



EDLF 6080: Education Policy: What Works in Education? Conducting Rigorous Analyses of Education Policies

3 Credit Hours

Education Leadership, Foundations, and Policy

Spring 2014

Undergraduates interested in taking the course must obtain permission from the instructor.

January 13-April 28, 2013

Mondays, 3:30 – 6:00 PM

Final paper due May 8th, 2013

Instructor

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Description

An introductory course in which principles of assessing educational policies are applied to the evidence currently available across a range of policies. Areas of education policy may include early childhood education, charter schools, accountability, teacher recruitment, retention and assessment, and bridging from K-12 to higher education. Discussions focus on linking policies to outcomes for students.

Learning Objectives

"I've repeatedly called education the civil rights issue of our generation. ... Because in America, education has always been the great equalizer—it is the one force that can overcome differences in race, privilege, background, and national origin. Yet today, perhaps for the first time in decades, a growing opportunity gap threatens to decrease social mobility and solidify the transmission of privilege from one generation to the next. ... Public officials should always scrutinize education programs carefully for effectiveness. But all levels of government—local, state, and national—need to invest wisely to help close the opportunity gap. Education is not an expense on a budget line—it's an investment in the future." **Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education**, September 18, 2012

Education policy issues are frequently at the core of public discourse. Topics ranging from universal preschool education to the soaring costs of college frequently make their way to the front page of newspapers and into Presidential speeches. While there is considerable public discussion about how to improve education, it is often difficult to separate what actually works

in education from the political considerations and vested interests that are also infused in educational debates. The purpose of this class is to hone your ability to critically examine the design, implementation, and effect of educational policies. We will explore the goals and objectives of various policies, and investigate the theoretical and empirical basis for why policy intervention might improve students' outcomes. Of equal importance, we will evaluate the existing evidence for whether policies appear to advance, hinder, or simply leave unchanged students' learning and achievement.

A Mile Deep, A Few Feet Wide

Please note that the purpose of this course is *not* to provide a comprehensive overview of all educational policies affecting children, families, schools, and teachers in the United States. Rather than go an inch wide, so to speak, we will choose a few policy areas that we can investigate deeply. We will use a common framework to evaluate each policy area we consider (see more below under the "Policy Analysis Framework" section. My goal is that you will be able to apply this framework and the analytic skills we develop during the course to assess any educational policy issues you encounter in the coming years.

Instructional Methods

Active Learning

I have a strong pedagogical commitment to fostering an active learning environment in the course. While I will plan and facilitate the first half of the semester, students (working in small groups) will plan and teach the class sessions in the second half of the semester. Each small group will:

- choose an education policy to focus on during their class
- select texts for their peers to read in preparation for the class
- plan and deliver a presentation analyzing the policy through our policy framework
- facilitate a class discussion about the readings and presentation content

See below for additional details about the student-led class sessions.

A Mutual Commitment

I view this course as a mutual commitment to learning. For my part, I make several commitments. I will strive to provide you with the highest quality course structure possible; to facilitate thought-provoking class discussions; to design assignments that are both challenging and enriching; and to provide sufficient support for each of you to have a highly-fulfilling and rewarding course experience. In return, I ask several commitments of each of you. I ask that you engage fully and invest wholeheartedly in all aspects of the course, from preparing for class discussions to completing assignments. I ask that reach out for support if you are struggling with any aspect of the class. And I ask that you respect and try your best to learn from the diverse opinions and perspectives of your classmates. With this mutual commitment in place, I am confident that we will all learn considerably from each other over the course of the semester.

The Policy Analysis Framework (PAF)

Most of our discussions in the course will be organized around a core set of questions that will allow us to rigorously analyze different aspects of the education policies we consider. In addition to guiding the structure of our class sessions, this framework will form the basis for the final policy analysis paper that each student will write at the end of the semester (more on this below).

Ten Questions We Will Ask About Every Education Policy We Consider

1. What problems are these policies intended to address?
2. What are the indicators that these problems exist? For whom do they exist?
3. What's the rationale for why government (at whatever level) should intervene?
4. What policy interventions have already been attempted to address these problems?
5. Which key constituents need to be engaged for this policies to be successful?
6. Who supports these policies? Who opposes these policies?
7. How do these policies compare in importance to other educational policy priorities, or more broadly to other public policy priorities?
8. What evidence exists for the impact of these policy interventions?
9. Are these policies an effective use of public resources?
10. Are there additional policy interventions that might more effectively or efficiently address these problems? What might these interventions be more effective than previous efforts?

