EDU 413: Contemporary Issues in Education Policy
Fall 2011
Department of Education Leadership

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Class Sessions: Tues. 4:50 – 7:30 (Dewey 2-110C)

Course Description and Objectives
EDU 413 introduces students to several currently pressing educational policy issues and debates, including class size reduction, school choice, and mayoral control. The course is designed to provide content knowledge and encourage critical thinking about the issues/problems being addressed by state and local policies; the nature and effects of these policies; and the complexities of major policy issues. The course focuses on the impact of recent policies on the public school system, the school organization, educational performance, and equity.

The course objectives are:
- To increase students’ knowledge about current policy debates;
- To provide students with the necessary skills and understanding to critically analyze policies;
- To provide students with an understanding of school and district administrators as advocates, makers, and implementers of policy;
- To provide students with the necessary skills and understanding so that students are able to advocate for policies that have a positive effect on the public school system, school organization, educational performance, and equity.

Format
The course will be conducted in a seminar format, using readings, small group activities, guest speakers, and electronic media to guide discussion.
Student Expectations
1. All assignments are due when indicated. Late assignments will be penalized with lower grades. No incompletes will be granted, except in cases of serious illness or family emergency.
2. Please be sure to proofread your writing and use appropriate citations throughout your work. Make every paper you submit your best possible version!
   For all assignments, you should follow APA guidelines for your references. The following cites provide further APA style guidelines:
   http://umclibrary.crk.umn.edu/apa6thedition.pdf
   http://www.docstyles.com/apacrib.htm

   Also, I highly recommend you review the following useful website regarding how to avoid plagiarism: http://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/roig_st_johns/index.html

   Written assignments during the term receiving less than a B- may be revised and resubmitted after consultation with me.
3. If there were one right answer to policy issues, then the task of research and policymaking would be relatively simple. However, this is not the case. Policy issues involve diverse perspectives, investments, and costs. Active discussion and thoughtful disagreement are essential for all of us to learn. Respect for others’ opinions and points of view is a fundamental ground rule for this class. One aspect of respect is meeting on equal terms; thus thoughtful reading and preparation before class discussion is expected to enable you to fully contribute to every class.
4. Students must attend each class. Please notify me in advance at the above phone number should you have to miss a class. Missing class will result in a lower course grade (except in the case of serious illness or emergency).
5. I wish to fully include persons with disabilities in this course. Please let me know as soon as possible if you need any special accommodations to enable you to fully participate.

Course Communication
This course will use Blackboard as a source of communication and information. Please make sure that you are able to access the system immediately after the first class (and contact Kristine Mager right away at kmager@warner.rochester.edu if you are having difficulty). You should check Blackboard on a regular basis to be aware of announcements, handouts, or additional course information. The Blackboard system can be accessed at: http://my.rochester.edu.
Requirements/Readings
There is no required text for this course. All required readings are available on Blackboard or will be handed out in class if they have not been posted. (Note: Additional readings may be posted and required beyond what is currently on this syllabus and Blackboard.)

In addition, each student is required to read and report on one book that you select from a list of options (see Assignments).

You must also sign up for the Public Education Network weekly NewsBlast at: http://www.publiceducation.org/subscribe.asp which will help you stay abreast of current policy issues. You should review this and be prepared to discuss relevant topics during class. It is also beneficial to read other electronic and print media with an eye toward current policy issues/debates. You'll find that these are in the news daily at the local, state, and national level. I recommend you sign up for the free e-newsletters at www.edweek.org to also follow these topics.

Suggestions
1. Conversations regarding assignments and other course matters may be initiated at any time, either during class or during individual meetings.
2. In preparing for class, students are encouraged to write notes regarding the purpose, thesis, arguments, findings, and evidence of each of the assigned readings and consider how the readings relate to the course, the local and state context, and your own experiences in schools/districts or research interests. These notes will be particularly useful to prepare you for class discussions and will enable you to incorporate course readings into written assignments.

