

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD in Education

EDUC 872-001: Social Science Research and Education Policy
3 Credits, Spring 2021
Tuesday 4:30-7:10 pm (Virtual Class Meeting via Zoom¹)

Faculty

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Prerequisites/Corequisites

EDRS 810, 811, and 812 or permission of instructor.

University Catalog Course Description

Focuses on research base used to support education policy actions. Focuses on analyzing strength of this research.

Course Overview

This course focuses on the research base used to support education policy actions. Students will identify and critically review research for selected K-12 and higher education policy issues and through their analysis determine the strength of the undergirding evidence.

Course Delivery Method

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

Learner Outcomes and Objectives

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

1. Demonstrate ability to critique education research articles, especially those from education policy journals (e.g., *Educational Researcher*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*).
2. Objectively analyze policy options and determine what research would be necessary to support their claims.

¹ Zoom meeting ID is: 994 6566 0918; Zoom meeting passcode is: 865683

3. Identify gaps in the evidence undergirding education policy options.
4. Understand and explain why certain education policy decisions have not had the desired outcome.

Required Texts

1. Murnane, R.J., & Willett, J.B. (2011). *Methods Matter: Improving Causal Inference in Educational and Social Science Research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
2. All other readings, including journal articles and shorter, non-technical articles, are available through the course blackboard page. (Note: some of the journal articles may contain statistical or methodological concepts that may be unfamiliar; we will review and discuss these concepts in class). The instructor can suggest additional readings on methodological and statistical concepts and education-policy related topics of interest.

Course Requirements and Performance Evaluation

Expectations:

1. Attend all classes. Please provide advance notice, when possible, if you must miss a class. On these occasions, please get notes and any handouts from a colleague.
2. Read all assignments carefully and thoroughly prior to class and bring copies (either hard or electronic copy) to class.
3. Actively participate in class discussions and activities and respectfully engage with one another.
4. Submit all assignments on time. All assignments are due by 4:00 p.m. on the date indicated in the *Assignments* section below and must be emailed to the instructor at msteinb6@gmu.edu. Format for in-class presentations: presentations should be prepared in Microsoft PowerPoint. Format for written assignments: Times New Roman size 12-point font, 1" page margins and 1.5" line spacing. Citations/references should adhere to the APA style guide manual.

Assignments:

1. Team Presentation (20% of grade). Each student will be assigned to a (minimum of a) two-person team to present an analysis of research related to an education policy topic (see list of *Team Presentation Topics* at the end of the syllabus). Each team (with instructor guidance) will identify 2-3 social science research articles, published in peer reviewed journals, that empirically address the topic. Each team will email the instructor these articles no later than one week prior to the team presentation. The instructor will disseminate the articles to the class one week before the team presentations; these articles form the basis for that week's required reading assignment.

Teams will each have 30-45 minutes to present on their education policy topic. Presentations should address (at minimum) the following: (i) What is the research topic and why is it relevant to education policy? (ii) What are the research question(s) that each article aims to answer? (iii) What is the research setting? (iv) What are the data and

research methods? (v) What are the key findings? (vi) How does this evidence address the education policy topic? (vii) What remains unanswered vis-à-vis the education policy topic (i.e., what additional evidence could inform this education policy topic)?

All presentations should be prepared in Microsoft PowerPoint (and should be emailed to the instructor prior to the team's presentation – no later than 4pm on the day of the team presentation). Each team presentation will be followed by 20-30 minutes of class discussion and feedback.

2. Individual Presentation (2) (40% of grade; 20% each). Each student will present two individual presentations. In consultation with the course instructor, each student will select two education policy topics (and is encouraged to select his/her dissertation topic as one of these two topics). Each student (with instructor guidance) will identify 2-3 social science research articles, published in peer reviewed journals, that empirically address the topic. Each student will email the instructor these articles no later than one week prior to his/her presentation. The instructor will disseminate the articles to the class one week before the individual presentations; these articles form the basis for that week's required reading assignment.

Each student will have 30-45 minutes to present their education policy topic. The structure of the presentation should follow that of the team presentation (see *Assignments #1*, above).

All presentations should be prepared in Microsoft PowerPoint (and should be emailed to the instructor prior to the individual's presentation – no later than 4pm on the day of the individual presentation). Each individual student presentation will be followed by 20-30 minutes of class discussion and feedback.

3. Final Paper (20% of grade). Education policy research in the social sciences relies on the critical feedback of scholars and education practitioners. The aim of the final paper is to provide students with the opportunity to critically examine and present their analysis of a scholarly article in education policy. In no more than 10 pages, students will describe: (i) the research topic and why is it relevant to education policy; (ii) the research question(s) that the article aims to answer; (iii) the research setting; (iv) the data and research methods; (v) the key findings; (vi) the extent to which this evidence address the education policy topic; and (vii) what remains unanswered vis-à-vis the education policy topic (i.e., what additional evidence could inform this education policy topic).

