

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

EDUC 303-001 – Politics of American Education  
3 Credits, Spring 2019  
Wednesdays 1:30 p.m., Thompson Hall L013, Fairfax Campus

**Faculty**

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**Prerequisites/Corequisites**

None.

**University Catalog Course Description**

Focus on the study of the American political system. Designed for students studying the American political system and students interested in careers in education. Explores how interactions between various levels and branches of government affect education. Offered by Graduate School of Education. May not be repeated for credit.

**Course Overview**

Not applicable.

**Course Delivery Method**

This course will be delivered using both lecture and seminar formats, including class discussions and presentations.

**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, the formal and informal structures of our policy system, and how authority for education is dispersed among local, state, and federal governments;
- Examine and discuss key issues and debates in education policy at all levels of government and the different and often competing philosophies that inform education policy decisions;
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the education policy process and the main ideas shaping contemporary education policy;
- Identify the main stakeholders in the formation and implementation of education policy and explore the role of interest groups and the media;
- Develop the ability to think critically and write about public education issues; and,
- Gain exposure to potential careers in education.

### Professional Standards

Not Applicable.

### Required Texts

Mitra, D. L. (2018). *Educational change and the political process*. New York: Routledge.

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. All assignments are due by 12 p.m. on the date indicated below and must be uploaded on Blackboard.

- **Assignments and/or Examinations**

Assignment	Points	Assignment Due Date
Class Participation	10	N/A
Hearing/Meeting Summary	10	Feb. 6
Presentation	20	Feb. 27 & March 6
Policy Paper	30	April 3
Final Exam	30	May 8

- **Class Participation:** Students are expected to attend and actively participate in class discussions. (10 points)
- **Hearing/Meeting:** Watch online or attend a Congressional or state legislative hearing, or a state board or local school board meeting, on any education topic and prepare a brief 2-page summary that describes the agenda and issues discussed, the statements and perspectives of participants, the discussion and any decisions made, as well as your thoughts and reactions. (10 points)

- **Presentation:** Prepare a short, 15-minute class presentation (including visuals, such as a PowerPoint) on a federal, state or local education policy issue. Discuss its history, significance, political context and policy impact, drawing on official records and media coverage, and answer any questions. *(20 points)*
  - **Policy Paper:** Choose a contemporary education issue, analyze its development through the policy process, and make policy recommendations. The paper should a) discuss the policy issue and its background, b) identify the key policy actors and interest groups, and their respective positions and perspectives, c) describe its development and current status through the stages of the policy process, and d) provide policy recommendations for future action. The paper should be at least 7 pages. *(30 points)*
  - **Final Exam:** This will be a cumulative examination to assess understanding and comprehension of material from the textbook, assigned readings and class discussions, homework assignments, quizzes, and the midterm exam. It is therefore a cumulative examination. More information and expectations will be provided in class. *(30 points)*
- **Other Requirements**  
Students are expected to arrive on time, actively participate in discussions, and 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 undergraduate courses. See the Assessment Rubric at the end of the syllabus and also <http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/>

### **Professional Dispositions**

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

### **Class Schedule**

See page 5.

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

### **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 <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices 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/> .**

## Class Schedule

### 1. Jan. 23: Introduction

- Student & Instructor Introductions
- Review of Syllabus
- Introduction to Education Policy & Politics

### 2. Jan. 30: Federal Education Policy (Chapter 1)

- American Enterprise Institute. (2017). *From ESEA to ESSA: The growth of the federal role and the shift to accountability*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/From-ESEA-to-ESSA.pdf>
- Klein, A. (2015, March 31). The nation's main K-12 law: A timeline of the ESEA. *Education Week*, 34(26). Retrieved from: [www.edweek.org/ew/section/multi-media/the-nations-main-k-12-law-a-timeline.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multi-media/the-nations-main-k-12-law-a-timeline.html)
- Klein, A. (2016, March 31). The Every Student Succeeds Act: An ESSA overview. *Education Week*. Retrieved from: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/every-student-succeeds-act/>
- Mehta, J. (2015, Summer). Escaping the shadow: A Nation at Risk and its far-reaching influence. *American Educator*. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1064157.pdf>
- Sanchez, C., & Turner, C. (2017, January 13). Obama's impact on America's schools. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/01/13/500421608/obamas-impact-on-americas-schools>