Course Schedule: Topics by Week

Sept. 6: Introduction to Educational Policy
Introduction to course
Overview: educational policy and educational policy analysis

**DURING CLASS: Choose Book; Choose Date/Topic for Discussion Leader Assignment.

Sept. 13: Uniforms and Bullying/Cyberbullying
Readings:

**DURING CLASS: Discuss book reviews and presentations
Sept. 20: School Choice: Intra- and Inter-District Choice

Readings:

Sept. 27: School Choice: Charter Schools

Readings:

ASSIGNMENT: Identify Topic for Policy Paper

Oct. 4: Class Size Reduction Policies

Readings:

ASSIGNMENT: Student Book Presentations:
1) Schneider
2) Lassiter
Oct. 11:  **Mayoral Control**


**ASSIGNMENT:** Student Book Presentations:
1) Koretz
2) Lipman

Oct. 18:  **High School Reform - Overview**

Readings:


**ASSIGNMENT:** Student Book Presentations:
1) Rothstein

Oct. 25:  **High School Reform – Scheduling, Groupings, and Transitions**

Readings:


**ASSIGNMENT:** All Book Reviews Due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.
Nov. 1: Student Promotion/Retention
Readings:

Nov. 8: Teacher Quality, Labor Markets, and Preparation
Readings:

ASSIGNMENT: Annotated Bibliography Due by 11:59 p.m.

Nov. 15: Teacher Quality, Labor Markets, and Preparation (continued)
Readings:
Ingersoll, R. & Smith, T. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. Educational Leadership, 60(8), 30-33
Nov. 22: NY’s Race to the Top

TBD

Nov. 29: Policy Implementation and Evaluation

Dec. 6: Final Thoughts on Issues in Educational Policy
Readings:
Assignments

Attendance and Participation: 25 pts.
Book Review (individual): 20 pts.
Book Presentation (group): 10 pts.
Policy Paper Annotated Bibliography: 10 pts.
Policy Paper: 35 pts.

Attendance and Participation: 25 pts.
◊ Due: ongoing

Given the nature of EDU 413, it is important that all students participate fully in the course. My expectation is that students will attend each class and be prepared by carefully reading all required readings. In addition, I expect that students will participate fully in classes, particularly during sessions with guest speakers, student presentations, or in-class group activities. Participation will be evaluated based on the contribution to the discussion and other students’ learning; it will not be evaluated based on the number or length of comments.

1. Reading Briefs: As part of your ongoing participation in this course, you are required to prepare a 1-2 page brief each week that emerged from your reading of the required articles/chapters/etc. The weekly briefs will serve as a basis for our class discussions. They should be informal reflections on the readings assigned for that particular week, not summaries of the readings. The brief should have a focus, picking a particular aspect of the reading(s) and reacting to it. You may incorporate your own experience with the topic or you might offer a more general reaction to the subjects under consideration.

At the end of each brief, you must include at least 2 thoughtful questions for discussion based upon the readings - think of these as questions that would help you and your peers further understand the topic at hand or could help you with a particular aspect of the policy that you are grappling with (and likely others are too). These are also really beneficial in providing me with insights into your thinking around these topics.

These briefs are due no later than 9:00 p.m. every Sunday and should be sent to me through Blackboard as an attachment under the course tools (email). Briefs submitted after the deadline will be recorded as received late. Students may choose not to submit briefs on any three weeks of the term without penalty. However, students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in every session. The briefs will not be graded, but will constitute a major criterion in judging class preparation and participation and in allowing me to gauge students’ understanding of these complex topics.

2. Discussion Co-Leader
Each student will sign up to be discussion co-leader of one class. Your responsibility as discussion co-leader includes identifying newspaper articles, policy briefs, etc. on the topic for the day to extend your and your colleagues’ understanding of these topics. You should bring copies of these to class for all of the students and be prepared to help lead the discussion on the required readings, as well as on the related materials that you provide. At the end of the class the week before you are co-
leader please meet with me to discuss what you plan to share and any questions you have about this role.

