIZ #1\***

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?

***Reading for 2/26/18:*** Ornstein, Chapter 9.

***Homework for 2/26/18:*** Article Summary due next time; 5<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 2/26/18.

2/26/18: **\*ARTICLE SUMMARY DUE\***

Federal Courts and Education. Discuss the make-up of the U.S. Supreme Court and its role in influencing K-12 and higher education policy. What are some of the important decisions of the Court and how have they influenced education policy?

*Readings for 3/5/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 8; Baker, B. (2014) article, pp. 1-7.

*Homework for 3/5/18*: Study for the midterm; 6<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 3/5/18.

3/5/18: **\*MIDTERM EXAM\***

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

*Readings for 3/19/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 10; Lynch et al. (2013) article; 7<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 3/19/18.

3/12/18: **\*SPRING BREAK\***

3/19/18: Social Influences on Education. Discuss the influence of family, peers, teachers, and other contextual factors on the education of individual students.

*Readings for 3/26/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 11; Romans, A. (2013) article.

*Homework for 3/26/18*: Article Summary #2 due next time; 8<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 3/26/18.

3/26/18: Education of Various Groups. Discuss the influence of social class and race/ethnicity and how they relate to school achievement. What can schools do to address these issues?

*Readings for 4/2/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 12; Davidson et al. (2015) article; Klein (2016) article.

*Homework for 4/2/18*: Study for Quiz #2; 9<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 4/2/18.

4/2/18: **\*QUIZ #2\***

Educational Opportunity. Discuss the achievement gap, NCLB, Race to the Top, Common Core, ESSA, and other efforts to level the educational playing field.

*Readings for 4/9/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 16; Nichols-Barrer et al. (2014).

*Homework for 4/9/18*: Policy Paper due next time; 10<sup>th</sup> Weekly Reflection due prior to 4/9/18.

4/9/18: **\*POLICY PAPER DUE\***

Education Reform in America. Discuss major reform efforts over the past 2 decades. What is needed? How do we determine success?

*Readings for 4/16/18*: Ornstein, Chapter 13; Gamberg, D. (2016).

*Homework for 4/9/18*: Policy Paper due next time; Weekly Reflection due prior to 4/16/18 (only if you have not completed 10).

4/16/18: 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?

*Homework for 4/23/18*: School Board summary due next time; Weekly Reflection due prior to 4/23/18 (only if you have not completed 10).

4/23/18: **\*SCHOOL BOARD SUMMARY DUE\***

Putting the Pieces Together: How Do All the Moving Parts Determine Reality? How do the various educational stakeholders we've discussed throughout the semester collaborate or conflict in the policy process? Who is ultimately in charge?

*Homework for 4/30/18*: Weekly Reflection due prior to 4/16/18 (only if you have not completed 10).

4/30/18: Catch up and Review. This class meeting is reserved for any content that we might not have covered in other class meetings. We will also review for the final exam.

*Homework for 5/7/18*: Study for the final.

5/7/18: **Reading Day**

5/14/18: **\*FINAL EXAM\***

## 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](mailto: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/> .**



## Assessment Rubric

Grade/Pts.	Quality of Work	Completeness	Timeliness	Participation
A 94-100	Exceptional quality and insight; rare and valuable contributions to the field.	100% complete and error free.	100% on time.	Questions and comments reveal thoughtfulness; consistent class engagement; a class leader.
A- 90-93	Very high quality; demonstrates evidence of significant reflection and evaluation; clear and convincing writing; work is free of grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.	Accurate and seamless writing; virtually a complete product.	Nearly or always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations.	Excellent undergraduate student; actively engaged; provides on-target and thoughtful responses; good team participant.
B+ 87-89	Convincingly on target; demonstrates evidence of understanding and application; clear and concise writing; very few distracting grammatical, spelling, or citation errors.	Accurate and seamless writing; may have minor shortcomings.	Almost always on time; communicates with professor in emergencies or unusual situations.	Well above average undergraduate student; actively engaged in moving the group toward goal.
B 83-86	Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity.	Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the professor's ability to see the product as a whole.	Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with professor; not necessarily chronic.	Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection; engaged almost all the time.
C+ 78-82	Evidence of understanding present but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader; weak or insufficient citations.	Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed.	More than half the assignments are late; no assignments are excessively late.	Doesn't contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection; follows rather than leads group activities.

C 71-77	Barley meets undergraduate level quality work; unsophisticated; assignments show little or no connection to course content or concepts.	Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.	Several missed deadlines or excessively late make up work.	Weak or minimal participation; passive; occasionally unengaged in class discussions or group work; sometimes sidetracks group because of lack of preparedness.
D 66-70	Work is below undergraduate quality. Assignments do not meet minimum parameters for evidence or reflection.	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task due to lack of completion.	Several missed deadlines; incompletes not made up.	Minimum participation; often not engaged in class discussions or group work; often sidetracks group do to lack of understanding or preparedness.
F 65 or below	Unacceptable quality of work.	Incomplete work to the extent that it is unrecognizable as the assigned task.	Often misses deadlines; incompletes not made up.	No constructive participation; destructive; intolerant toward other points of view.