

GOVT 455 Education Policy and Politics in the U.S.

Fall 2007, Section 01, CRN #15327

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Course Meetings: 37 Morton Hall, W 5:30-8:30pm

Office Hours: T 10:30-11:30am, W 1-3pm

1. Course description

Welcome to GOVT 455. This research seminar explores the policy and politics of K-12 education in the United States. The course considers these issues through several lenses. We will read top research on matters ranging from the history of school reform to more specific topics such as standards and accountability policy. In November, we will take an all-day field trip to Washington, DC to talk with policy elites in the nation's capital. And finally, by completing an original research paper, you will develop in-depth knowledge about a topic you choose while helping others carry out their own projects.

There will be much for us to learn, read, and think about this semester. The class will only succeed if we all try hard to achieve a deep understanding of the material, offer and receive criticism from others, and recognize that we are members of a research community committed to doing outstanding work. I won't lie: the workload will be intense, akin to a graduate level course. I have had similar expectations in previous years and found that the majority of my students were able to handle the challenge.

2. Readings

These books are required for purchase and are available at the William and Mary Bookstore.

- David Tyack and Larry Cuban. 1995. *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ISBN 0674892836.
- Paul Manna. 2006. *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 1589010906.
- Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli. 2006. *No Child Left Behind: A Primer*. New York: Peter Lang. ISBN 082047844X.
- Jay P. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser (eds). 1999. *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. ISBN 0309062802.
- Diane Ravitch, ed. 2004. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy, 2004*. Washington, DC: Brookings. ISBN 0815773692.
- Julian R. Betts and Tom Loveless, eds. 2005. *Getting Choice Right: Ensuring Equity and Efficiency in Education Policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings. ISBN 0815753314.

Other required readings are on the course Blackboard site.

3. Assignments and grading

I will calculate course grades based on the following items. Students must complete all items to receive credit for the course.

Percent	Item
40	Class contributions, including being the class discussion starter for one week
10	Research paper preliminaries, which include: (a) research paper prospectus, (b) methods and data sources description, and (c) annotated bibliography
10	Research paper presentation
40	Final research paper

I will assign grades based on an A to F scale (A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=88-89; B=83-87; B-=80-82; C+=78-79; C=73-77; C-=70-72; D+=68-69; D=63-67; D-=60-62; F<60). Each assignment will be weighted based on the percentages in the above table. More details on each item will be forthcoming. For now, let me briefly describe the two major components of your grade: class contributions and the research paper.

3.1 Class contributions

Your active participation and attendance at all seminar sessions is absolutely essential. Put simply, this class will flop unless each and every week, all class members are prepared to exchange ideas and have lively debates.

The best contributions extend or develop discussions, and simultaneously push all seminar members, including myself, to consider ideas in new ways. To that end, you should all know one another's names by the end of the second week of classes. You should circulate emails among yourselves (and send me a cc) when you notice an article that might be useful to your colleagues. As much as possible, you should ground your comments in the readings. You should minimize comments that begin with something like "Well, back home in my school . . ." And you should not rely on a few seminar members to lead or carry the discussion. If speaking up in class makes you nervous, with my help, you will confront that fear head on in this class.

In addition to regular class participation, each week two seminar members will serve as discussion starters. More on that role appears in section 4.1.

3.2 Research paper

The capstone assignment for this course is a 25-page paper on a topic of your choosing. As an original research paper, your work should be grounded in a *theoretical orientation* that you use to help you interpret the *empirical evidence* you will gather. The paper will have a clear *research strategy* that allows you *test hypotheses* in a rigorous way.

This course may be the first time you have ever taken on such a project. Thus, during each week I will offer advice about how to do original research (see section 4.1), as well as ideas on what may be the hardest part of all: identifying and managing a project that you find interesting and can actually complete in one semester.

To help develop your project and to get you working on your paper early in the semester, you will complete three short writing assignments, which are due during the first two months of class. Those assignments and my feedback will serve as building blocks for the final paper.

Near the end of the semester, all students will present the tentative results of their research to the entire class. Presentations will run approximately 15 minutes and have a 15 minute question and answer period. Because these presentations will occur before the final papers are due, they will also enable you to gather additional feedback before completing your final draft.

4. Other important notes

4.1 Class Organization

Typically, we will follow this road map during each class.

Research Q&A. This is your time. At the beginning of each session we will hear any and all questions people might have about their research papers. This is time to seek help from your classmates and me. Your questions need not relate to the specific topic on the syllabus for any given week. Things as mundane as, “I was trying to get Stata to do X and I can’t figure out how—help!” to more substantive matters such as “I’m thinking of doing a comparison of X, Y, and Z on the issue of state finance—does that seem like a good way to proceed?” I would expect this part of class to last anywhere from 0 to 60 minutes depending on people’s questions.

Manna sets the stage. I will take approximately 15-20 minutes of each class to give a brief lecture. In those talks I will discuss how to do research and I will situate the week’s topic in a broader context. I will not talk about the assigned readings. Rather, I will offer a more complete literature review on the week’s topic beyond the syllabus; and link the week’s topic to more general theories emerging from political science and other social science fields.