The following websites and journal/periodicals are recommended as you search for your articles, briefs, etc. in preparation for co-leading (however, you may use other resources, e.g., newspapers):

**Websites:**
*Education Week –* [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)*
American Educational Research Association - [http://www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)*
Education Commission of the States – [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)*
Council of Chief State School Officers – [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

**Academic journals:**

**Periodicals/Practitioners:**
*Phi Delta Kappan; Education Week; Educational Leadership.*

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**Book Review (Individual) and Presentation (Group)**
◊ **Presentations will occur on 10/4, 10/11, 10/18. All individual papers are due on 10/25.**

Each student must select one of the following books for this assignment. As a group, you will present the book to the rest of the class. Each of you will individually write a short review of the book (max. 6 pages, double spaced excluding reference list - you will lose points if your review is longer than 6 pages). You are required to acquire the book on your own either through the library or from any other source (e.g., amazon.com). Contact me before the 2nd class by email if you are having difficulty getting your book.

This is a critique, and not just a summary of the author’s points. Please read over the additional materials that I provide on 9/13 before starting your book review.

Policy Paper
You are required to prepare a policy paper on a topic of your own choosing for your final project for this course. The topic must focus on an existing K-12 education policy at the local or state level (Note: you may focus on a topic that we have discussed in the course). You will submit your topic to me on 9/27 and I will discuss the topics with students individually during the following class if they need to be further refined (e.g., narrowed or expanded).

Examples of Policies (in addition to those we discuss in class):
- Academic Intervention Services
- School Day (e.g., Start Times or Lengthening the School Day)
- Single Sex Schools/Classrooms
- Comprehensive School Reform
- Full-day Kindergarten
- Universal Pre-Kindergarten
- Teacher Mentoring
- Alternative Certification
- Year-Round Schooling
- High School Exit Exams
- English Language Learners
- Vouchers
- Special Education (narrow to a specific sub-area)
- Teacher Evaluation/Merit Pay/Pay for Performance
- Online Learning

Policy Paper - Annotated Bibliography (10 pts)
You policy paper must be based on related documents, including newspaper articles, research reports, policy briefs, evaluation reports, and journal articles. The paper should use relevant research literature to summarize past policy impacts and to make inferences about likely future impacts. To help ensure that you are focusing on the right types of documents and acquiring a preliminary understanding of these you must submit an annotated bibliography on 11/8. I will provide additional details regarding the amount and types of information to include for each citation.
Policy Paper - Final Paper: Policy Analysis (35 pts)
◊ Due: 12/11 (approximately 20-25 pages double spaced)

The purpose of this activity is to enable you to develop the skills necessary to research and analyze education policies. The following are key areas to discuss and you should organize your paper around these areas:

- Policy overview: brief overview of the policy that is the focus of your paper;
- Policy problem/issue definition – what is the problem that the policy you are studying is trying to address?
- Policy design/formulation – what are the details of the policy? What is the policy’s intended effect?
- Policy effects – Is there any evidence of policy effects (either intended or unintended)? Has it had different effects on different populations of students? Has it had different effects on the public school system, school organization, student performance, or issues of equity?
- Implementation issues – what are the problems that have been identified in implementing this type of policy? Consider whether these are things that could be addressed by changes to the policy design.
- Policy recommendations – what do you recommend in terms of whether or not this policy should be adopted/altered/etc.?

You may want to incorporate certain ways of examining policy that I have discussed in class e.g., the type of policy (e.g., distributive) or a policy lens (e.g., normative lens).

Please keep in mind that the context of your analysis is important – who is the intended audience (e.g., a local school board, the state department of education)? You must be clear about the level of analysis because you would likely analyze a policy differently and argue for different recommendations if you were addressing a rural vs. urban district or a district vs. a state department of education. Is your analysis about a policy that already exists or one that doesn’t exist in a particular district/state (i.e., are you analyzing whether to adopt a new policy or whether or not a policy should be continued)? These types of contextual issues are important to your analysis. The policy paper is due on December 11 (submit to Blackboard).
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