EDU7217 Course Syllabus: Educational Systems: The Dynamics of Policy, Values, and Practice

Term:  
Course: EDU 7217  
Instructor:  
Email:

Course Vision: To understand the policy, political and cultural context in which educational institutions operate. To engage the interactive dynamics between policy, expectations, values, culture, and practices of educational policy systems at the national, state, local, and the conditions that support and impede their efficacy.

Course Description: This course provides an in depth investigation of the political dynamics and policy challenges in American education. Education policy represents perhaps our nation’s most complex, far reaching, and contentious ongoing domestic policy issue. During the past 200 years, states and local governments have traditionally dominated education policy and politics; however, the federal government has played an increasingly critical role. We explore federal, state, and local political institutions and the broad range of education policy reforms they have implemented in an effort to improve our national education goals.

This course provides a broad overview of American education policy and politics at the state and national level. First, we examine the purpose and history of American public education. Second, we explore the problems facing the U.S. public education system within an increasingly globally competitive world. Third, we explore theories of the public policy process and unpack how education policy subsystems work to incrementally, and sometimes non-incrementally, influence education policy. Next we investigate the politics of education policy with particular emphasis on the federal, state and local education policy subsystems. Finally, we examine specific education policy issues including teacher education, standards and accountability systems, and school reform.

Throughout the course, student’s problems of practice (PoP) will be our central focus. Students will explore education systems through the lens of their PoP. First, we will try to understand the larger political and policy context that allowed each PoP to develop. To be change agents it is necessary to become an expert in the institutions, procedures, and political environment that allow and constrain educational change. The first assignment requires students to explore the policy subsystem, the stakeholders and institutions that comprise policy decision-making environments. The second assignment compels students to explore how their policy of interest made it through the policy process. The third assignment requires students to develop political and policy analysis skills by writing a policy memo that recommends a policy change to improve your problem of practice.
How can one consider these forces in the context of current and future "systems of education" so that practitioners can better contribute to the system rather than simply be acted upon by the system? These questions will be asked in relationship to numerous levels of the system. Students will develop a basic understanding of policy at the federal, state, local, and organizational levels and use this knowledge to analyze education policy subsystems and policy outputs. The final project will include a policy memo to recommend changes for improving a specific area of the education system.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this course will be able:

1. To describe the basic procedures, rules, and structures of American political institutions and argue how those institutions shape education policy.

2. To compare and contrast various policy problems facing the U.S. education system and argue the extent to which our American political institutions have the ability to overcome these problems.

3. To synthesize empirical educational research and political institutions and culture to produce public policy memos for a policy client.

4. To evaluate policy research in light of your theoretical understanding of policy and the political process.

5. To produce concise, logical, theoretically driven written and oral arguments supported by empirical evidence.

**Course Responsibilities:** Students are expected to fulfill the following expectations in order to achieve the course promises:

1. To read the assigned material and complete assignments: The course readings and assignments are critical component of our shared learning experience providing us with the tools to analyze educational policy and politics. Our shared learning experience will suffer without your commitment to this course.

2. To participate in class!

3. To complete all course assignments in a timely manner: All assignments must be submitted by 11:59PM on the due dates. I will accept assignments for half credit up to 7 days after the due date. After 7 days no credit will be awarded.

4. To learn from and respect all students: As academically gifted individuals in a shared learning experience, I expect you to learn as much from each other as you do from me. I also expect each student to treat all members of our learning community with respect.
Books


Other readings will be provided in PDF format on Blackboard.

Methodology  
(Course Culture and Processes)  
The course models a student-centered, active learning environment. This requires the learner to take ownership of his or her own learning and requires the instructor/facilitator to create opportunities for learners to demonstrate that ownership. Class readings and activities correlate with online learning and offline assignments. There will be a number of individual and small group assignments as well as online class discussions, including some that require participants to represent diverse points of view and present reviews, commentary, and class assignments to colleagues. Communication is critical, as it contributes to one another’s learning in the class.

Core Competency Focus

1. Critical educational consumer: One who possesses an understanding and knowledge of current educational issues in their historical, social, political, and theoretical context.

2. Astute educational thinker: One who can find, analyze, and synthesize relevant theory, research, frameworks, and arguments.

3. Effective Communicator: One who can clearly and succinctly communicate their ideas and analysis and synthesis of relevant literature and research.

