EFOP 2010/3010: Educational Systems, Macro Policy, and Politics
Fall 2025

University of Pittsburgh
5400 Wesley Posvar Hall
Tuesdays 5pm-7:40pm

Instructor:
Hayley Weddle
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Office hours: Please email me to set up a meeting—I look forward to connecting.

Course Description

Welcome to the macro education policy course! I am excited to learn with all of you this semester. This course examines issues and trends in education policy. While many of the readings have a focus on the United States, students are encouraged to make comparisons to other contexts in class discussions and assignments. The course uses critical policy analysis as a grounding framework, and addresses key issues pertaining to education policy across the P-20 pipeline such as: (a) the ways that educational organizations are shaped by a stratified society; (b) how policies at the federal- and state-levels mediate education at the local level; (c) how educational systems have been impacted by movements including high-stakes accountability and privatization, (d) how power, politics, and advocacy influence policy processes. The course is designed to be collaborative and engaging, and will include opportunities for group discussion as well as individual sensemaking.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, we will be able to:

1. Describe policy issues, debates, and stakeholders at different points along the P-20 education pipeline
2. Apply a critical lens to evaluate the equity implications of policies across levels of the education system (e.g. federal, state, local)
3. Examine policy advocacy and change processes, including the role of evidence
4. Communicate clearly about complex education policy and equity issues

Course Materials

Free text for this course is:

Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.

This book is available electronically on PITTCat and thus does not need to be purchased (although you are welcome to do so if you'd like). All other readings will be uploaded to Canvas.

Assignments

Below are the assignments for the course; more details will be provided during class.

Individual meeting (Weeks 1-2): During the first two weeks of class, **please sign up for a 20-minute virtual meeting with me** so that we can get to know one another. I am excited to learn about what brought you to your graduate program, how I can best support your learning, and your experiences/interests related to education policy. Meetings will be via Zoom. (10%)

Paper: Identifying a macro policy issue to examine (due Week 4): For this short individual paper, students will identify an education policy issue (e.g. high-stakes accountability, school choice, higher ed access, the role of philanthropy in education; special education services; free speech on college campuses, etc.) which will be the focus of the remaining written course assignments. The policy issue can focus on the US or any international context. This short introductory paper should include:

- Overview of the education policy issue, who it impacts, & why it is important to examine
    - *Note: this portion should include relevant citations to support claims*
- Rationale for selecting this issue (connection to your work, interests, or future research)
- Plan for identifying relevant sources, to be reviewed in your upcoming assignments

Include relevant citations in your introduction.
Length: 1 page double spaced. (10%)

Reflective examination of a policy issue: first source review (due Week 6): For this assignment, you will begin examining the policy issue you selected for your Week 4 introductory paper. Students will write a concise and evidence-based examination of one relevant source from a reflective inquiry perspective. The paper should be written in APA format. The source review should include a brief summary of the piece (e.g. 2-3 sentences) followed by your *analysis* of the source. Questions to address for each source might include:

- How convincing is the evidence or information presented, and why?
- What are the strengths? How might the study, argument, or framing have been improved?
- Does the piece reflect a critical policy analysis frame, or more traditional? How so?
- How does the piece align with, expand, or complicate what you know about the policy issue you selected?
- What unanswered questions do you have after reading this piece?

Provide the APA citation (single spaced) at the top followed by your analysis (double-spaced).
Length: 1.5-2 double-spaced pages. (10%)

Reflective examination of a policy issue: additional source reviews (due Week 9): For this assignment, you will continue examining the policy issue you selected and write a concise and evidence-based examination of either 2 or 3 additional relevant sources. Thus, masters students

will review 3 sources total (including the Week 6 source), and PhD students will review 4 total (including the Week 6 source). Papers should be double-spaced and written in APA format.

For each source review, follow the Week 6 format above. Please aim to include two sources that are peer-reviewed empirical pieces, if possible.

For each source, provide the APA citation (single-spaced) at the top followed by your analysis (double-spaced). The length for each source review is 1.5-2 double-spaced pages. (20%)

Peer review: feedback on policy issue paper (due Week 11)
Students will engage in a constructive asynchronous review process to provide feedback on a peer's paper. See here for the template, which will be discussed in class.

