Instructor: Dr. Penelope M. Earley  
Class Date & Time: Wednesday 4:30 – 7:10  
Class Location: Robinson A, Room 308  
Contact Information:  
    Penelope Earley  
    Room 441, Robinson A  
    E-mail: pearley@gmu.edu  
    P: (703) 993-3361  
    F: (703) 993-2013  
Office Hours: By Appointment: M-F 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. 

COURSE DESCRIPTION  
This course examines public policy decision making in education at the local, state, and national levels and its impact on education institutions, students, and the public. Particular attention is given to which government entities have authority over education decision making and the resolution of competing policy arguments within the political arena. Prerequisite: Admission to the Ph.D. program or permission of instructor. 

STUDENT OUTCOMES  
At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:  

1. Understand and explain the responsibilities of various levels of government for pre-K – 16 education.  
2. Analyze and describe the impact of social, legal, and political forces on the functioning of education in the United States.  
3. Analyze and articulate differing policy arguments and perspectives regarding education.  
4. Identify and assess the role/s of non-government entities, such as interest groups and the media, in education policy making.  
5. Analyze and describe the impact of one or more major judicial decisions on public education, including the social and political factors underlying those decisions. 

RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. However, most, if not all standards for educators expect professionals to be aware of the political, social,
economic, legal and cultural context of public education in the United States. This course provides students with that background and understanding.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is taught using lectures and discussions.

TEXTS, READINGS, AND RESOURCES


Education Policy Analysis Archives, available on line (http://epaa.asu.edu)


State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, available on line (http://www.schev.edu)


The Constitution of Virginia, available on line (http://www.legis.state.va.us/laws/Constitution.html)

United States Department of Education, available on line (http://www.ed.gov)

United States Supreme Court, available on line (http://www.supremecourtus.gov)

Virginia State Department of Education, available on line (http://www.pen.k12.va.us)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. **Analyses:** Two written analysis papers based on assigned readings. (25 points each)

B. **Class Presentation:** Present a summary of authority for education of SCHEV, VA Department of Education, the U.S. Department of education, federal agencies other than the Department of Education, a local school division or board, and George Mason University. Include appropriate handouts with web sites etc. (10 points)

C. “In The News” Each Week students will do an in-class analysis of the policy implication/s of articles on education published that week in a variety of media outlets (print, television, radio, on-line). (10 points)

D. **Attend and Prepare a Written Summary of a Policy Event:** Students will attend one of the following (or an approved alternative) and prepare a 3-5 summary and analysis of the event and/or speakers (20 points):
2. October 20 Brown Lecture in Education Research, 6:00 pm at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC. Speaker—Claude Steele

3. Attend at your convenience a meeting of a local school board. Please include a copy of the agenda with your paper (watching a school board meeting on TV is not an acceptable substitute).

4. Attend an education hearing at the U.S. House of Representatives or Senate.

5. A policy event proposed by the student and approved in advance

E. Candidate Positions and Election Issues. Prepare a comparison of the three Governor of Virginia candidates’ positions on Pre-K-16 education. What are they promising? Are their proposals realistic? Why or why not?

NOTE: Personal pronouns are banned from policy analysis papers.

EVALUATION

An evaluation rubric for this class is attached. All written work must be completed on a typewriter or a word processor and must be within the page limits established by the instructor. If a paper is to be between five and seven pages, papers fewer than five pages will be returned to the student to be completed. If it is more than seven pages the instructor will stop reading the paper at the end of the seventh page.

Grading Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-95</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-91</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85-88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>79-75</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>74 and below</td>
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Point assignments for work:

- Two analysis papers (25% each) 50%
- Class Presentation (10%) 10%
- News Clips & analysis (10%) 10%
- Policy Event Paper (20)% 20%
- Election Issues (10%) 10%

Total 100%

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 31—Introduction to public policy and education
- Introductions
- Review of syllabus & class schedule
- What are your expectations
- “In the news”
- Introduction to policy studies
- U.S. Constitution and federal authority over education
Assignment for September 07: Find and read the constitution for the state you have selected. Be prepared to describe how the state’s authority for education is presented.

