

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
Education Policy

EDUC 870: Education Policy: Process, Context, and Politics
EDPO 601: P-12 Policy Challenges
Fall 2021
3 Credits

Thursdays 4:30pm – 7:10pm
Online (Zoom)
Room: Zoom Meeting ID 988 4935 5652
Password: policy

Faculty

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

Note About Cross-listing

This course is cross-listed as both EDUC 870 and EDPO 601. Doctoral, Masters, and Graduate Certificate students are all welcome to enroll in this class. Doctoral students will typically enroll in EDUC 870. Masters and Graduate Certificate students will typically enroll in EDPO 601. Please email the instructor if you have any questions.

University Catalog Course Description

EDUC 870: Examines public policy decision-making in education at local, state, and national levels, and its impact on education institutions, students, and public. Focuses on theories and methodological approaches, and resolution of competing policy arguments in political arena.

EDPO 601: Explores current public education policymaking from real-world perspective of federal, state and local executive and legislative branch leaders. Equips students with practical skills in understanding and shaping education policy.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

EDUC 870: This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Understand and explain the responsibilities of various levels of government for preK-16 education.
2. Analyze and describe the impact of social, legal, and political forces on the functions of education in the United States.

3. Analyze and articulate differing policy arguments and perspectives regarding education.
4. Understand the various research frames and methodologies used to study education policy.

EDPO 601: This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Develop an understanding of how public education policy is made in contemporary federal, state and local settings.
2. Gain a basic fluency in P-12 public education policy challenges confronting policymakers today.
3. Learn the rudiments of how to use research to affect public education policy.
4. Develop practical skills for work in public education policy including the ability to research a problem, develop a specific policy proposal to address it, and advocate for it effectively in writing and orally.
5. Develop an appreciation of the role of, and develop skills to facilitate, collaboration across sectors in improving public education outcomes.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered online in a seminar/lecture format via Zoom. Readings and syllabus are available on Blackboard.

In-Class Data Analyses

Most class sessions will include an in-class data analysis exercise in which we explore a contemporary education policy issue, helping students to develop and refine a skill set for future coursework and careers. No prior experience in data analysis, statistics, econometrics, or computer programming is required.

We will use the R programming language and the RStudio graphical user interface. R and RStudio are available for free online for both Windows and Mac operating systems. I expect that this class will be some students' first experience with quantitative education policy analysis. We will start with the basics (including downloading the software) and move slowly. These in-class exercises are not a substitute for formal research methods classes, and this class will not count towards any research methods requirements.

Organization of a Typical Class Session

- 4:30 – 4:40: Welcome, updates, and attendance
- 4:40 – 5:20: Professor lecture (questions, comments, and discussion welcome)
- 5:20 – 5:40: Supplementary content presentation 1
- 5:40 – 6:00: Supplementary content presentation 2
- 6:00 – 6:10: 10-minute break
- 6:10 – 7:00: In-class data analysis
- 7:00 – 7:10: Prepare for next week

Required Texts

McGuinn, P. J. (2006). *No Child Left Behind and the transformation of federal education policy, 1965-2005*. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.

Dahill-Brown, S. E. (2019). *Education, equity, and the states: How variations in state governance make or break reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Polikoff, M. (2021). *Beyond standards: The fragmentation of education governance and the promise of curricular reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press

Additional Resources and References

Aldeman, C. (2017). The case against ESSA: A very limited law. In F. M. Hess & M. Eden (Eds.), *The Every Student Succeeds Act: What it means for schools, systems, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barone, C. (2017). What ESSA says: Continuities and departures. In F. M. Hess & M. Eden (Eds.), *The Every Student Succeeds Act: What it means for schools, systems, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cross, C. (2014). *Political education: Setting the course for state and federal policy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Driver, J. (2018). *The schoolhouse gate: Public education, the Supreme Court, and the battle for the American mind*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Henig, J. R. (2009). Mayors, governors, and presidents: The new education executives and the end of educational exceptionalism. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84(3), 283-299.

Henig, J. R., Jacobsen, R., & Reckhow, S. (2019). *Outside money in school board elections: The nationalization of education politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Hess, F. M. (2008). Looking for leadership: Assessing the case for mayoral control of urban school systems. *American Journal of Education*, 114(3), 219-245.

Hess, F. M., & Leal, D. L. (2005). School house politics: Expenditures, interests, and competition in school board elections. In W. G. Howell (Ed.), *Besieged: School boards and the future of education politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Howell, W. G. (2005). Introduction. In W. G. Howell (Ed.), *Besieged: School boards and the future of education politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Jochim, A., & McGuinn, P. J. (2016). The politics of the Common Core assessments: Why states are quitting the PARCC and Smarter Balanced testing consortia. *Education Next*.