Course structure

The course will be divided into three sections:

- Section 1 (three classes): We will develop a common foundation for analyzing education policies during the remainder of the semester. I will provide an overview of education policy and solicit your views on which education policies should receive top priority in the coming years. We will establish standards of evidence for evaluating the unique contribution of education policies to student outcomes, separate from all the other factors in students' lives that will impact their achievement and attainment. Finally, we will discuss the goals of our educational system, and how we can measure whether students are making progress towards achieving these goals.
- Section 2 (four classes): In each class I will facilitate an analysis of a specific education policy issue. I have selected four policy topics that span students' educational trajectories, from early childhood education through higher education. I have also intentionally chosen policies that vary in their scope, costs, and scalability. I will rely on the PAF to guide our analysis and discussion of each policy issue.

The topics are as follows:

1. Universal pre-school
2. Charter schools
3. Algebra for all
4. College outreach

- Section 3 (six classes): The class will divide into small groups and each small group will be responsible for planning and teaching a class session on a specific education policy. I will be heavily involved in helping each group to identify a focal topic, choose readings, and plan the class presentation and discussion. In the “course requirements” section I provide additional detail on when various aspects of the class planning need to be completed.

Course Texts

All readings are described in the course outline below. I have posted articles on Collab unless I provide a web link below.

Course Outline [edit table as needed]

Date	Topics	Readings
January 13 th	Introduction to the Education Policy	Kolata, G. (2013). Guesses and hype give way to data in study of education. <i>New York Times</i> , September 2. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/science/applying-new-rigor-in-studying-education.html?pagewanted=all&.r=0 National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). <i>The Nation’s Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress 2012</i> . http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2013456 National Center on Education and the Economy (2006). <i>Tough Choices or Tough Times</i> . Executive Summary. http://www.skillscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/ToughChoices_EXECSUM.pdf Partanen, Anu (2011). “What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland’s School Success.” <i>The Atlantic</i> , December 29 th . http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/12/what-americans-keep-ignoring-about-finlands-school-success/250564/ Squaring off on education reform (video): http://www.educationnation.com/index.cfm?objectid=0DA1B005-E93A-11E0-B00E000C296BA163
January 20 th	MLK Day, no class	
January 27 th	Evidence	Murnane, R., and J. Willett. <i>Methods Matter</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, chapters 1-3. Slavin, R. "Evidence-Based Education Policies: Transforming Educational Practice and Research" <i>Educational Researcher</i> , 31(7): 15-21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/3594400.pdf?acceptTC=true Taubes, G., "Do we really know what makes us Healthy?" <i>New York Times</i> , 9/16/2007 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/magazine/16epidemiology-t.html?pagewanted=all
February 3 rd	Achievement and Attainment	Almlund, M., Duckworth, A.L., Heckman, J.L., & Kautz, T.D. (2011). <i>Personality traits and economics</i> . National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 16822. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. http://www.nber.org/papers/w16822

		<p>Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N., Hilger, N., Saez, E., Schanzenbach, D.W., & Yagan, D. (2011). How Does Your Kindergarten Classroom Affect Your Earnings? Evidence from Project Star. <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>, 126(4): 1593-1660.</p> <p>Ladd, H. (2012) "Education and Poverty: Confronting the Evidence" Presidential Address, APPAM Research Meetings, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.</p> <p>Oreopoulos, P. & Salvanes, K.G. (2011). Priceless: The non-pecuniary benefits of schooling. <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 25(1): 159-184.</p> <p>Tough, P. "What it Takes to Make a Student," <i>New York Times Magazine</i>, November 26, 2006.</p>
<p>February 10th</p>	<p>Universal preschool</p>	<p>Barnett, W.S. (2008). Preschool education and its lasting effects: Research and policy implications. Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Research Unit. http://nieer.org/resources/research/PreschoolLastingEffects.pdf</p> <p>Gibbs, C., Ludwig, J., Miller, D.L. (2011). <i>Does Head Start do any lasting good?</i> National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 17452. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. http://www.nber.org/papers/w17452</p> <p>Gormley, W. T., Jr., Gayer, T., Phillips, D., & Dawson, B. (2005) The effects of universal pre-K on cognitive development. <i>Developmental Psychology</i> 41(6): 872-884.</p> <p>Fitzpatrick, M. (2008). Starting school at four: The effect of universal pre-kindergarten on children's academic achievement. <i>The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy</i>, 8(1): 1-38.</p> <p>Puma, M., Bell, S., Cook, R., Heid, C., Broene, P., Jenkins, F., Mashburn, A., & Downer, J. (2012). <i>Third-grade follow-up to the Head Start Impact Study Final Report, Executive Summary</i>. OPRE Report #2012-45b. Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/head_start_executive_summary.pdf</p>
<p>February 17th</p>	<p>Charter schools</p>	<p>Abdulkadiroglu, A., Angrist, J., Cohodes, S., Dynarski, S. Fullerton, J., Kane, T., & Pathak, P. (2009). <i>Informing the debate: Comparing Boston's charter, pilot, and traditional schools</i>. Boston, MA: The Boston Foundation. http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~pfpie/pdf/InformingTheDebate_Final.pdf</p> <p>Angrist, J.D., Cohodes, S.R., Dynarski, S.M., Pathak, P.A., & Walters, C.D. (2013). <i>Charter schools and the road to college readiness: The effects of on college preparation, attendance, and choice</i>. Boston, MA: The Boston Foundation. http://www.tbf.org/~media/TBFOrg/Files/Reports/Charters%20and%20College%20Readiness%202013.pdf</p> <p>Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2013). <i>National Charter School Study</i>. Stanford University: Center for Research on Education Outcomes. https://credo.stanford.edu/documents/NCSS%202013%20Final%20Draft.pdf</p> <p>Gleason, P., Clark, M., Tuttle, C.C., Dwoyer, E., & Silverberg, M., (2010). <i>The evaluation of charter school impacts: Final report (NCEE 2010-4029)</i>. Washington, D.C. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education</p>