Final papers are due on April 27, 2021 by 4:00 p.m., and must be emailed to the instructor at msteinb6@gmu.edu. Format for final paper: Final papers should be no more than 10 pages in length, using Times New Roman size 12-point font, 1" page margins and 1.5" line spacing. Citations/references should adhere to the APA style guide manual.

By March 30, 2021, students will email the instructor a description of the education policy topic they plan to examine in the final paper and why this topic is of interest. The description should be no longer than 1-2 paragraphs in length.

4. In-Class Discussion/Participation (20% of grade). The success of any doctoral course depends on the active and persistent engagement of all members of the class. As a seminar, this course requires that students complete all readings prior to class and are prepared to substantively and actively participate in class discussions. Each student's

discussion/participation grade is based on attendance and participation in all scheduled class meetings. Students should be prepared to offer comments, questions and/or observations about each of the scheduled and assigned readings and the in-class team/individual presentations.

Grading:

This course is graded on the Graduate Regular scale (see: <http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/>). Cumulative points corresponding to each grade are as follows:

A+ 97-100	A- 90-92	B 83-86	C 70-79
A 93-96	B+ 87-89	B- 80-82	F ≤ 69

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 <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 or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

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

CLASS SCHEDULE

Dates and topics are tentative. The instructor will notify students of any changes to the class schedule prior to each session. Readings and assignments for each topic are listed below and should be completed prior to the class in which the topic is discussed. * indicates suggested (though not required) readings.

JANUARY 26 (Session 1)

Topic: Introduction to the Course

Readings for this class:

- No readings

Assignments for this class:

- No assignments due
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FEBRUARY 2 (Session 2)

Topic: What does it mean to “critique” education policy research?

Readings for this class:

- Angrist, J.D., Dynarski, S.M., Kane, T.J., Pathak, P.A., & Walters, C.R. (2012). Who benefits from KIPP? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 31(4), 837-860.
 - *Methods Matter*: Chapter 1; Chapter 3
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FEBRUARY 9 (Session 3)

Topic: Adjudicating (seemingly) different findings

Readings for this class:

- Jepsen, C. & Rivkin, S. (2009). Class size reduction and student achievement: The potential tradeoff between teacher quality and class size. *Journal of Human Resources*, 44(1), 223-250.
 - Krueger, A. (1999). Experimental estimates of education production functions. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114(2), 497-532.
 - *Methods Matter*: Chapter 4
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FEBRUARY 16 (Session 4)

Topic: The role of education research to inform policy decisions

Readings for this class:

- Steinberg, M., Ukert, B., & MacDonald, J. (2019). Schools as places of crime? Evidence from closing chronically underperforming schools. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 77, 125-140.
 - *Methods Matter*: Chapter 8 (pages 135-149); Chapter 9 (pages 165-173)
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FEBRUARY 23 – (Session 5)

Topic: Alternative approaches to analyzing education policy

Readings for this class:

- Lacoë, J. & Steinberg, M. (2019). Do suspensions affect student outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 41(1), 34-62.
 - Rosenbaum, J. (2018). Educational and criminal justice outcomes 12 years after school suspension. *Youth & Society*, 1-33.
 - *Methods Matter*: Chapter 7 (128-134); Chapter 12 (286-324)
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MARCH 2 (Session 6)

Topic: Team Presentations (Team 1)

Readings for this class:

- Team 1 research article (tbd)
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MARCH 9 (Session 7)

Topic: Team Presentations (Team 2)

Readings for this class:

- Team 2 research article (tbd)
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MARCH 16 (Session 8)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; first round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)
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MARCH 23 (Session 9)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; first round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)
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MARCH 30 (Session 10)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; first round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)

Assignments:

- Description of final paper topic to instructor
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APRIL 6 (Session 11)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; second round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)
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APRIL 13 (Session 12)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; second round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)
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APRIL 20 (Session 13)

Topic: Individual Student Presentations (2; second round)

Readings for this class:

- Research articles from 2 student presenters (tbd)
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APRIL 27 (NO CLASS MEETING)

Assignments: Final Paper Due

TEAM PRESENTATION TOPICS

Below is a list of suggested topics for the team presentations. In consultation with the course instructor, each team will select one topic for the team presentation.

1. What are the consequences of out-of-school suspensions for students and their peers?
2. Do school choice policies produce better outcomes for students than traditional public schools?
3. What role does school funding play in student achievement?
4. Do alternative pathways into the teaching profession increase the supply of teachers and improve student outcomes?
5. What are the consequences of closing schools on student outcomes?
6. Does class-size reduction improve student outcomes?
7. Are there benefits to early childhood education (e.g., pre-school)?
8. Can administrators identify effective teachers at the time of hire?
9. What factors predict student success in higher education?
10. Do school accountability systems generate improvements in schooling outcomes?