### 3. Feb. 6: State Systems of Education (Chapter 2)

- *Hearing/Meeting Summary Due*
- Bellwether Education. (2017). *An independent review of ESSA State Plans*. Retrieved from: [https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether\\_ESSAReview\\_ExecSumm\\_1217\\_Final.pdf](https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_ESSAReview_ExecSumm_1217_Final.pdf)
- McArdle, E. (2014). What happened to the Common Core? *Ed*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/14/09/what-happened-common-core>
- Railey, H. (2017). State education governance structures: 2017 update. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State\\_Education\\_Governance\\_Structures\\_-\\_2017\\_update.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State_Education_Governance_Structures_-_2017_update.pdf)
- View the documentary “Building the Machine,” available at: <https://vimeo.com/97016931>

### 4. Feb 13: Local School Districts, Citywide Change, and Rural Dilemmas (Chapter 3)

- Barnum, M. (2017, December 8). Advocates of the portfolio model for improving schools say it works. Are they right? *Chalkbeat*. Retrieved from: <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2017/12/08/advocates-of-the-portfolio-model-for-improving-schools-say-it-works-are-they-right/>
- Camera, L. (2017, October 11). Big progress, small gains: A decade of mayoral control over D.C. schools. *US News & World Report*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2017-10-11/big-progress-small-gains-a-decade-of-mayoral-control-of-dc-public-schools>

- Hanover Research. (2014). Effective board and superintendent collaboration. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Effective-Board-and-Superintendent-Collaboration-Featured.pdf>
- Mathis, W. J., & Welner, K. G. (2016). *The “portfolio” approach to school district governance*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from: [https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-4%20Portfolio\\_3.pdf](https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-4%20Portfolio_3.pdf)
- Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2013). Mayoral governance and student achievement: How mayor-led districts are improving school and student performance. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from: <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/MayoralControl-6.pdf>

#### **5. Feb. 20: Influential Policy Actors (Chapter 4)**

- Gabor, A. (2018, September 24). School reformers switch gears. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-09-04/school-reform-common-core-is-out-think-local-is-in>
- Hess, F. M., Henig, J. R., & Hatfield, J. (2016, January 15). Foundation influence in education policy deserves greater scrutiny. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Opinion-Foundation-Influence/234942>
- Matthews, D. (2018, October 30). Billionaires are spending their fortunes reshaping America’s schools: It isn’t working. *Vox*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/30/17862050/education-policy-charity>
- Strauss, V. (2018, June 27). Are the teachers unions really as powerful as all that? *Washington Post*. Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/06/27/are-the-teachers-unions-really-as-powerful-as-all-that/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.09f3810580cf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/06/27/are-the-teachers-unions-really-as-powerful-as-all-that/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.09f3810580cf)
- Tucker, M. (2012). A different role for teacher unions. *Education Next*, 12(1): 16-20. Retrieved from: [https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext\\_20121\\_MTucker.pdf](https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext_20121_MTucker.pdf)

#### **6. Feb. 27: Policy Presentations I**

- *Policy Presentations Due*

#### **7. March 6: Policy Presentations II**

- *Policy Presentations Due*

#### **8. March 20: Public Policy and Power (Chapter 5) & Problem Formation, Agenda Setting, and Framing (Chapter 6)**

- Weaver-Hightower, M. B. (2008). An ecology metaphor for educational policy analysis: A call to complexity. *Educational Researcher*, 37(3), 153–67.
- Lewis, W. D., & Young, T. V. (2013). The politics of accountability: Teacher education policy. *Educational Policy*, 27(2), 190–216.

**9. March 27: Policy Formation (Chapter 7) & Policy Implementation (Chapter 8) & Sustainability and Scale (Chapter 9)**

- Education First Consulting and Grantmakers for Education. (2011). Implementing education policy: Getting from What Now? to What Works. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from: [https://www.edfunders.org/sites/default/files/institute\\_2011.pdf](https://www.edfunders.org/sites/default/files/institute_2011.pdf)
- Redding, C., Cannata, M., & Taylor Haynes, K. (2017). With scale in mind: A continuous improvement model for implementation. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(5), 589-608.
- Young, T., & Lewis, W. D. (2015). Educational policy implementation revisited. *Educational Policy*, 29(1), 3–17.