Student discussion starters. Each week, two of you will take approximately 10-15 minutes to begin our whole-group discussion. The best discussion starters will provide the class with a set of provocative questions, which they type up in a handout and distribute to everyone, that emerge from the week’s reading. As they present these questions, the discussion starters should offer their initial reactions to the readings. Three points of caution, though: First, discussion starters should NOT summarize the readings. Second, discussion starters should NOT summarize the readings. Finally, discussion starters should NOT summarize the readings. Make sense? Assume we all know the readings; as discussion starter, your job is to launch us into an interesting conversation about them.

Readings discussion. We will spend most of each class discussing the specific readings assigned for the week. During this time we can explore the paths the discussion starters have identified, and entertain questions or reactions that class members bring up. Even if you are not the discussion starter, you should arrive each day with some original thoughts and questions about the readings.

4.2 Academic misconduct

I begin each semester by assuming that academic misconduct will not be an issue, but as a policy matter I mention this on every syllabus. For any questions about policies regarding cheating, plagiarism, or other types of misconduct, please refer to the web site of the William and Mary Honor Council and the relevant pages about the Honor Code from the Student Handbook. If I discover a student violating the Honor Code, I will initiate an Honor Council proceeding and, at a bare minimum, recommend to the Council that the student receive an “F” for the course. I take this issue extremely seriously, and hope you do too.

4.3 What you can expect from me

So far I have described what I expect from you. But what can you expect from me? Several things. First, and foremost, I will not ask you to do things that waste your time. My experience has convinced me that students respond best when classes encourage them to use their minds well by thinking hard about interesting ideas and questions. Second, I will offer lots of honest feedback in office hours, via email exchanges, and on your written work. If my comments seem confusing, overly harsh, or unclear, let’s talk it over. Finally, I promise to treat you and your ideas with fairness and respect. It is inevitable that we will have substantive disagreements about government and politics as we examine the course material. In fact, I hope we do because that helps make the course interesting. I will not penalize you if you do not embrace my views; nor will I reward you if we happen to agree on political or policy matters.

5. Schedule of topics and readings

5.1 Organizing frames

W, 8/29 – Course intro and overview

W, 9/5 – Reform impulses

- Tyack and Cuban. 1995. *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. Read entire.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983. *A Nation at Risk*. Available at: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>. Read “Introduction,” “Findings,” and “Recommendations.” BB (on Blackboard)

W, 9/12 – Federalism

- Manna. 2006. *School’s In*. Chapters 1, 2 (skim), 3-5 and 7.

W, 9/19 – Local challenges

- Jennifer Hochschild. 2005. “What school boards can and cannot (or will not) accomplish.” In William Howell (ed.) *Besieged: School Boards and the Future of Education Politics*. BB
- Frederick M. Hess. 1999. *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*. Chapter 2 “Organizational and personal incentives for reform” and Chapter 8 “The spinning wheels of reform: Getting unstuck.” BB
- Jeffrey Henig, et al. 1999. *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*. Chapter 3 “The elusiveness of education reform” and Chapter 4 “Race and the political economy of big-city schools: Teachers and preachers.” BB

Friday, 9/21 RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE BY 6pm

W, 9/26 – No Child Left Behind Act

- Manna. 2006. *School's In*. Chapter 6.
- Hess and Petrilli. 2006. *No Child Left Behind*. Chapters 1 (skim) and 2-5.
- Optional resource: No Child Left Behind Act:
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>.

W, 10/3 – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

- Siobhan Gorman. 2001. "Navigating the special education maze: Experiences of four families." In Chester E. Finn, Jr., Andrew J. Rotherham, and Charles R. Hokanson, Jr. (eds.) *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century*. BB
- President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. 2002. *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*. Read entire. BB
- *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District*. 509 U.S. 1 (1993). BB
- Optional resource: You can listen to the oral argument for the *Zobrest* case at the Oyez Project website: http://www.oyez.org/cases/1990-1999/1992/1992_92_94/argument/.
- Optional resource: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:
<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cstatute%2C>.

Friday, 10/5 RESEARCH PAPER DATA AND METHODS DUE BY 6pm

5.2 Issues

W, 10/10 – Testing

- Heubert and Hauser (eds). 1999. *Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Chapters 1, 2, 4 (skim), 6, 7, 10, 11 (skim), and 12.

W, 10/17 – Accountability in the NCLB Context

- American Enterprise Institute. Conference on "Fixing Failing Schools: Is the NCLB Toolkit Working?" November 30, 2006. Available at:
http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.1351,filter.all/event_detail.asp.
--Read: Papers by Casserly, Manna, Plank, Hassel, and Hannaway
--Watch and take notes on: Talks by Marshall Smith, Diane Ravitch, and Kati Haycock
--If you have time, watch other presentations that interest you

W, 10/24 – Teachers

- Ravitch. 2004. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, pp. 1-88, and 201-285.

Friday, 10/26 RESEARCH PAPER ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE BY 6pm

W, 10/31 – Choice

- Betts and Loveless (eds). 2005. *Getting Choice Right*. Chapters 1 (skim), 3, 5, 6, and 9.

W, 11/7 – All-day class trip to Washington, DC.

W, 11/14 – Washington, DC debrief

W, 11/21 – No class due to Thanksgiving Break

5.3 Student research

W, 11/28 – Student research paper presentations

W, 12/5 – Student research paper presentations

T, 12/11, 6:30-9:30pm – Student research paper presentations
This is our scheduled final exam time.

Thursday, 12/20 FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE BY 6pm