INSTRUCTOR
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This weekly seminar explores the functions schools serve in society and how educational policies affect schools, teachers, and children. We will learn about several important issues central to the improvement of schools, and we will examine the problems associated with education policymaking. Our focus will be on K-12 education policy in the U.S. We will consider educational policy on multiple levels: school, district, state, and federal.

We will first consider the question: What is the purpose of schooling? Assumptions and views about the aims of education have direct implications for the aims of education policy and how it is created and implemented. Next, we will explore the challenges and unintended consequences of policymaking through our study of some key issues and policy solutions. We will examine urban school reform and closing the achievement gap; school financing; school choice, vouchers and charters; and standards and accountability. In this section of the course, we will concentrate most on the school, district, and state level. The third part of the course will explore federal education policy (including federal support for vouchers and the Common Core), using the issue of teacher quality. In the fourth section, we will discuss the limits of devising policy solutions for complex educational issues.

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:
- understand schools in various contexts (e.g. cultural, historical, economic, and political), and be able to articulate the ethical and civic dimensions of schooling;
- think critically about educational opportunity, equity, and achievement in relation to race/ethnicity, social class, gender, and disability;
- make an effective oral presentation about educational issues;
- think critically and write persuasively about the various functions schools perform in a community, with special attention to issues of equality and access in our democracy; and
- critically evaluate educational research, policy and practice, and develop policy recommendations.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, CITING SOURCES, AND PLAGIARISM

You are responsible for following the policies and procedures outlined at the following sites:
For Brandeis statement on Academic Integrity, visit www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai/ and
www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/rr/section 3.

For guidance on citing your sources, visit www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/rr/. See also
www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/cite/Citing2.htm.
For further detailed descriptions regarding plagiarism and citation, visit
www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

READINGS

Because there is so much reading for each week, I have placed asterisks next to the readings you
should read closely, with the understanding that you will skim the other assigned readings.

Listed below are books which pertain to issues we will discuss in this course. You can purchase them
at the Brandeis bookstore or from an online bookseller (or a discount online bookseller). One or two
copies of these books will be on reserve in the library and on the Education Program bookshelves,
OPPOSITE ROOM 215 OF THE ABRAHAM SHAPIRO ACADEMIC CENTER.

For extra credit: Read and post a report on one of these books:

Press.
Choice are Undermining Education. Basic Books.
Sahlberg, P. (2010). Finnish Lessons: What the World Can Learn from Educational Change in
Finland. Teachers College Press.
Seminar Expectations:

Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly, read all assigned material, participate in seminar discussions and activities. Participation and attendance in class are important components of your learning; the participation aspect of your grade will also be calculated based on how you contribute to the learning of the other students in the class. Please check your calendars; if you cannot come to class, please let me know ahead of time.

Also, please note that there is a significant amount of reading for this course. It may be advisable to form study groups to help you read and understand all of the material. You will be held responsible for all of the material in class.

I Online Forum: Policy in the News (15% of Grade)

Education policy issues are a hot topic right now, and many high-profile policy decisions are being made at the local, state, and federal levels. We will be discussing some of these debates and decisions in an online forum; students are required to post at least 3 times throughout the semester. At least one post must be an original discussion topic in which you share an summarize a news article with the class and post a response and/or discussion question. You are expected to respond to your classmates’ posts two times during the semester. In your posts, please try to connect the news article to ideas and readings from class.

II Proposed Outline & Policy Memo on Issue of your Choice

a. Proposed Outline. (5% of grade) Students should select any education issue of interest and importance in your home state. Please submit a proposed outline, following the specific guidelines I will provide you in class, stating your main line of argument and delineating the shape the paper will take (including a brief statement of the challenges you anticipate as you work on it) and a working list of references.

Due for Peer Meetings in HARDCOPY, Wednesday, 10.23.19. You can also submit this outline to Will or the professor for comments.

b. Policy Memo. (30% of Grade) The policy memo of 10-12 pages should describe and analyze an educational issue as it pertains specifically to the student’s home state. Papers should outline key facets of the issue, why it is important, and to whom. What is the current debate about this issue in the policy realm? What current policy solutions have been proposed or enacted? What assumptions underlie these initiatives? Who are the major constituents? Who wins? Who loses? What policy solution would you recommend? What are the major implementation challenges? What needs to happen for this solution to succeed? What intended and unintended outcomes might result from this policy? What assessment and evaluation tools will be used to determine if it has been successful?

First draft due in HARDCOPY (no email submissions permitted) 11/6/19
You can resubmit on 11/20/18 if you receive a grade of B+ or lower.

