

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

Fall 2008, Section 01, CRN #15327

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*Course Meetings:* 37 Morton Hall, T 4:30-7:30pm

## 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'll 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'll 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 execute their own projects.

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 up to 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 978067489283.
- Paul Manna. 2006. *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 978158901090.
- Jay P. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser (eds). 1999. *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. ISBN 978030906280.
- Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Frederick M. Hess. 2007. *No Remedy Left Behind*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute. ISBN 9780844742557
- Jane Hannaway and Andrew J. Rotherham. 2006. *Collective Bargaining in Education: Negotiating Change in Today's Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. ISBN 9781891792717
- Julian R. Betts and Tom Loveless, eds. 2005. *Getting Choice Right: Ensuring Equity and Efficiency in Education Policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings. ISBN 978081575331.

Other required readings are in a packet available at the campus copy center in Swem Library.

### 3. Assignments and grading

Course grades are based on the following items. Students must complete all items to receive course credit.

| 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 every week, all class members are prepared to exchange ideas and have lively debates. Consider yourself ill-prepared if before class you are not taking notes on the readings and preparing some written ideas to at least some of the discussion questions. 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.

The best contributions extend or develop discussions. In other words, you speak to help push the conversation forward, not simply to have us hear your voice. As much as possible, you should ground your comments in the readings and point us to specific passages to help back your arguments. 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.

Please see me immediately if speaking up in class makes you nervous. With my assistance, we can help you to overcome those fears.

#### 3.2 Research paper

The course’s capstone assignment is a 25-page paper on a topic related to K-12 education policy or politics. As an original research paper, your work will be grounded in a theoretical orientation that you use to help you generate hypotheses and interpret empirical evidence. The paper will have a clear research design that you will develop with the help of myself and your classmates.

You will define the scope of your project by completing three short writing assignments, listed above as “research paper preliminaries,” 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 semester's end, all students will present initial results of their research to the entire class and invited guests. 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 Road map for each class meeting***

Research Q&A. At the beginning of each session we will hear any and all questions people 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. I would expect this part of class to last anywhere from 0 to 60 minutes depending on people's questions.

Manna sets the stage. Time permitting, I will take approximately 15-20 minutes 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 week's assigned readings.

Student discussion starters. Each week, two students will take approximately 10-15 minutes to begin our whole-group discussion. The best discussion starters will provide the class with well-informed reactions to discussion questions that I will have distributed in advance. This will help launch us into a full class discussion about the week's topic. Be careful, though: discussion starters should NOT summarize the readings. Assume we all know the readings. As discussion starter, your job is to initiate an interesting conversation about them.

Readings discussion. We will spend most of each class discussing the assigned readings. 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***

For any questions about the consequences of cheating, plagiarism, or other types of misconduct, please refer to the William and Mary Honor Council website 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.

### ***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, 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. Finally, I promise to treat you and your ideas with fairness and respect. 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

We will alter this schedule as needed.

CP=Course Pack

### 5.1 Organizing frames

T, 9/2 – Course introduction

- Steven Johnson. 2006. *The Ghost Map*. Ch. 3 “The Investigator.” CP

T, 9/9 – Reform

- Tyack and Cuban. 1995. *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. Read entire.

T, 9/16 – Excellence and equity

- Diane Ravitch. 2003. “The test of time.” *Education Next*. Spring. CP
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983. *A Nation at Risk* (excerpt). CP
- Mark Kelman. 2001. “The moral foundations of special education law.” In Chester E. Finn, Jr., Andrew J. Rotherham, and Charles R. Hokanson, Jr. (eds.) *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century*. CP
- Education Trust. 2006. *Yes We Can: Telling Truths and Dispelling Myths about Race and Education in America*. CP
- Richard Kahlenberg. 2006. “A new way on school integration.” The Century Foundation Issue Brief. CP
- Thomas B. Fordham Institute. 2008. “Executive summary” and “Foreword.” *High-Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB*. CP

### Friday, 9/19 RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE BY 5PM

T, 9/23 – Governance, part 1: Federalism

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

T, 9/30 – Governance, part 2: Localism

- 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*. CP
- Frederick M. Hess. 1999. *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*. Ch. 2 “Organizational and personal incentives for reform” and Ch. 8 “The spinning wheels of reform: Getting unstuck.” CP
- Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich (eds). 2003. *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*. Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich, Ch. 1 “Mayor-centrism in context”; John Portz, Ch. 4 “Boston: Agenda setting and school reform in a mayor-centric system”; and Kenneth J. Meier, Ch. 8. “Structure, politics, and policy: The logic of mayoral control.” CP

## ***5.2 Key policy areas and controversies***

T, 10/7 – Standards and testing, part 1

- Diane Ravitch. 1995. *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*. Ch. 1 “The idea of standards” (excerpt). CP
- Heubert and Hauser (eds). 1999. *Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Ch. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

### **Friday, 10/10 RESEARCH PAPER DATA AND METHODS PLAN DUE BY 5PM**

T, 10/14 – Fall break. No class.

T, 10/21 – Standards and testing, part 2

- Heubert and Hauser (eds). 1999. *Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Ch. 5, 6, 7, 10, and 11

T, 10/28 – The No Child Left Behind Act

- Manna. 2006. *School's In*. Ch. 6 (skim quickly).
- Hess and Finn 2007. Ch. 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, and Conclusion.

### **Friday, 10/31 RESEARCH PAPER ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE BY 5PM**

T, 11/4 – Teachers and collective bargaining

- Hannaway and Rotherham. 2006. *Collective Bargaining in Education: Negotiating Change in Today's Schools*. Introduction (skim), Ch. 1 (skim), 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10.

T, 11/11 – Public and private school choice

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

T, 11/18 – All-day class trip to Washington, DC.

T, 11/25 – Washington, DC debrief and research paper discussion

## ***5.3 Student research***

T 12/2 – Student research paper presentations

F, 12/12, 6:30-9:30pm – Student research paper presentations

This is our scheduled final exam time. I would prefer to switch this class meeting to Tuesday, 12/9. Let's discuss this possibility.

### **Tuesday, 12/16 FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE BY 6PM**