PAI/PSC 300: EDUCATION POLICY

Spring 2020
Mondays 9:30am-12:15pm, Eggers Hall 113

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Class materials are located on Blackboard (http://blackboard.syr.edu).

Course Description
This course is designed to familiarize students with the policies defining the K-12 U.S. education system today. The policy areas we will cover include, but are not limited to, governance, funding, accountability, and choice. We will concern ourselves with policies made at the federal, state, and local levels and consider the implications of these policies for students, families, and communities. We will discuss the goals of policies and the extent to which the intention, implementation and ultimate effects of the policies align. Students will have the opportunity to investigate specific issues in K-12 education, such as high school dropouts and racial achievement gaps, and rely on evidence to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of potential policy solutions.

Course Structure
The course will be divided into three sections:

1. Section 1 (5 classes): We will develop a common foundation for analyzing education policies. This section begins with an overview of the goals and history of K-12 education in the United States. We discuss what needs to be done to run schools, such as raising and distributing funds, hiring teachers and staff, deciding on
curriculum, and assigning students to schools and classrooms. We examine the roles of key actors in education, including federal, state, and local governments and the court system. The second part of this section introduces the steps to policy analysis, basic descriptive evidence, and sources of data. We will also establish the standards of evidence for evaluating the contributions of education policies.

2. **Section 2 (4 classes):** The second section looks at common system-wide approaches for improving educational outcomes. We begin with school finance and the distribution of funding across districts and schools. We evaluate the effects of changes in funding policies and state aid on this distribution. Next we will discuss school and teacher accountability and how ways of assessing performance affects educational outcomes. The last class in this section looks at the roles of school choice policies, namely charter schools and voucher programs, and what their adoption means for the allocation of students to schools and educational performance.

3. **Section 3 (4 classes):** The final section focuses on the identification and analyses of specific education issues. I selected four common problems or concerns that arise in K-12 education policy. They are 1) school discipline, 2) high school dropouts, 3) Racial achievement gaps, and 4) special education needs. For each of these issues we will discuss the extent to which it is a problem, examine the type of data that might help one come to a conclusion, assess options for addressing the issue, and identify costs and benefits of doing so.

**Required Texts**

There are no textbooks for this course. All required readings are available online via the posted link or on Blackboard.

**Grading**

Attendance and participation 10%
District analysis 15%
Midterm exam 25%
Policy change take-home 20%
District analysis follow-up 30%

**Grading Components**
**Attendance and Participation**

You are expected to attend class regularly and actively participate in all classroom activities and discussion. I will take attendance each class, and this makes up 5% of your grade. You are allowed to miss 1 class throughout the semester without penalty. **Additional absences with receive an attendance grade of 0** unless there is appropriate documentation.

The participation part of this grade (5%) requires you to post a response (1-2 paragraphs) on the day’s readings on Blackboard before the start of class. This response can contain comments about what you found interesting/confusing or questions about the content or be in response to posted comments from your classmates. These responses will help me understand what you took away from the assignment and if the class converges on points of confusion or interest.

**District Analysis**

This assignment asks you to describe an American public school district and identify a problem it is currently facing. It is designed to help you understand the basic demographic, programmatic, and governance features of public school districts and their common challenges. Choose a district anywhere in the United States. In approximately 3 double-spaced pages, describe the district (e.g. student population, academic performance, educational programs, leadership). Then use evidence to identify a problem that the district is facing and explain why it is a problem.

**Midterm**

The midterm will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. It covers everything we learned in Section 1 of the course, and includes both the content in required readings and classroom material such as lecture slides.

**Policy Change Take Home**

This assignment asks you to choose from one of three real world policy changes related to education funding, accountability, or school choice. Write an approximately 4-page double-spaced paper that 1) identifies the issue(s) the policy was designed to address, 2) provides an overview of the policy that was adopted, 3) specifies the criteria for evaluating the policy’s success and describe what it was and was not able to achieve, 4) characterizes its benefits and drawbacks, being careful to describe how the consequences of the policy change may vary by stakeholder group.
**District Analysis Follow-up**
The superintendent in the district that you are working has asked you to write a paper to guide her thinking around a key policy problem. In this district analysis follow-up you will describe an issue faced by their school district (distinct from the issue you identified in the district analysis assignment), identify options for addressing this problem, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and make a policy recommendation. In 6-8 double-spaced pages, this paper should draw on relevant empirical literature to inform the assessment of different policy alternatives.

**Course-Specific Policies:**

**Attendance.** Attendance is mandatory, and unexcused absences will impact your participation grade. I will only excuse absences in extenuating circumstances – such as for medical reasons or a family emergency – and I will require notification from the Office of Student Assistance on the reason for the absence.

