

HNRS 131-004: Contemporary Social Issues: K-12 Education Policy

Instructor: Amy Crockett

Email: acrocket@gmu.edu

Class Time: Tuesdays/Thursdays 10:30 am - 11:45 am

Class Location: Aquia Building, Room 219

Office Hours: By appointment. Email me to set up a time.

Office: Buchanan Hall D134-8

Course Overview

This course explores the various social and economic issues and policies within K-12 education. We will examine the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, and other forms of identity impact various educational issues. Students will consider the different approaches to understanding different policy debates as well as understand the different stakeholder views. Some of the issues to be considered are purpose of school, school admissions tests, inequities of school funding, school access, impact of charter schools and private schools, and the school to prison pipeline. The course will provide the students with the opportunity to think through the challenges with creating and designing public policy to address various education issues. Students will also consider the issues from a wide range of perspectives. The goal of the class is to prepare students to understand and engage in the contemporary debates around these issues. The course will provide students with opportunities to think through the challenges in education and in creating education policy from a range of perspectives.

Required Texts: None. All readings will be available on Blackboard, through the library, or with a free student subscription to Wall Street Journal or other newspapers. Use your Mason Username and password to activate a New York Times account at bit.do/MasonNYtimes. Wall Street Journal account can be found at go.gmu.edu/wsj. You can also find more details on the GMU Library website.

Blackboard (BB):

Use of Blackboard is **mandatory**. All course information from the syllabus, assignment descriptions to assignment submissions and the posting of grades are managed on our course pages on Blackboard. Any revisions to the syllabus or other class business will be posted to the “Announcements” section on Blackboard.

Zoom

Zoom is available via web browser, desktop application, and mobile app. Instructions for how to download or sign in to Zoom through GMU's license can be found at:

<https://its.gmu.edu/service/zoom/>

Assignments

- Participation: 25%
- Opinion Editorial Papers: 20% (10% each)
- Debate Day Preparation: 20% (10% each)
- Experiential Learning Report: 10%
- Discussion Facilitation: 10%
- Final Reflection Paper: 15%

Participation: 25%

The quality of our classroom community depends on your active participation. As a student enrolled in a discussion seminar, you are expected to come to each class prepared to contribute to the discussion and share your questions and ideas. Your participation grade will be determined through a combination of attendance, discussion, and class activities. An "A" grade in this category will require attendance at nearly all classes (two excused absences are built in) and engagement in both small and large group activities/discussions. Active engagement includes making comments, asking questions, and interacting with peers. Comments should reflect thoughtful reflection on readings or other student comments.

Two Opinion Editorials: 20%

An opinion editorial (op-ed) is a short newspaper article that expresses an informed point of view. An op-ed is 600-700 words. You will identify an educational problem or policy of your choosing. You will then place that issue within the larger social, cultural, and historical context. Then you will analyze the current policy or proposed solution making an argument for why it will or will not work. As well as analyzing the impact the policy will have on specific groups. Grades will not be based on your opinion, but will be based on your ability to place the issue within the larger context and argue persuasively using clear analytical arguments. More details to follow in class.

Two Class Debate Day Preparation: 20%

We will have two class debates. You will need to come to class prepared with research prepared to argue for a particular point in the debate. Again your grade will not depend on your opinion, but on the preparation and research given to understand the complex issues we will be debating. More details to follow in class.

Discussion Facilitation: 10%

An important goal of this class will be to create a learning community in which all members have the opportunity to contribute to in-class discussions. Toward this goal, you and a partner will be asked to facilitate a portion of a class discussion. You will sign up for a date for discussion facilitation during the second week of class. Detailed instructions on the steps to follow will be posted to Blackboard prior to the sign-up date. Discussion facilitations will also require you to submit your own preparation notes.

Experiential Learning Assignment: 10%:

Part of understanding a contemporary social issue is understanding those currently impacted by the issue. It also requires you to experience the issue or talk with someone that is experiencing the issue. As such you will be required to participate in some form of experiential learning. More details will follow in class. Some options include attending a school board meeting, visiting a school or classroom, interviewing a teacher, etc.