IV Oral Competency (30% of grade)

There will be two ways of demonstrating your oral competency.

a. Class participation and small group presentations: As you present what you have learned in small group, jigsaw presentation, you will receive feedback on the effectiveness of your presentation. A rubric will be shared about effective presentations. (10% of grade)
b. Learning from that feedback, you will make an individual 3-5 minute video addressed to the recipient of your policy memo. This presentation will summarize the written memo and make argument/s about why your recommendation should be accepted or followed. 15% of grade. *Due on 11.13.19 and shared with class on 12.4.19.*

V. Small Group Project – presented on 11/13/19 and 11/20/2019 (20% of grade)
Students working in groups of 4 to 6, will present a current issue in education policy and lead class discussion. Your group will be responsible for researching an approved topic and creating a session in which you effectively communicate the significance of your topic, the underlying issues at play, past and present policy initiatives, and your own policy recommendations. Your session should include summary handouts and resource recommendations for the other students in the class. Students are encouraged to be creative with regard to the organization of their session. Your group will be evaluated on your preparation and in-depth knowledge of subject, the quality of information that you provide, and the clarity and organization of the session. (Sample topics include: The Role of Religion in the Public Schools, Student Free Speech, Paths to Teacher Certification, Sex Education Curricula, Evolution and Creationism, Cheating, etc.)

**EVALUATION**

All assignments must be satisfactorily completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course. The approximate weights of these various assignments are as follows:

- Policy in the News Online Forum Postings 15%
- Memo Outline 5%
- Policy Memo 30%
- Oral competency 30%
- Small Group Project 20%

**Accommodations**

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodation, students should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay (6-3470). I invite you to visit [www.brandeis.edu/acserv/](http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/) for more information.
**SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION POLICYMAKING**

**Class 1 (8/28): Introduction to the course, the topic, the syllabus, each other.**
What are schools for? Please read these pieces before our class.


**Class 2 (9/4): What are schools for? How does the larger society/nation help define the purposes of schools?**


**Class 3 (9/11): Federal Government, States, Districts, and Schools: What is education policy and who pays for public education?**

Educational Policy:


Financing education

Darling Hammond, L. “What Teacher Strikes Are Really About” CNN. 2018


Frohlich, T.C. (June 3, 2014) States Spending the Most (and least) on Education. 24/7 Wall St. http://247wallst.com/special-report/2014/06/03/states-spending-the-most-and-least-on-education/


Who are our students? Who are our teachers? Examining Race, Class, and Privilege in Education

Class 4 (9/18): Public Education and Other People’s Children

Everyone will read:


We will jigsaw the following (you will be assigned a subset of reading and expected to share/discuss in class):

I. Economic Inequality:
- Mishel, L. (March 2016). If we want to improve upward mobility, we must tackle income inequality. https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/if-we-want-to-improve-upward-mobility-we-must-tackle-income-inequality/

II. Changing Demographics:

III. LGBT Students

IV. The Lack of Teacher Diversity:

V. Closing the Gap: Successful Interventions:

Recommended:
☐ http://datacenter.kidscount.org (explore education stats for your state)

Class 5 (9/25): The Standards Debate (and start the reading for 10/2)

Class 6 (10/2): Accountability: How Do We Measure Success?
Showing of the film “Tested”

Everyone will read:

- Skim: Avni, A. (July 21, 2014). Wrong Answer: In an era of high-stakes testing, a struggling school made a shocking choice. New Yorker. [Link](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/07/21/wrong-answer)
- Strauss, V. (4/2/2019) ‘If all of that testing had been improving us, we would have been the highest-achieving nation in the world.’ Here’s what does work in school reform.”

We will jigsaw the following:

I. Trends in Teacher Evaluation

II. “Next Generation” Student Assessments: Common Core, PARCC and Smarter Balanced

III: Standardized Tests, Civil Rights, and The Opt Out Movement
IV. Student Assessment: Alternatives to Standardized Testing


V. Benchmarking for Success


10/9  No class  Send your outline to your partner (with copy to Prof. Levenson) for review on 10/16.

Class 7 (10/16)  Special Education and Teaching English Language Learners: From Civil Rights Legislation to new framework under Standards Based Learning

*Share suggestions re Outline in Peer Meetings in HARDCOPY*

Class 8 (10/23): School Assignment: Desegregation, Re-segregation, Charters and Choice
Submit your policy memo to Prof. Levenson.


Class 9 (10/30) The teachers’ changing role: Preparation, Responsibilities, and Retention

Meet to research and plan your small group presentation.


☐ *Strauss, V (2/19/2019). This time, it wasn’t about pay: West Virginia teachers go on strike over the privatization of education (and they won’t be the last). Washington Post.


☐ Education Trust. (6/29/2012). Common-sense strategies for improving working conditions in… low-performing schools are critical to…keeping strong teachers. Online

Minero, E. “When Students are Traumatized”


Class 10 (11/6) School Discipline
Prepare your video about your policy memo to be submitted to Will C.
(You may also resubmit your policy memo on 11/6 if you received a grade of B+ or lower due in hardcopy to Instructor.)


Class 11 (11/13) The Problem of Implementation (Individual video presentations are due)
Submit your policy memo video to Will C.
Begin small group presentations

IMPROVING SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS: THE LIMITS OF POLICY

Class 12 (11/20). Small Group Presentations

- Mehta, J. (5/24/2015). Education reformers have it all wrong: Accountability from above never works, great teaching always does. Salon.com

11/27: No Class

Class 13 (12/4) Videos, Poems and good food

Share videos

Choose a poem (from Teaching With Fire, Edited by Sam Intrator or some other source) to share with the class.