4. Skillful Problem Poser: One who can readily identify and articulate problems of practice that are timely and significant

5. Scholarly Practitioner: One who can integrate theoretical and scholarly knowledge with professional practice.
Work Products and Performance Criteria

**A4 Discussion and Participation (15 points)**

Students will be placed into policy groups based on their policy areas of interest. The weekly discussion board assignments each require students to write a piece of the first draft of assignments 1, 2, and 3. Each week students answer the discussion board questions that answers one section of the upcoming paper assignment. In addition, each student must provide a brief critique of colleague’s posts within your policy group. By the time the paper assignment is due each student will have a first draft and critical feedback.

Class contribution will include use of Blackboard and in class discussion to support your own thinking (as well as your peers thinking) related to course readings and assignments. Students are expected to participate in class discussion each week. Initial posts are due no later than 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday and responses are due by 11:59PM on Friday night. Each student is expected to post at least two follow up responses. The discussion boards are closed on the weekend to give you time to focus on your readings and other assignments.

Primary Posts: 300-500 words. Your primary post will answer an assignment question. Your writings must always be grounded in the readings. Therefore, the posts tie together the readings, assignments and your own problem of practice. Be sure to provide appropriate citations. You will find guiding questions for each week provided in Blackboard and on the class schedule below.

Response Posts:
150-200 words. Policy group responses should critically analyze colleague's answers to the assignment questions and consider your understanding of the weekly reading. It is your responsibility as a scholar to provide constructive feedback to improve the overall product of your colleague’s written work. Peer analysis is both a critical skill to develop and provides much needed feedback to improve written work.

**A1 Policy Issue Subsystem (15 points)**

**DUE: November 5th**

This paper asks you to reflect on your own experience in your profession and your problem of practice. First, describe your problem of practice. Second, describe the policy issue that most directly defines the environment in which your PoP exists. Third, describe the major stakeholders including legislative, executive branch and interest group actors that comprise your policy subsystem. Fourth, describe the relationship between these actors and what type of policy subsystem they comprise. This narrative should be 3-5 pages and should answer the following questions:

1. What is your problem of practice?
2. What policy issue and specific legislation or regulation most directly defines the environment in which your problem exists?
3. How does your policy issue influence your PoP or efforts to solve the problem?
4. Who are the legislative stakeholders?
5. Who are the executive branch stakeholders?
6. Who are the critical interest group coalitions?
7. What type of policy subsystem do these actors comprise?
**A2 Policy Process Stages (30 points)**
**DUE: November 19\(^{th}\)**
Write a 3-5-page paper explaining the policy problem you wrote about in the first paper and describing why the problem requires government intervention. The paper should emphasize both course materials and any outside sources in your specific policy area. This paper should answer the following questions:

1. What is the policy problem you have identified?
2. How did your legislation or regulation become defined as a public problem?
3. How did your issue get on the public agenda?
4. How did your issue get adopted?
5. How did your policy get implemented?

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**A3 Policy Memo (40 points)**
**DUE: December 10\(^{th}\)**
The purpose of a policy memo is to help a person make a decision about a policy. Write a policy memo to a person of your choice that has the potential to influence policy. You can choose a person at the federal, state, or local levels. The important thing is to choose a person who can influence a policy you are interested in changing. The policy memo should be a maximum of three-pages single spaced with spaces between paragraphs. The policy matrix can be on a fourth page. See the example policy memo for the formatting. Your policy memo should precisely follow the memo example formatting including the following sections:

1. Executive Summary
2. Problem Statement
3. Recommendation
4. Evaluation Criteria
5. Policy Alternatives
6. Application of the Evaluation Criteria to the Policy Alternatives
7. Policy Memo Matrix

The following discussion board questions will provide a first draft of the policy memo.

1. Define your policy problem.
2. Construct four policy alternatives that could solve your problem.
3. Use the evaluation criteria to assess your policy alternatives and choose a policy recommendation.

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**Academic Honesty and Integrity Statement**

The University views academic dishonesty as one of the most serious offenses that a student can commit while in college and imposes appropriate punitive sanctions on violators. Here are some examples of academic dishonesty. While this is not an all-inclusive list, we hope this will help you to understand some of the things instructors look for. The following is excerpted from the University’s policy on academic honesty and integrity; the complete policy is available at [http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academichonesty.html](http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academichonesty.html)

- **Cheating** – intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or
study aids in an academic exercise. This may include use of unauthorized aids (notes, texts) or copying from another student’s exam, paper, computer disk, etc.