Final Reflection Assignment: 15%

The final paper will be a reflection assignment. More details to follow. **The final assignment is due Tuesday, May 16th by 1:15 p.m.**

Grading Percentages

A	100-94	C	76-74
A-	93-90	C-	73-70
B+	89-87	D+	69-67
B	86-84	D	66-64
B-	83-80	F	63 and below
C+	79-77		

Classroom Procedures and Grading Notes

Correspondence

I will respond to your emails within 24 hours during the weekdays. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement in Blackboard. Additionally, please be respectful of your instructor's time and avoid emailing with trivial or basic questions that can easily be answered by reading the syllabus, asking a classmate, or reviewing other course materials.

Late Policy for Assignments:

You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Due dates are clearly indicated throughout the syllabus. I understand that 'life happens' and there are times when you need extra time to complete an assignment. Late assignments will be subject to a daily penalty. I will deduct one grade variation from your assignment for every day late (weekends equal one day) for up to 3 days (A- to B+; B to B-, etc). For all assignments, I do allow a 15-minute grace period with no penalty. After this grace period, the first deduction is applied. A student will receive a zero on the assignment if it is not submitted within 3 days. However, you CANNOT turn in debate preparation, discussion leader, or the final assignment late.

In the case of family and/or medical emergencies, I can make an exception to this policy based on the particulars of the case. However, if an emergency does arise, you should try to contact me *before* the actual due date (e.g., via email, day or night). I do not offer extensions to students after the due date has passed, except in the case of true family or health emergencies.

Course Schedule

This is a tentative schedule and subject to change. Check Blackboard for amendments. Any changes will be announced and discussed in class.

Schedule	Topic/In-Class Materials We Will Be Discussing
Week 1	Welcome and Introduction to a Framework to evaluating policy
Tuesday, January 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome and Introductions• Go over syllabus and class expectations
Thursday, January 26	Economic approach to policy analysis. Getting a baseline for discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Applied Mainline Economics</i>, "Chapter 5 The Political Process" by Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke (pg. 70-79)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Virginia School of Political Economy I: An Introduction to Public Choice." (8:16)
Week 2	
Tuesday, January 31	<p>What is the status of education currently? What is the history of outcomes and funding? What policies have been put in place recently?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanushek, Eric A., Paul E. Peterson, Laura M. Talpey, and Ludger Woessmann. "The achievement gap fails to close." <i>Education Next</i> 19, no. 3 (2019): 8-17. • "Black Education Tragedy is New" Walter Williams 12/2/2020 http://walterewilliams.com/black-education-tragedy-is-new/ • Optional: No Child Left Behind: An Overview By: Alyson Klein https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/no-child-left-behind-an-overview/2015/04
Thursday, February 2	<p>What is the purpose of education? What does educational opportunity mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book Review: The Case Against Education: Why the Education System is a Waste of Time and Money by Bryan Caplan. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lserewiewofbooks/2018/05/30/book-review-the-case-against-education-why-the-education-system-is-a-waste-of-time-and-money-by-bryan-caplan/ • Brick, Blanche. 2005. "Changing Concepts of Equal Education Opportunity: A Comparison of the Views of Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann and John Dewey: [1].
Week 3	
Tuesday, February 7	<p>What determines student success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanushek, Eric A. "The failure of input-based schooling policies." <i>The economic journal</i> 113, no. 485 (2003): F64-F98. • Lazear, Edward P. "Educational Production." <i>The Quarterly Journal of Economics</i> 116, no. 3 (2001): 777–803. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696418
Thursday, February 9	Guest Lecture about Student Assessments
Week 4	
Tuesday, February 14	<p>How important are teachers? How can you measure a teachers success or effectiveness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goldhaber, Dan. "In schools, teacher quality matters most: today's research reinforces Coleman's findings." <i>Education Next</i> 16, no. 2 (2016): 56-63. https://www.educationnext.org/in-schools-teacher-quality-matters-most-coleman/
Thursday, February 16	What is the importance of a school board? Who is on the School Board?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Why School Boards Are Now Hot Spots for Nasty Politics” Stephen Sawchuck 7/29/21 https://www.edweek.org/leadership/why-school-boards-are-now-hot-spots-for-nasty-politics/2021/07 “The Big Problem With Who Runs for School Boards – and How to Fix It” Carrie Douglas. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-big-problem-with-who-runs-for-school-boards-and-how-to-fix-it/2022/12 Optional in case you wanted to read the actual Virginia Law: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title22.1/chapter7/
Week 5	
Tuesday, February 21	Guest Speaker – What is it really like running for school board?
Thursday, February 23	<p>How are schools funded? How much gets to the students? Is the amount currently spent enough? Is the money effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chingos, Matthew, and Kristin Blagg. "Making sense of state school funding policy." <i>Urban Institute</i>. Retrieved December 4 (2017): 2017.
Week 6	
Tuesday, February 28	Debate: Teacher Shortage
Thursday, March 2	<p>How much does the principal matter? Why is there so much principal turnover?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Podcast “School Leaders REALLY Matter” on Extraordinary Districts in Extraordinary Times. 3/11/2021 https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/school-leaders-really-matter/ Grissom, Jason A., Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay. 2021. “How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research.” New York: The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/how-principals-affect-students-and-schools-executive-summary.aspx
Week 7	
Tuesday, March 7	<p>Guest Speaker – Teach For America, New Orleans, Charter Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Podcast – “Sarah Carr on Charter Schools, Educational Reform, and Hope Against Hope” Econ Talk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvCBkVWJGDs
Thursday, March 9	<p>Opinion Editorial #1 Due @ 10:30 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class discussion of Opinion papers
Week 8	SPRING RECESS