Note that absence notifications for medical reasons will be given only if such absences are advised by a health care provider at the Health Center, based on clinical findings and prescribed treatment recommendations. An excused absence will not be given solely to confirm a visit to the Health Center. For complete details on the absence notification policy for health-related reasons, visit: https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/policiesand-procedures-barnes-center-at-the-arch-syracuseuniversity/#s:health-care-andcounseling

**Assignments.** Assignments should be turned in on time. As a rule, I do not grant extensions unless there is an absence notification from the Office of Student Assistance. Late assignments will receive a grade deduction of 10 percentage points for each day they are overdue. For example, a paper that normally gets 90% would be graded 80% if it is one day late, 70% if it is two days late, and so on. No extra credit will be given. All assignments should be submitted on Blackboard by the stated deadline in the most recent syllabus. For purposes of submitting assignments, I reserve the right to use Turnitin on Blackboard. Turnitin is a plagiarism prevention system that identifies “matched text.” This system allows you to view your “Originality Report” and check that all sources you have used are properly acknowledged and cited.
Be sure to edit and rewrite, proofread and spell-check the paper, and number the pages. There should be a title page with the title of the paper, your student ID number, the name of the course, and the date on the cover-sheet. Do not place your name on the cover-sheet or subsequent pages. Although in many cases I will remember who is writing on which topic, to the degree possible I try to grade the papers “blind.”

The preferred citation style is the embedded citation format (sometimes known as MLA format), where the author and page number are placed in parentheses at the end of the sentence. You should have an accompanying bibliography at the end of the paper (this does not count towards the page requirements).

**Make Up Work.** Students are expected to complete all assignments by the deadline. Other than the exception for religious observance noted above, make-up homework assignments will not be given under any circumstances. Students who fail to turn in an assignment before the deadline will receive a grade deduction of 10 percentage points for each day they are overdue.

**Electronic Devices.** It is strictly prohibited to text or browse your phone during the lecture. Doing so detracts from everyone’s learning experiences. Please also refrain from using laptops for personal reasons (with the exception of taking notes), unless I inform you in advance that they will be helpful for an in-class activity.

**Syracuse University Policies:**

Syracuse University has a variety of other policies designed to guarantee that students live and study in a community respectful of their needs and those of fellow students. Some of the most important of these concern:

**Diversity and Disability** (ensuring that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in a diverse, inclusive, accessible, bias-free campus community) can be found at: [https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/](https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/).

**Religious Observances Notification and Policy** (steps to follow to request accommodations for the observance of religious holidays) can be found at: [http://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious_observance.htm)

Any student who plans to miss an assignment or exam due to a religious observance and has made the appropriate notifications should see me within the first two weeks of class to make arrangements for making up this missed work.
Orange SUccess (tools to access a variety of SU resources, including ways to communicate with advisors and faculty members) can be found at: http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/

Disability-Related Accommodations:

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with ODS, please visit their website at http://disabilityservices.syr.edu. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityservices@syr.edu for more detailed information.

ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible to begin this process.

Academic Integrity Policy

Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online summary of the University’s academic integrity
expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

**Tentative Schedule**

All readings are required. All readings are available electronically.

**Part I: CONTEXT**

1. How schools work

**January 13:** Introduction – What is the purpose of education? How has the U.S. education system evolved from past to present?

**January 20:** NO CLASS – Martin Luther King Jr. Day!

**January 27:** Education governance: Who are the stakeholders and what are their roles?

*Readings:*

**February 3:** The court system; What needs to be done to run schools?

*Readings:*
2. Problem analysis, data, and evidence

February 10: Problem analysis; Descriptive statistics.

Readings:

District Analysis assignment due Monday, February 17 at 9:30am on Blackboard

February 17: Correlation vs. causation; Establishing causation via randomized experiments and quasi-experimental methods. Readings:


February 24: Midterm exam

Part II: IMPROVING SYSTEMS

3. Education funding

March 2: How does the school finance system work? What should we consider when distributing funds across districts and schools? Readings:

- The Urban Institute. (2017). “How Do School Funding Formulas Work?” Available at: https://apps.urban.org/features/funding-formulas/

4. Accountability

March 9: School accountability Readings:


March 16: NO CLASS – Spring break!

March 23: Teacher accountability Readings:


5. School choice

March 30: Charter schools, vouchers, and intra- and inter-district choice Readings:


Policy Change Memo due Friday, April 3 at noon on Blackboard
Part III: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING PROBLEMS

For each of these we will discuss whether it is a problem, examine the type of data that might help you decide, discuss options for addressing, and identify costs and benefits of addressing the issue.

April 6: School discipline  
Readings:


April 13: High school dropouts  
Readings:
• “High School Dropouts in America” *Alliance for Excellent Education*. Pages 1-3.


April 20: Racial achievement gaps  
Readings:


April 27: Special education needs  
Readings:


*District Analysis Follow-up due Friday, May 1 at noon on Blackboard*