		<p>Sciences, US Department of Education. http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/education/charter_school_impacts.pdf</p> <p>Hoxby, C.M., & Murarka, S. (2009). <i>Charter schools in New York City: Who enrolls and how they affect their students' achievement</i>. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 14852. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. http://www.nber.org/papers/w14852</p>
February 24th	Algebra for all	<p>Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., & Vigdor, J. L. (2012). <i>The aftermath of accelerating algebra: Evidence from a district policy initiative</i>. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 18161. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. http://www.nber.org/papers/w18161</p> <p>Cortes, K., Goodman, J., & Nomi, T. (2013). <i>Intensive math instruction and educational attainment: Long-run impacts of double-dose algebra</i>. HKS Faculty Research Working Paper RWP13-09. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/joshuagoodman/files/rwp13-009_goodman.pdf</p> <p>National Mathematics Advisory Panel. (2008). <i>Foundations for success: The final report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, Executive Summary</i>. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education: Washington, DC, 2008. http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-report.pdf</p> <p>Nomi, T. (2012). The unintended consequences of an algebra-for-all policy on high-skill students: Effects on instructional organization and students' academic outcomes. <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>, 34(4): 489-505.</p>
March 3rd	College outreach	<p>Carrell, S., & Sacerdote, B. (2012) <i>Late interventions matter too: The case of college coaching in New Hampshire</i>. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 19031. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. http://www.nber.org/papers/w19031</p> <p>Castleman, B.L., & Page, L.C. (2013). <i>Summer nudging: Can personalized text messages and peer mentor outreach increase college going among low-income high school graduates?</i> Center for Education Policy and Workforce Competitiveness Working Paper No. 9. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia. http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/9_Castleman_SummerTextMessages.pdf</p> <p>Hoxby, C.M., & Turner, S. (2013). <i>Expanding college opportunities for high-achieving, low-income students</i>. Stanford University: Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. http://siepr.stanford.edu/?q=/system/files/shared/pubs/papers/12-014paper.pdf</p> <p>Stephan, J.L., & Rosenbaum, J.E. (2013). Can high schools reduce college enrollment gaps with a new counseling model? <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>, 35(2): 200-219.</p>
March 10th	Spring break, no class	
March 17th	Student-led class	
March 24th	Student-led class	
March 31st	Student-led class	
April 7th	Student-led class	
April 14th	Student-led class	
April 21st	Student-led class	

April 28 th	Wrapping up	
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Grading

Students in “What Works in Education” are expected to complete all assignments and will be graded according to the following scale:

A+ 96-100; A: 92-95; 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.