- McGuinn, P. J. (2012). Stimulating reform: Race to the Top, competitive grants, and the Obama education agenda. *Educational Policy*, 26(1), 136-159.
- Mehta, J., & Teles, S. (2011). Jurisdictional politics: A new federal role in education. In F. M. Hess & A. P. Kelly (Eds.), *Carrots, sticks, and the bully pulpit: Lessons from a half-century of federal efforts to improve America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Mitra, D. L. (2018). *Educational change and the political process*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Morel, D. (2018). *Takeover: Race, education, and American democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Orfield, G., & Eaton, S. E. (1996). *Dismantling desegregation: The quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Saultz, A., Fusarelli, L. D., & McEachin, A. (2017). The Every Student Succeeds Act, the decline of the federal role in education policy, and the curbing of executive authority. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 47(3), 426-444.
- 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.
- West, M. (2017). The case for ESSA: A proper balance. In F. M. Hess & M. Eden (Eds.), *The Every Student Succeeds Act: What it means for schools, systems, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Whitman, D. (2015). The surprising roots of the Common Core: How conservatives gave rise to 'Obamacore.' Brookings Institution, Brown Center on Education Policy.
- Wong, K. K., Shen, F. X., Anagnostopoulos, D., & Rutledge, S. (2007). *The education mayor: Improving America's schools*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Course Performance Evaluation

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

Assignments and/or Examinations

Data analysis exercises: Most in-class data analyses will conclude with 1-2 exercises for students to complete at home. Students need to complete these exercises and submit their answers via Blackboard prior to the next week's class. The data analysis exercises should only take 5-10 minutes and will be graded for completion only.

- Doctoral students: required
- All other students: not required, but feel free to submit your answers if you want to learn

more about data analysis

Supplementary content presentations: Each class session will contain 1-2 student presentations of material that supplement the primary reading. Presentations of about 10 minutes should be organized using slides (PowerPoint or equivalent). Afterwards, the presenting student will lead 10 minutes of Q&A.

- Doctoral students: To prepare for these presentations, students should consult at least 3 academic sources (a book from a university press, a peer-reviewed journal, a report from a major research institute or think tank, etc. – contact the instructor with any questions)
- All other students: To prepare for these presentations, students should consult at least 1 academic source (a book from a university press, a peer-reviewed journal, a report from a major research institute or think tank, etc. – contact the instructor with any questions)

Take-home midterm exam: About half-way through the semester, students will receive a take-home midterm exam. Students will have one week to complete the exam, and they can use their course materials and notes.

Final paper: Students will choose a specific education policy debate to analyze. They will compose a 10-12 page (double-spaced) paper in APA format with 6 sections:

1. Executive summary: Your executive summary should contain an explicit argument A) for or against a specific education policy in a specific location, B) the actions that various stakeholders should take to advance/reject/revise this policy, and C) the level(s) of government where this activity should take place (1-2 pages)
2. Policy: Describe the policy in detail (2-3 pages)
3. Stakeholders: Who are the primary stakeholders with respect to this policy? What role(s) do these individuals/groups play? What role(s) could/should they play? (1-2 pages)
4. Level(s) of government: What level(s) of government—local, state, and/or federal—are involved in the passage/revocation/revision and implementation/dismantling/modification of this policy? What role(s) does each level of government play? What role(s) could/should they play? (1-2 pages)
5. Debate: What are the strongest arguments that scholars and political actors have made in favor of your position? What are the strongest arguments that scholars and political actors have made against your position? Why are the opposing arguments insufficient? (4-6 pages)
 - a. Doctoral students: This will be the most important section of your paper. You will want to demonstrate that you are well-versed in the various evidence-based arguments for and against your position. If this causes you to go slightly over the 12 page limit, that is OK.
6. Conclusion: Briefly summarize your argument (1-2 pages)

Final paper presentation: On the last full day of class, each student will give a brief presentation and lead a brief discussion of their final paper. The length of the presentation and discussion period will depend on the number of students enrolled in the class. Presentations should be organized around slides (PowerPoint or equivalent). Keep it simple: I recommend using one slide to summarize each section of your final paper (but skip an “executive summary” slide, which

would be redundant with your conclusion slide). **If there are more than 10 students enrolled, we may split final paper presentations over two weeks.**