September 07—Discussion of Constitutional authority for education in the U.S.

- “In the news”
- Where is federal Constitutional authority for education?
- Reports on state constitutions

Assignment for September 14: Research and explore legal authority for education in the United States (the use of PowerPoint is encouraged). Each student will prepare a presentation on one of the following:

1. U.S. Department of Education
2. State Council on Higher Education for Virginia
3. Virginia State Department of Education
4. Any local school division/board in Virginia
5. District of Columbia Public School System
6. Federal agencies or departments other than the U.S. Department of Education (select up to two)
7. Compile a list of the education advocacy organizations. Include: What is the focus of each? Who do they represent? What’s their web site address? And other information you think is important.
   For “in the news” select an article on education from a paper in the state you selected for the September 07 assignment.

September 14—Consideration of federal, state and local authority for education

- “In the news”
- Student presentations

Assignment for September 21: Read Savage Inequalities. Prepare a 4-6 page paper describing in broad policy terms the problems Kozol describes (this summary should be no more than 1 to 1½ pages of your total paper), then suggest one or more policy option to address the problems. Include which level of government (or who in the private sector) would implement the policy option or options. Discuss and analyze the implications of the policy options you propose. If the paper is double spaced, it should be six pages long, if it is single spaced it should be no more than 4 pages long.

September 21—Policy Issue: Funding Inequality

- Video on finance equalization. Discuss the policy choices made by citizens and school districts featured in the video.
- Presentation of student papers

Assignment for September 28: Go to www.fec.gov/elections.html Read about the Electoral College and voter registration statistics. For “in the news” look for articles from news sources in the Western part of the United States (use LexisNexis)

September 28—Discussion of voting and citizen participation

- “In the news”
- How do presidential elections in the U.S. work?
• How does the structure of the voting system influence candidate behavior?
• Is the system fair or not?
• Are segments of our society “disenfranchised” as a result of how the election system works? Why or why not?

Assignment for October 05: Read “The Language Police.” Prepare a 4-6 page paper describing in broad policy terms the problems and solutions Ravitch describes (this summary should be about 1 to 1 ½ pages of your paper). Analyze the problems and solutions. Does she identify the correct root cause? Will her solutions work? Why or why not? If the paper is double spaced, it should be six pages long, if it is single spaced it should be no more than 4 pages long.

October 05—Who Controls the K-12 Curriculum?
• Who (individual/s or levels of government) controls the K-12 school curriculum?
• What do Ravitch’s findings mean for local schools?
• How do standards setting organizations fit in? Do they help or complicate the situation Ravitch describes?
• How do curricular decisions in higher education differ from those in the K-12 sector? What are implications of K-12 curricular decisions for higher education?
• What is Ravitch’s opinion? Does she offer a solution?
• Presentation of student papers
• “In the News”

Assignment for October 19: Prepare and analyze the Virginia Gubernatorial Candidates’ positions on education (include everyone who will be on the ballot).

October 12—No Class.

October 19—Election Issues: Virginia
• “In the news”
• How do the candidates compare on education issues?
• Do their positions and statements reflect what you consider the key education issues? Why or why not?
• Are the positions realistic or election year rhetoric? Why or why not?

Assignment for October 26: Select a member of the U.S. Supreme Court who interests you (this will be done in class on October 19). Find out all you can about that person, what is their education and professional background, how old is the person, how long has she or he served on the court, who appointed the person, how are their decisions classified and other interesting information. Begin by going to the web site for the U.S. Supreme Court.