Assessments

- A. Class Participation** (10 percent). Please come to class prepared to engage in lively and informed discussion (doing the readings in advance of class is the best way to ensure that discussions are both lively *and* informed).
- B. Education Policy Tracking** (15 percent). At any given point in time there are countless education policy issues being debated and considered across the country. Throughout the semester I ask that you choose one contemporary policy debate to track and analyze. You can choose a policy issue at any level of government, from the national level to a policy debate that has taken center stage in your home town. The goal of the activity is for you to report on and analyze the evolution of the policy discussion throughout the semester. I encourage you to use the questions in the PAF as a guide for the types of issues about which you report. Your policy tracking can be done through any format you choose (blog, Twitter feed, etc). My only requirement is that you be willing to teach me how to use whatever media you select (after email I slide pretty steeply towards technological infancy). I will evaluate your reporting based on both the quality of your reflection and the strength of connections you draw to course content as well as on the creativity and frequency of your posts.
- C. Policy memo** (15 percent). **Due date: March 21.** After Section II of the course we will have considered four distinct educational policies, each of which operates at a different scale and accordingly has different cost implications and potential for meaningful impact. While each of the policies could merit public investment and support, governments are often in the difficult position of choosing which programs to prioritize and invest in. In the policy memo you will each write a 750-word memo to the Governor (you can choose your state or keep this generic) that advocates for investment in a particular policy. Your memo should address the following questions, and should use the policy memo template I provide at the end of the syllabus:
- How is this policy likely to benefit children (or other constituents) in the state? What evidence can you provide to illustrate these benefits?
 - What are the potential budgetary implications of implementing this policy? Do the benefits justify the costs?
 - Why should the Governor’s office prioritize this policy above the other education policies we discussed in Section 2?

- What challenges or opposition might the Governor encounter implementing this policy?
- How might the government go about evaluating the impact of the policy?

D. Student-led class sessions (25 percent). As I describe above, students will work in small groups to plan and teach a class session on an educational policy issue of your own choosing. In order to facilitate finding out students whose substantive interests align with your own, I have created a discussion forum on the course site for students to share policy topics around which they would like to organize a class. Though the class sessions will be distributed over a several-week period, for equity reasons I expect all groups to adhere to the following deadlines:

- January 22: Small groups and policy topics finalized
- Week of January 27: Small group meetings with Ben to discuss your policy interest and a broad focus for your class session
- Feb 14: Small groups submit proposed class readings to Ben
- Feb 26: Small groups submit draft PowerPoint slides and class discussion questions
- March 7: Small groups submit final class materials to Ben

I will base my grade both on the actual class session as well as the quality of each group's preparation in advance of the class. Because this is a group project each student will have the opportunity to provide confidential feedback on the relative contributions of each group member.

E. Final policy analysis paper (35 percent). As a culminating experience in the course, each student will write a thorough analysis of an education policy. As with the Policy Tracking activity, you can choose a policy at any level of government, though it is important to make sure that there is sufficient published material about the policy you choose to inform a well-researched policy analysis. The PAF should provide the framework for your policy analysis, though your report should be a cohesive narrative, not a question-by-question response. You may choose to emphasize certain elements of the PAF over others, and may of course re-order how you address each PAF topic in your policy analysis. I expect students to adhere to the following deadlines:

- Feb 24: Students submit to Ben a brief (no more than half-page) proposal identifying the policy you plan to analyze; why this policy merits thorough analysis; and a selected list of reports or articles which will inform your policy analysis.
- April 28: Students submit a draft of the paper to another student in the class (randomly assigned by Ben) for peer review. Peers are responsible for providing constructive feedback on policy memo within five days of receiving the draft. Peer reviewers should copy me on the feedback they send; I will factor the quality of your feedback into your overall grade for the policy analysis paper.
- May 8: Final policy memos submitted to Ben.

Policy analyses should be no longer than ten pages double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins.

University Email Policy

Students are expected to activate and then check their official U.Va. email addresses on a frequent and consistent basis to remain informed of University communications, as certain communications may be time sensitive. Students who fail to check their email on a regular basis are responsible for any resulting consequences.

University of Virginia Honor System

All work should be pledged in the spirit of the Honor System of the University of Virginia. The instructor will indicate which assignments and activities are to be done individually and which permit collaboration. The following pledge should be written out at the end of all quizzes, examinations, individual assignments and papers: "I pledge that I have neither given nor received help on this examination (quiz, assignment, etc.)". The pledge must be signed by the student. For more information please visit <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/>.

Special Needs

It is the policy of the University of Virginia to accommodate students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student with a disability who needs accommodation (e.g., in arrangements for seating, extended time for examinations, or note-taking, etc.), should contact the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (LNEC) and provide them with appropriate medical or psychological documentation of his/her condition. Once accommodations are approved, it is the student's responsibility to follow up with the instructor about logistics and implementation of accommodations.

If students have difficulty accessing any part of the course materials or activities for this class, they should contact the instructor immediately. Accommodations for test taking should be arranged at least 14 business days in advance of the date of the test(s). Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the LNEC: 434-243-5180/Voice, 434-465-6579/Video Phone, 434-243-5188/Fax. For more information, visit the U.Va. Special Needs website at <http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lnecl.html>.