

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
Education Policy

EDUC 871: Advanced Policy Issues in Education
Spring 2021
3 Credits

Thursdays 4:30pm – 7:10pm
Online (Zoom)
Room: 981 8068 6817
Password: educ871

Faculty

Name: Prof. David Houston
Office Hours: By Appointment
Office Location: Thompson 1802 or video conference
Email: dhousto@gmu.edu

University Catalog Course Description

This course focuses on in-depth analysis and study of selected education policy issues. Review of various points of view on the issues is considered. Particular attention will be given to interactions and connections between selected education issues, and the similarities and differences in policy approaches at the K-12 and higher education levels.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered online in a seminar/lecture format via Zoom. Our meeting room number is 981 8068 6817. The password is educ871. Readings and syllabus are available on Blackboard.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

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

1. Demonstrate a detailed and sophisticated understanding of major policy issues.
2. Analyze and describe the legal and political forces that influence decision making on these issues.
3. Understand and explain the intersections of various policy issues.
4. Understand and explain how and why different levels of education may approach these policy issues in a different manner.
5. Demonstrate ability to describe and analyze the research bases for major policy issues.

Required Texts

Murnane, R. J., & Willett, J. B. (2011). *Methods matter: Improving causal inference in educational and social science research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Additional Readings (Available on Blackboard)

Abdulkadiroglu, A., Angrist, J. D., & Pathak, P. A. (2014). The elite illusion: Achievement effects at Boston and New York exam schools. *Econometrica*, 82(1), 137-196.

Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. (2015). Regression. In *Mastering 'metrics: The path from cause to effect* (pp. 47-81). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Atteberry, A., Bassok, D., & Wong, V. C. (2019). The effects of full-day prekindergarten: Experimental evidence of impacts on children's school readiness. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 41(4), 537-562.

Blagg, K., & Luetmer, G. (2020). Measuring and assessing student achievement in urban school districts. Urban Institute.

Bleiberg, J. (2020). Does the Common Core have a common effect? An exploration of effects on academically vulnerable students. Annenberg Institute at Brown University EdWorkingPaper Series.

Carter, S. P., Greenberg, K., & Walker, M. S. (2017). The impact of computer usage on academic performance: Evidence from a randomized trial at the United States Military Academy. *Economics of Education Review*, 56, 118-132.

Chingos, M. M. (2015). Breaking the curve: Promises and pitfalls of using NAEP data to assess the state role in student achievement. Urban Institute.

Cohodes, S. (2018). Charter schools and the achievement gap. *The Future of Children*, 1000(1), 1-16.

Conaway, C. (2020). Maximizing research use in the world we actually live in: Relationships, organizations, and interpretation. *Education Finance and Policy*, 15(1), 1-10.

Conaway, C. & Goldhaber, D. (2020). Appropriate standard of evidence for education policy decision making. *Education Finance and Policy*, 15(2), 383-396.

CREDO. (2013). National charter school study: Executive summary. Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford University.

Dale, S. B., & Krueger, A. B. (2002). Estimating the payoff to attending a more selective college: An application of selection on observables and unobservables. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(4), 1491-1527.

- Dale, S. B. & Krueger, A. B. (2014). Estimating the effects of college characteristics over the career using administrative earnings data. *Journal of Human Resources*, 49(2), 323-258.
- Dobbie, W., & Fryer, R. G. (2013). Getting beneath the veil of effective schools: Evidence from New York City. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(4), 28-60.
- Dynarski, S. (2018). Evidence on New York City and Boston exam schools. *Education Next*.
- Figlio, D. (2017). Start high school later for better academic outcomes. *Education Next*.
- Figlio, D., Holden, K. L., & Ozek, U. (2018). Do students benefit from longer school days? Regression discontinuity evidence from Florida's additional hour of literacy instruction. *Economics of Education Review*, 67, 171-183.
- Gordon, N., & Conaway, C. (2020). *Common-sense evidence: The education leader's guide to using data and research*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Horn, M. B. (2017). New research answers whether technology is good or bad for learning. *Education Next*.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Kraft, M. A. (2020). Interpreting effect sizes of education interventions. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 241-253.
- Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017). Descriptive analysis in education: A guide for researchers. U.S. Department of Education.
- Loveless, T. (2020). Common Core has not worked. *Education Next*.
- Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). The impressive effects of tutoring on PreK-12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. EdWorkingPaper Series.
- Petrilli, M. J. (2020). Stay the course on national standards. *Education Next*.
- Pigott, T. D., & Polanin, J. R. (2020). Methodological guidance paper: High-quality meta-analysis in a systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(1), 24-46.
- Schueler, B. E. (2019). A third way: The politics of school district takeover and turnaround in Lawrence, Massachusetts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 116-153.
- Schueler, B. E., Goodman, J. S., & Deming, D. J. (2017). Can states take over and turn around school districts? Evidence from Lawrence, Massachusetts. *Educational Evaluation and*

Policy Analysis, 39(2), 311-332.

Whitehurst, G. J. (2012). The value of experiments in education. *Education Finance and Policy*, 7(2), 107-123.

Whitehurst, G. J. (2014). Does pre-k work? It depends how picky you are. Brookings Institution.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments via email prior to the beginning of the class session when the assignment is due.