**10. April 3: Understanding U.S. Ideals (Chapter 10)**

- *Policy Paper Due*
- Horger, M., (2013). Breaking up is hard to do: America’s love affair with the two-party system. *Origins*, 6(10), July. Retrieved from: <http://origins.osu.edu/article/breaking-hard-do-americas-love-affair-two-party-system>
- Inglehart, R. & Norris, P. (2016). Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash. Research working papers, Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government. Retrieved from: <https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/getFile.aspx?Id=1401>
- View the documentary “Separate and Unequal,” available here: <https://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-separate-and-unequal/>

**11. April 10: Market-Driven Reform: The Foundation for the Accountability Movement (Chapter 11)**

- Cohodes, S. (2018). Charter schools and the achievement gap. *The Future of Children*, 28(1): 1-16. Retrieved from: [https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/resource-links/charter\\_schools\\_compiled.pdf](https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/resource-links/charter_schools_compiled.pdf)
- Dynarski, M., & Nichols, A. (2017). More findings about school vouchers and test scores, and they are still negative. Washington, DC: Brookings. Retrieved from: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ccf\\_20170713\\_mdynarski\\_evidence\\_speaks1.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ccf_20170713_mdynarski_evidence_speaks1.pdf)
- Gill, B., Walsh, L., Wulsin, C. S., Matulewicz, H., Severn, V. Grau, E., Lee, A., & Kerwin, T. (2015). Inside online charter schools. *Mathematica*, Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/inside-online-charter-schools>
- Jabbar, H. (2015). Competitive networks and school leaders’ perceptions: The formation of an education marketplace in post-Katrina New Orleans. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(6), 1093–131.
- West, M. (2016). Schools of choice. *Education Next*, 16(2): 46-54. Retrieved from: [https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext\\_XVI\\_2\\_west.pdf](https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext_XVI_2_west.pdf)

## 12. April 17: Equity (Chapter 12)

- Dynarski, M. (2016). *The challenges of promoting equal access to quality teachers*. Washington, DC: Brookings. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-challenges-of-promoting-equal-access-to-quality-teachers/>
- Education Commission of the State. (2017). *Equity in education: Key questions to consider*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved from: [http://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Equity in Education Key questions to consider.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Equity_in_Education_Key_questions_to_consider.pdf)
- Heckman, J. J. (2011). The Economics of Inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, 35(1): 31-47. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ920516.pdf>
- Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from: [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community\\_Schools\\_Evidence\\_Based\\_Strategy\\_BRIEF.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Evidence_Based_Strategy_BRIEF.pdf)
- The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2016). *Advancing equity through ESSA: Strategies for state leaders*. Washington, D.C: Author. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED577041.pdf>

## 13. April 24: Looking Forward

- Coley, R.J., & Baker, B. (2013). *Poverty and education: Finding the way forward*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. [Only pages 30-46] Retrieved from: [https://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty\\_and\\_education\\_report.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty_and_education_report.pdf)
- Garland, S. (2016, March 27). The end of ‘no excuses’ education reform? *Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from: <https://hechingerreport.org/the-end-of-no-excuses-education-reform/>
- Hanushek, E. (2016). What matters for student achievement. *Education Next*, 16(2): 18-26. Retrieved from: [https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext\\_XVI\\_2\\_hanushek.pdf](https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext_XVI_2_hanushek.pdf)
- McGuinn, P. (2016). From No Child Left behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act: Federalism and the education legacy of the Obama Administration. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 46(3): 392–415. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/publius/article/46/3/392/1753622>

## 14. May 1: Reading Day

## 15. May 8: Final Exam

*Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to 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 almost entirely 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 adequate explanation; 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.	Multiple 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	Insufficient evidence of	Several missed deadlines or excessively	Weak or minimal participation;

	quality work; unsophisticated; assignments show little or no connection to course content or concepts.	understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.	late or missing work and/or poor attendance.	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 and assignments and/or poor attendance.	Minimum participation; often not engaged in class discussions or group work; often sidetracks group due 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 and assignments; and/or poor attendance.	No constructive participation; destructive; intolerant toward other points of view.