	NO CLASS
	NO CLASS
Week 9	
Tuesday, March 21	<p>Discussion about famous education stories portrayed in Hollywood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional: Watch or read the stories of any one: Freedom Writers, Stand and Deliver, or Lean on Me
Thursday, March 23	<p>What are charter schools? Have charter schools succeeded in student outcomes? Should public magnet schools be subject to the same arguments as charter schools?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Hitting Left – Diane Ravitch" Feb. 20, 2020 https://hittingleft.libsyn.com/diane-ravitch Winters, Marcus A. "Charter Schools in Newark: The Effect on Student Test Scores." <i>Manhattan Institute for Policy Research</i>(2020). https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/charter-schools-newark-effect-on-student-test-scores-MW.pdf
Week 10	
Tuesday, March 28	<p>What is the impact of extracurricular activities on student outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seow, Poh-Sun, and Gary Pan. "A literature review of the impact of extracurricular activities participation on students' academic performance." <i>Journal of education for business</i> 89, no. 7 (2014): 361-366.
Thursday, March 30	<p>What are the issues surrounding curriculum? Should there be a national curriculum? What problems was common core trying to address? Have arguments over curriculum changed over time? What control should parents have over curriculum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Common Core Explained" Catherine Gewertz. 9/30/15. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-common-core-explained/2015/09 "What is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It Under Attack?" Stephen Sawchuck 5/18/21. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05
Week 11	
Tuesday, April 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest Speaker – Curriculum Designer and Award winning veteran teacher
Thursday, April 6	Debate: School Choice
Week 12	