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

- Data analysis exercises: 10%
- Supplementary content presentations: 15%
- Take-home midterm: 20%
- Final paper: 30%
- Final paper presentation: 15%
- In-class participation: 10%

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

Aug. 26	Class 1:	Structure of the U.S. K-12 Education System
	Reading:	Mitra, 2018 (p. 1-65)
Sept. 2	Class 2:	Education and the Policy Process
	Readings:	Mitra, 2018 (p. 67-140); Cross, 2014 (p. 3-5)

	SCP 1:	Policy windows: Sputnik and the National Defense Education Act
	SCP 2:	Problem framing: A Nation at Risk report (1983)
	Data:	Intro to R, RStudio, loading data
	Assignment:	SCP preferences (<u>due Tuesday 8/31</u>)
Sept. 9	Class 3:	The Politics of No Child Left Behind, Part 1
	Readings:	McGuinn, 2006 (p. 1-104)
	SCP 1:	The two major teachers unions (NEA and AFT)
	SCP 2:	Opportunity to Learn Standards
	Data:	Variable types, measures of central tendency
Sept. 16	Class 4:	The Politics of No Child Left Behind, Part 2
	Readings:	McGuinn, 2006 (p. 105-210)
	SCP 1:	State academic standards (pre-Common Core)
	SCP 2:	The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
	Data:	t-tests, part 1 (p-values)
Sept. 23	Class 5:	After NCLB: Race to the Top & Common Core
	Readings:	McGuinn, 2012; Whitman, 2015; Jochim & McGuinn, 2016; Mehta & Teles, 2011
	SCP 1:	NCLB waivers
	SCP 2:	The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
	Data:	t-tests, part 2 (confidence intervals)
Sept. 30	Class 6:	The Every Student Succeeds Act
	Readings:	Barone, 2017; West, 2017; Aldeman, 2017; Saultz et al., 2017
	SCP 1:	Chronic absenteeism as “additional indicator” of school quality
	SCP 2:	Standardized testing during the Covid-19 pandemic
	Data:	chi-squares
Oct. 7	Class 7:	The Supreme Court and School Desegregation
	Readings:	Orfield & Eaton, 1996 (p. xxi-22); Driver, 2018 (p. 242-314)
	SCP 1:	Grutter v. Bollinger
	SCP 2:	Fisher v. University of Texas (Fisher I)
	Data:	Data manipulation and variable creation
	Assignment:	Take-home midterm
Oct. 14	Class 8:	State Governance and Education, Part 1
	Readings:	Dahill-Brown, 2019 (p. 1-106)
	SCP 1:	The Progressive movement in the early 20 th century
	SCP 2:	The history of school district consolidation
	Data:	Correlation
	Assignment:	1-2 paragraph final paper proposal

Oct. 21	Class 9:	State Governance and Education, Part 2
	Readings:	Dahill-Brown, 2019 (p. 107-220)
	SCP 1:	City/county school district system in Virginia
	SCP 2:	School district secession in Memphis metro area
	Data:	Bivariate regression
Oct. 28	Class 10:	State Takeovers of Local Districts
	Readings:	Morel, 2018 (ch. 1-3); Schueler, 2019
	SCP 1:	State takeover of Newark Public Schools
	SCP 2:	State takeover of Camden Public Schools
	Data:	Multivariate regression, part 1
Nov. 4	Class 11:	Mayoral Control
	Readings:	Wong et al., 2007 (p. 1-27); Hess, 2008; Henig, 2009
	SCP 1:	New York City: Michael Bloomberg and Joel Klein
	SCP 2:	Washington, D.C.: Adrian Fenty and Michelle Rhee
	Data:	Multivariate regression, part 2
Nov. 11	Class 12:	School Board Politics
		<i>(drop if two classes for final paper presentations are needed)</i>
	Readings:	Howell, 2005; Hess & Leal, 2005, Henig et al., 2019
	SCP 1:	2009 Wake County School Board Election
	SCP 2:	2020 Los Angeles (LAUSD) School Board Election
	Data:	Multivariate regression, part 3
Nov. 18	Class 13:	Large-Scale Reform in a Decentralized System
	Readings:	Polikoff, 2021 (p. 1-142)
	SCP 1:	Next Generation Science Standards
	SCP 2:	Legislation to ban Critical Race Theory in K-12 classrooms
	Data:	Introduction to causal inference
Nov. 25	No Class (Thanksgiving)	
Dec. 2	Class 14:	Final Paper Presentations
	Assignment:	Final paper presentations
Dec. 9	Assignment:	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/>.

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 VIA should be directed to viahelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/assessments>. 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/>.