Length: Complete the 1-2 page feedback template, which will be shared with your assignment partner as well as with Dr. Weddle via Canvas. (10%)

Reflective examination of a policy issue: Discussion/conclusion (due Week 13):
Building on the source reviews submitted in Weeks 6-9, this paper should include the following:

- A synthesis of themes across your sources. Potential questions to address include:
    - How are findings or information across sources similar or different?
    - Whose perspectives/experiences are considered across sources? Whose perspectives are missing?
    - What does the research reveal about how this policy issue reproduces or disrupts inequities? How do we know (what counts as evidence)?
    - What unanswered questions remain about this policy issue?
    - Where do you see your reading/work/research going next?
- Preliminary implications for policy, practice, and/or future research.
    - Based on what you are learning, who should do what differently?
    - What future studies are needed?

Length: 2 double-spaced pages max. (10%)

Roundtable presentation: Celebrating our policy learning and change ideas (Week 14): In this short assignment, students will engage in round-table style presentations (3 minutes max per person) to share their learning with a small group of peers. Presentations will focus on either 1) what is one idea for change that arose during your policy issue examination? OR 2) what is an idea from class that you're taking into your future research or practice? (1 slide total). We will prepare the presentations in our Week 13 class, and present in small groups during Week 14. Presentation slides should be uploaded to Canvas. (10%)

Ongoing engagement and deadlines: Consistent attendance and engagement is the foundation of our collective learning, and what I care most about as an instructor. Flexibility is also a cornerstone of my teaching. Recognizing that students may feel more comfortable participating

in different ways, I am open to many forms of engagement (e.g. sharing during small group breakouts, participating in full-class discussions, adding insights to online platforms such as Mentimeter, etc.). Please reach out if you cannot attend a class session or have other circumstances you'd like to address, and I will provide an alternate engagement opportunity or assignment extension as appropriate. I encourage anyone who is sick to stay home, rest, and not worry about class. I'm happy to connect about course material once you're feeling better. (20%)

Course Schedule and Readings

*Please read the materials listed for each week in advance of that class session, as they will be discussed during class. All readings will be available on Canvas, or in the core text

Week 1—August 26th

Introduction to the course and thinking critically

- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 1: The politics of education policy in an era of inequality (available free in the core text)
- Diem, S., Young, M. D., & Sampson, C. (2019). Where critical policy meets the politics of education: An introduction. *Educational Policy, 33*(1), 3-15.

Week 2— September 2nd

Thinking critically about education policy issues

- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 2: Critical policy analysis: Interrogating process, politics, and power
- Young, M. D., Diem, S., & Sampson, C. (2024). The Vital Necessity of Critical Education Policy Research. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 46(2), 397-405.
- Mitra, D. L. (2022). Power as a Political Process. In *Educational Change and the Political Process* (pp. 181-193). Routledge.

Week 3—Sept 9th

Examining the US K-12 education system

- Stanford, L. (2024). The U.S. Department of Education Explained. *Education Week.*
- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Excerpts from Ch. 4 and Ch. 5 [pages 69-77, 82, and 89-95] **book* page numbers

Week 4—Sept 16th

Choice, privatization, and accountability

- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 3: Public schools or private goods?
- Sattin-Bajaj, C., & Roda, A. (2020). Opportunity hoarding in school choice contexts: The role of policy design in promoting middle-class parents' exclusionary behaviors. *Educational Policy, 3*4(7), 992-1035.
- Congressional Research Service (2025). Overview of Public and Private School Choice Options [skim].