- **Fabrication** – intentional and unauthorized falsification, misrepresentation, or invention of any data, or citation in an academic exercise. Examples may include making up data for a research paper, altering the results of a lab experiment or survey, listing a citation for a source not used, or stating an opinion as a scientifically proven fact.

- **Plagiarism** – intentionally representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise without providing proper documentation of source by way of a footnote, endnote, or intertextual note.

- **Unauthorized collaboration** – Students, each claiming sole authorship, submit separate reports, which are substantially similar to one another. While several students may have the same source material, the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the data must be each individual’s.

- **Participation in academically dishonest activities** – Examples include stealing an exam, using a pre-written paper through mail order or other services, selling, loaning or otherwise distributing materials for the purpose of cheating, plagiarism, or other academically dishonest acts; alteration, theft, forgery, or destruction of the academic work of others.

- **Facilitating academic dishonesty** – Examples may include inaccurately listing someone as co-author of a paper who did not contribute, sharing a take home exam, taking an exam or writing a paper for another student.

Points/Letter Grade 95-100=A, 90-94=A-, 87-89B+, 83-86B, 80-82=B-, 77-79=C+, 73-76=C, 70-72=C-, 60-69=D, >60=F
| UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE, HISTORY AND PROBLEMS |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READINGS** | **DISCUSSION BOARD QUESTIONS** | **ASSIGNMENTS** |
| Week 1: September 18th-24th | What is the purpose and history of American public education? | The American Dream and Public Schools Chapter 1 Shaping Education Policy Chapter 1 | Define your problem of practice in one paragraph. Be specific and clear. | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |
| Week 2: September 25th – October 1st | What are the central problems facing public education today? | PPPAA Chapter 10 | What policy issue and specific legislation or regulation most directly defines the environment in which your problem exists? | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |

| UNIT 2: THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION GOVERNANCE |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READINGS** | **DISCUSSION BOARD QUESTIONS** | **ASSIGNMENTS** |
| Week 3 October 2nd – 8th | What is a policy subsystem? | Policy Studies for Educational Leaders Chapter 4 | How does your policy issue influence your PoP or efforts to solve the problem? | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |
| Week 4 October 9th – 15th | What is the role of federal government in education? | The Political Dynamics of American Education Chapter 11 Handbook of Education Policy and Politics Chapter 11 | Who are the major legislative actors in your policy subsystem? | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |
| Week 5 | October 16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> | What is the state’s role in educational policy? | Politics in the American States Chapter 12 | Who are the major executive branch actors in your policy subsystem? | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |
| Week 6 | October 23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> | Governance, Local and Organizational Policy | The Political Dynamics of American Education Chapters 5-6 | Who are the major interest group actors in your policy subsystem? | Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback |

UNIT 3: THE POLICY PROCESS

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<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
<th>DISCUSSION BOARD QUESTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>October 30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – November 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>What is issue definition and agenda setting?</td>
<td>Policy Studies for Educational Leaders Chapter 5</td>
<td>How did your legislation or regulation become defined as a public problem? How did your issue get on the public agenda?</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>November 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>What is policy formulation, adoption and implementation?</td>
<td>Policy Studies for Educational Leaders Chapters 6, 8</td>
<td>How did your issue get adopted and implemented?</td>
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UNIT III: EDUCATION POLICY REFORM, SOLUTIONS, AND ANALYSIS

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<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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<th>READINGS</th>
<th>DISCUSSION BOARD QUESTIONS</th>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>November 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>How do you define a policy problem? How do you research and construct policy alternatives?</td>
<td>Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives Chapter 5</td>
<td>Define your policy problem.</td>
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<td>Thanksgiving Week</td>
<td>November 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>November 27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – December 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>What are the policy instruments you can utilize to solve a problem?</td>
<td>Policy Studies for Educational Leaders Chapters 7</td>
<td>Construct four policy alternatives that could solve your problem.</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>How do you assess alternatives?</td>
<td>Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives Chapter 5</td>
<td>Use the evaluation criteria to assess your policy alternatives and choose a policy recommendation.</td>
<td>A3 Due December 10th Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback</td>
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<td>December 4th – 10th</td>
<td>How can educational leaders initiate change related to policy?</td>
<td>How can you use what you have learned in this course to initiate change in your organization and in the larger policy environment?</td>
<td>Read, Discussion Board Post, Discussion Board Group Feedback</td>
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References


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