Tuesday, April 11	<p>What is the impact of family challenges on student outcomes? What mental health resources are available to students? How do mental health resources help students? How could you fund more mental health resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Porche, Michelle V., Darcé M. Costello, and Myra Rosen-Reynoso. "Adverse family experiences, child mental health, and educational outcomes for a national sample of students." <i>School Mental Health</i> 8, no. 1 (2016): 44-60. Puskar, Kathryn Rose, and Lisa Marie Bernardo. "Mental health and academic achievement: Role of school nurses." <i>Journal for Specialists in Pediatric nursing</i> 12, no. 4 (2007): 215-223.
Thursday, April 13	<p>What are the laws surrounding homeschooling? Should homeschoolers be allowed access to local schools?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooper, Bruce S., and John Sureau. "The politics of homeschooling: New developments, new challenges." <i>Educational policy</i> 21, no. 1 (2007): 110-131.
Week 13	
Tuesday, April 18	No Class – I am traveling for an Economics Conference
Thursday, April 20	<p>Opinion Editorial #2 Due @ 10:30 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class discussion of Opinion papers
Week 14	
Tuesday, April 25	<p>What is the impact of school safety on student outcomes and well-being? How do you improve school safety?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kutsyuruba, B., Klinger, D.A. and Hussain, A. (2015), Relationships among school climate, school safety, and student achievement and well-being: a review of the literature. <i>Rev Educ</i>, 3: 103-135.
Thursday, April 27	<p>What is the school-to-prison pipeline? What is causing the phenomenon? Is there a way to fix the issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russell J. Skiba, Mariella I. Arredondo & Natasha T. Williams (2014) More Than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to-Prison Pipeline, <i>Equity & Excellence in Education</i>, 47:4, 546-564 Weisburst, E.K. (2019), Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes. <i>J. Pol. Anal. Manage.</i>, 38: 338-365.
Week 15	
Tuesday, May 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBD based on topic class chooses Peer Engagement with Final Assignment
Thursday, May 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations of Experiential Learning Reflections and Wrap Up

The Final Assignment is due Tuesday, May 16th by 1:15 p.m.

Diversity/Inclusion Statement

The Honors College, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and ability status.

- We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff. We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, and become aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

Anti-Racism Statement:

As a member of the George Mason University community, I will work to create an educational environment that is committed to anti-racism and inclusive excellence. An anti-racist approach to higher education acknowledges the ways that individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural manifestations of racism against Black individuals, indigenous people, and other people of color contribute to inequality and injustice in our classrooms, on our campuses, and in our communities. Anti-racist work strives to provide our community members with resources to interrupt cycles of racism so as to cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just environment for all of our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends, regardless of racial background. I believe that the work of anti-racism starts with each individual; together students and faculty in this course will build knowledge and take actions rooted in principles of equity, inclusion, and justice that we will carry with us throughout our lives.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

University Policies and Resources

GMU Library:

There are two libraries on Fairfax Campus: Fenwick and Gateway in the Johnson Center. You should be acquainted with these locations and how to use the library online catalog and databases. If you need any help with the library, please do not hesitate to contact the library staff. <http://library.gmu.edu/>

Academic Honesty:

You are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University's Honor Code. The Code can be found [here](#). It is your responsibility to see me if you have questions about these policies. George Mason University has an honor code that states the following:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal

achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this. Additionally, students must follow the university policy for [Responsible Use of Computing](#).

University Communications:

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University 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.

Counseling Center: Student Union I, Room 364, 703-993-2380.

[The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance.

Office of Disability Services: (703-993-2474; SUB I, Room 2500)

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the [George Mason University Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note that accommodations must be made before assignments or exams are due. I cannot adjust your grade after the fact.

Writing Center: (703-993-1200 Robinson A, Room 114)

[The George Mason University Writing Center](#) staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. The writing center includes assistance for students for whom English is a second language.

Learning Services: (703-993-2380; SUB I, Suite 3129) provides, at no cost, study skills workshops can help you improve your academic performance. These workshops include strategies for note-taking, reading, exams, memory and organization, time-management, performance anxiety, and improving concentration. They are offered multiple times throughout the semester. Workshop descriptions, schedule and registration information is online. <https://learningservices.gmu.edu/academic-success-workshops/>.

Patriot Pantry: (SUB I, Room 3200) provides access to non-perishable food items and toiletries to GMU students who are unable to afford them. The Pantry is donation-based and run by students and volunteers by the Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) in University Life. In addition to providing non-perishable food and personal items, it educates student users about the resources available on campus and in the surrounding community. For COVID alterations to service and for more information: <https://ssac.gmu.edu/patriot-pantry/>