October 26—Role of the Courts: Review and Discuss Federal Court Decisions Related to Education.
• What is the background of the nine Justices? Who’s the most conservative and who’s the most liberal? Who is most likely to retire next?
• How is the federal court system organized?
• Discussion of key legal decisions in education.
• “In the News”

**Assignment for November 02:** Go to [http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp)
This site allows you to gather extensive data on individual school districts and to compare one district with others. Pick a district of your choice and be prepared to present a profile of the school district at the next class. What can you learn or hypothesize about student achievement from these data? You might also look at other national data bases (Census, Postsecondary) to find additional information about the community in which the schools reside. See if you can find an article on education from a newspaper either in the school district you look at or from a paper that reports on happenings in that district.

**November 02—Equal or Not?**
- “In the News”
- Student presentations of school district data
- What data/information might account for differences in student achievement by district?
- What are policy options to address variations in student achievement across the United States?

**Assignment for November 16:** Find an education blog. Be prepared to discuss what’s on it and who provides the information.

**November 09—No Class**

**November 16—Discussion of Virginia Election Results**
- “In the News”
- Discussion of Virginia election results
- Did interesting voting patterns emerge?
- Given the winner’s promises, how should citizens evaluate his term five years from now?

**Assignment for November 30:** Find two news articles from two different papers on the same subject. Be prepared to discuss what is the same and different in each.

**November 23—No Class (Happy Thanksgiving)**

**November 30—Role of the Media in Education Policy**

- “In the News”
- Do members of the press just report policy or do they influence it? How?
- How do citizens find out what’s really happening?

**December 07—Wrap up**
Important Information for all students
The College of Education and Human Development expects all students to abide by the following:

✓ Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See www.gse.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.
✓ Students must know and follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full Honor Code.
✓ Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See http://mail.gmu.edu and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.
✓ Students with disabilities to seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/students/drc or call 703-003-2474 to access the DRC.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/Points</th>
<th>Quality of Work</th>
<th>Completeness of Work</th>
<th>Timeliness</th>
<th>Participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 96 – 100</td>
<td>Exceptional quality and insight; a rare &amp; valuable contribution to the field.</td>
<td>100% complete and error free</td>
<td>100% on time</td>
<td>Outstanding; facilitates conversation focused on the topic; questions &amp; comments reveal thoughtful reaction. Good team participant</td>
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<tr>
<td>A- 92 – 95</td>
<td>Convincingly on target; demonstrates evidence of understanding and application; clear and concise writing; the reader is not distracted by grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.</td>
<td>Accurate &amp; seamless writing; virtually a complete product</td>
<td>Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such as serious personal or family illness). Instructor is notified in advance that a paper may be late.</td>
<td>Well above average doctoral student; actively helps move group toward goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+ 89 – 91</td>
<td>Competent; provides credible evidence of understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations and/or writing clarity.</td>
<td>Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor’s ability to see the product as a whole.</td>
<td>Assignments late more than once or without prior conversation with instructor; not necessarily chronic.</td>
<td>Reliable and steady worker; questions and comments reveal some thought and reflection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B 85 – 88</td>
<td>Evidence of understanding presented but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations.</td>
<td>Evidence of effort but one or more significant and important points are missed or not addressed.</td>
<td>More than half the assignments are late, but none are excessively late.</td>
<td>Doesn’t contribute often, but generally reveals some thought and reflection. Follows rather than leads group activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- 80 – 84</td>
<td>Barely passable for graduate credit; only enough to get by; little evidence of understanding; assignments lack clarity and organization; little evidence of proof reading. Citations absent or inaccurate.</td>
<td>Barely sufficient; work is the least that could be done to justify graduate credit.</td>
<td>Excessively or repeatedly late.</td>
<td>Few meaningful contributions to class discussions. Little evidence of participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 75 - 79</td>
<td>Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or not connection to course content or concepts.</td>
<td>Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.</td>
<td>Excessively or repeatedly late.</td>
<td>Weak or minimal participation; passive; often sidetracks group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F below 74</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.</td>
<td>Missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.</td>
<td>No constructive participation; destructive; demeaning toward other points of view.</td>
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