Assignments and/or Examinations

Pre-Class Questions: Prior to class 2 and class 3, there will be two short questionnaires to assess students' prior knowledge about descriptive and causal research. These questionnaires are diagnostic rather than evaluative. They will be graded for completion only.

Article Summaries: For classes 4-9, students will write a one-page (single-spaced) summary of the reading designated with an asterisk (*) in the syllabus. These summaries must answer six questions:

1. Research Question(s): What is/are the primary research question(s)?
2. Treatment: What is the "treatment"?
3. Treatment Group: Describe the group that receives the treatment
4. Comparison Group: Describe the comparison group
5. Internal Validity: Besides the treatment, what other differences might remain between the treatment and comparison groups?
6. External Validity: Is the study population unique in a way that makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts?

Critical Literature Review: Students will choose an education policy research topic to review. With the guidance of the instructor, students will identify 10+ research articles and/or books relevant to their topic. Students will then compose a 10-15 page (double-spaced) paper in APA format that A) summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the existing research, B) identifies unanswered questions that future researchers should pursue, and C) draws actionable implications for policymakers and practitioners.

Final Paper Presentation: On the last day of class, students will present the content of their final papers. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long and organized around slides (PowerPoint or equivalent). If time allows, each student will lead a short Q&A session after their presentation.

Participation

Students are expected to:

1. Attend all classes and provide advance notice, if possible, if you must miss a class.
2. Read all assignments prior to class and bring copies (either electronic or hard copy) to class.
3. Actively participate in discussions of the readings and treat one another with respect.
4. Submit all assignments on time. Late work will be penalized by 2pts/day, unless prior arrangements are made.

Course Grades

- Pre-class questions: 5% (completion only)
- Article summaries: 30%
- Final paper: 30%
- Final paper presentation: 20%
- In-class participation: 15%

Grading Scale

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

Professional Dispositions

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/>. Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

Class Schedule

- Jan. 28 *1) Introduction: The Importance of Rigorous Education Research*
Reading: Gordon & Conaway, 2020 (p. 1-46)
- Feb. 4 *2) Student Achievement and the National Assessment of Educational Progress*
Research Methods: descriptive research and review of multivariate regression
Reading: Loeb et al., 2017; Chingos, 2015; Blagg & Luetmer, 2020
Assignment Due: pre-class questions

- Feb. 11 *3) Introduction to Causal Inference*
 Reading: Whitehurst, 2012; M&W Ch. 1-3
Assignment Due: pre-class questions
- Feb. 18 *4) Technology in the Classroom*
 Research Methods: randomized controlled trials (RCT)
 Reading: M&W Ch. 4; Carter et al., 2017*; Horn, 2017
Assignment Due: article summary
- Feb. 25 *5) Pre-K*
 Research Methods: RCT with non-compliance (instrumental variables)
 Reading: M&W Ch. 5; Atteberry et al., 2019*; Whitehurst, 2014
Assignment Due: article summary
- Mar. 4 *6) School Day Length & Timing*
 Research Methods: regression discontinuity
 Reading: M&W Ch. 9; Figlio et al., 2018*; Figlio, 2017
Assignment Due: article summary
- Mar. 11 *7) Peer Effects (NYC and Boston Exam Schools)*
 Research Methods: fuzzy regression discontinuity
 Reading: M&W Ch. 11; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2014*; Dynarski, 2018
Assignment Due: article summary
- Mar. 18 *8) The Effects of College Selectivity*
 Research Methods: fixed effects
 Reading: Angrist & Pischke, 2015; Dale & Krueger, 2002*; Dale & Krueger, 2014
Assignment Due: article summary
- Mar. 25 *9) Common Core State Standards*
 Research Methods: difference-in-differences
 Reading: M&W Ch. 8; Bleiberg, 2020*; Loveless, 2020; Petrilli, 2020
Assignment Due: article summary
- Apr. 1 *10) Charter Schools*
 Research Methods: conflicting results from multiple methods
 Reading: Cohodes, 2018; Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; CREDO, 2013
- Apr. 8 *11) Tutoring*
 Research Methods: meta-analysis
 Reading: Pigott & Polanin, 2020; Nickow et al., 2020
- Apr. 15 *12) State Takeovers*
 Research Methods: mixed methods
 Reading: Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Schueler et al., 2017; Schueler, 2019

Apr. 22 *13) Integrating Education Research into Education Decision-Making*
Reading: Conaway & Goldhaber, 2020; Conaway, 2020; Kraft, 2020

Apr. 29 *14) Final Paper Presentations*
Assignment Due: final paper presentations

May 6 *No Class*
Assignment Due: final paper

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/>.

Safe Return to Campus Statement

All students taking courses in person must take Safe Return to Campus Training before coming to campus. [Training is available in Blackboard](#).

Students must follow the university's public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university [Safe Return to Campus webpage](#).

All students taking in-person and hybrid courses must also complete the [Mason COVID Health Check](#) daily, seven days a week.

The COVID Health Check system uses a color code system, and students will receive either a Green, Yellow, or Red email response. Only students who receive a "Green" response are permitted to attend courses with a face-to-face component. If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get testing. Faculty are allowed to ask you to show them that you have received a Green email and are thereby permitted to be in class.

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

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>.

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/>.