Identifying a macro policy issue is due on Tuesday September 16th by 3pm via Canvas

Week 5—September 23rd

Current issues in higher education policy

- American Council on Education. (2019). *A Brief Guide to US Higher Education.* [skim report, read pages 21-25 more closely] *report page numbers, not PDF numbers.
- Cook (2024). *Affirmative Action Ban's Impact Is a 'Black Box.'* Inside Higher Education.
- NPR (2025). The Shifting Landscape of Higher Education. [podcast] https://www.npr.org/2025/07/24/1256157824/higher-education-george-mason

Week 6—September 30th

Politics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in education

- Pollock, M., Rogers, J., Kwako, [...] & Howard, J. (2022). *The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban "Critical Race Theory" in Public K–12 Education in the U.S., 2020–2021.* UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. [executive summary only]
- Chronicle. (2024). DEI Legislation Tracker. Chronicle of Higher Education.
- Mitra, D. L. (2022). *Educational change and the political process.* Routledge.
    - Chapter 2: Equity

Your first source review is due on Tuesday September 30th by 3pm via Canvas

Week 7—October 7th

Researching education policy issues

- Weddle, H. & Hopkins, M. (under review). Defending against challenges to equity in multilingual learner education: The role of state education agency leaders. *American Education Research Journal.*
- Kirksey, J. J. (2024). Weeks After the Raid: The Immediate and Sustained Changes in Student Attendance Rates Following Immigration Arrests. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

Week 8—October 14th

Influencing education policy

- Mitra, D. L. (2022). *Educational change and the political process.* Routledge.
    - Chapter 8: Influential Policy Actors
    - Chapter 9: Problem Structuring, Agenda Setting, and Framing
- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 6: Philanthropy, donors, and private influence

Week 9—October 21st

Policy trends for K-12 teaching

- Kraft, M. A., & Lyon, M. A. (2024). The rise and fall of the teaching profession: Prestige, interest, preparation, and satisfaction over the last half century. *American Educational Research Journal, 61*(6), 1192-1236. *[focus most on the discussion section]*
- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 7: Teaching and Leading Under New Public Management

Your additional source reviews are due on Tuesday October 21st by 3pm via Canvas, or by the end of the week if needed, due to tech disruption

Week 10—October 28th

Examining policy development and impact

- McCambly, H., & Mulroy, Q. (2024). Constructing an educational "quality" crisis: (E)quality politics and racialization beyond target beneficiaries. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 46(2)*, 192-221. ***guest speaker!*
- Cummings, A., Strunk, K. O., & De Voto, C. (2021). "A lot of states were doing it": The development of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law. *Journal of Educational Change,* 24(1), 107-132.

Week 11—November 4th NO CLASS (election day)--Asynchronous assignment

Asynchronous peer review assignment is due on November 5th by 10am via Canvas

Week 12—November 11th

Policy advocacy, research, and change

- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Ch. 9: Building Power: Community Organizing, Student Empowerment, and Public Accountability
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409-428.

Week 13—November 18th

Future directions for education policy

- Horsford, S. D., Scott, J. T., & Anderson, G. L. (2018). *The politics of education policy in an era of inequality: Possibilities for democratic schooling*. Routledge.
    - Chapter 10: Reclaiming the Power of Public Education
- Conaway, C. (2020). Maximizing research use in the world we actually live in: Relationships, organizations, and interpretation. *Education Finance and Policy, 15*(1), 1-10.

Reflective examination of a policy issue: Discussion/conclusion is due on Tuesday Nov. 18th by 3pm via Canvas

November 25th (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 14—December 2nd

Final in-class presentations/celebration

Looking forward to celebrating our learning together in class!

- Revisit a favorite reading from the course

Final round table presentations will take place in small groups during our Week 14 class on Dec. 2nd. We will work on these presentations during our Week 13 class.

December 9th–NO CLASS, enjoy the holiday break!

University Policies and Resources

**Language on this page comes directly from the University of Pittsburgh, unless noted in italics*

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the Academic Integrity Guide for an overview of the topic. For hands- on practice, complete the Academic Integrity Modules.

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Well-Being, Health, and Safety

Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to maintain your well-being and seek appropriate support can help you achieve your goals and lead a fulfilling life. It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. You are encouraged to visit Thrive@Pitt to learn more about well-being and the many campus resources available to help you thrive. If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources. The University Counseling Center is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact the Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226.

My priority is your well-being, and I am committed to being flexible. Please reach out with any concerns, scheduling conflicts, or other circumstances you would like to address so that we can strategize together. I encourage any student who is sick to stay home, rest, and not worry about attendance/class.