



Educational Policy & Politics

Dr. Alexandra Freidus
EDLR 6313 Fall 2022
Wednesdays, 12:30-3:00pm
Gentry 201

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Office hours: By appointment

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Course Overview and Objectives

Educational Policy and Politics is designed to develop students' understanding of the policy process and educational policy analysis. This course presents students with a range of theoretical frameworks to understand policy and the policy process – from problem definition to policy formulation, adoption, and implementation.

Our course goals for this semester:

- Develop a critical understanding of the ways in which different visions for the purpose of education and different conceptions of equity have been applied in education policy debates.
- Critically assess the goals, designs, assumptions, implementations, and outcomes of contemporary education policies.
- Become familiar with a range of theoretical frameworks used to analyze educational policy, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
- Apply policy analysis frameworks to a range of education policy topics, defining the problem and critically evaluating policy responses.

Our community goals:

- Treat ourselves and each other patiently and kindly.
- Communicate openly about our expectations, goals, and concerns.
- Stay flexible and focus on what matters.
- Support each other's learning and growth.

Course Requirements, Assignments and Grading

This is a seminar: the questions we ask and topics we dive deep in are largely driven by your interests, priorities, and goals. The overarching objective of this course is for each participant to develop a deeper understanding of education policy and become more adept at thinking and writing analytically. To accomplish these goals, students must read attentively, participate in class, and put strong efforts into class assignments. Our success in large part depends on you. We are a community of learners and, as such, the class will be structured in ways to encourage students to provide critical support and feedback to one another.

We will review and discuss our ethos of care on the first day of class. If you must miss a class or be late with an assignment, please let me know as soon as possible. You *don't* need to explain what's going on, but please don't hesitate to ask if there's any way I can help. I will ask you reach out to your peers to make sure you catch up on what you missed. If you are not in class or you are late to class, you are still responsible for the readings and assigned work, including any announcements I might make about updates to assignments, deadlines, etc.

Quality Participation (30%)

This is a discussion and workshop-based course. Our success and shared learning – both your own and your peers' – depend on you. Please arrive on time and ready to think through the week's assignments, with notes and questions that you want to discuss in class. Listening actively, asking questions, commenting on the thoughts of others, or discussing tentative ideas are just as important to our shared learning as stating original, fully-formed thoughts. You can also communicate your thinking by annotating the texts and making notes in our class Google Drive (where you will also find all readings). If you wish to know my assessment of your participation and understanding of readings, you are encouraged to seek a conference for that purpose. I will notify you if I have cause for concern.



Your participation also involves facilitating an insightful and analytic discussion with your book group in one class session. You will choose one book (of several options) to read with a partner(s), meet as a group to discuss the book, and work collaboratively to assign reading from and lead class activities related to that book. Your responsibilities as facilitators include:

- Work with your group to select *one or two* chapters of the book for the rest of the class to read. Develop reflection questions to share with the chapter. See the end of this syllabus for guidance on what these questions can and should look like.
- Send me your chapter selection(s) and discussion questions **no later than 9am Monday the week before the class discusses your book** so that I can distribute the chapter/questions to the class.
- Plan a brief introduction (no more than 20 minutes, max) to the book that offers context for the assigned chapter and helps the class understand how the chapter fits into the book overall.
- Lead a 30-minute discussion or activity that challenges the class to think more deeply about the chapter and connect the book to other topics we have explored.

Analytic Memos and Revisions (30%)

During the term, you will **choose four weeks** to prepare detailed analytic memos reflecting on the week's readings. **Post each memo on HuskyCT by 8pm on the Monday before**



Wednesday's class. I will not be able to provide feedback on memos that are posted after the Monday 8pm deadline. Please do not write a memo for the week your book group facilitates discussion.

Memos are not a synopsis of the reading. Instead, they should make an argument about the text(s), including a clear thesis statement and providing evidence to support this thesis. The argument, not a summary, is the focus of the memo; you should spend no more than 2-3 sentences telling the reader what the text(s) said. Memos are limited to **2 double-spaced pages**. Your memo is not required to respond to the prompts that I and the book club leaders provide, but you are welcome to do so. Even if you wanted to, you would not be able to respond to all of the guiding questions in one memo.

I will provide detailed feedback on each memo no later than the Friday of the week you submit. You will revise your memo, incorporating my feedback and new ideas from class discussion. Your revised memo is due before class meets the following Wednesday. Memos and revisions will be graded on a $\sqrt{-}$, $\sqrt{}$, $\sqrt{+}$ scale.

Policy Case Study (30%)

In this assignment, you will analyze a policy problem or problem of practice from a policy perspective. The assignment, rubric and proposal will be described in more detail in an upcoming class. You will work on this project over the course of the semester. It is essential that you meet each interim deadline in order to incorporate feedback as you work; part of your project grade will be based on how you incorporate feedback from your classmates and myself.



Proposal due: October 19 (before class)

Paper Outline Due: November 9 (before class)

Paper Draft with Colleagues' Comments Due: Nov 21 (9am)

Final Paper Due: December 12 (9am)

Writing Groups (10%)

An additional component of this work will be to engage with colleagues around the writing process. Midway through the semester, you will be put in a writing group designed to support you with the policy case study. Group members will read and critique the outline and rough draft of your paper. Your writing group participation (both the quality of the feedback you provide your group and your own responsiveness to feedback from your peers and myself, where appropriate) will be incorporated into your final grade.



Major Theoretical Frameworks

We will discuss, apply, and critique the following theoretical lenses over the course of the semester.

Loose Coupling

Loose coupling suggests that the work within the organization is not well connected to the external policies meant to influence it. As a result, teachers and others within school operate largely autonomously.

Street-level Bureaucracy

Policy implementation at the "street-level" often deviates from the formal written policy. The misalignment can be explained, in part, by the realities faced by front-line implementers who operate in

bureaucratic environments.

Sensemaking and Cognitive Framing

A policy’s impact is shaped by how it is framed and interpreted by various stakeholders. The ultimate outcome of policy is determined through a process whereby the policy and the organization policymakers seek to change adapt to one another.

Critical Policy Analysis

Policy does not exist within a vacuum; it is situated within relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society—and the movements that are trying to interrupt these relations. In order to understand an educational policy, we must identify the underlying political, social, and economic developments that make it necessary or possible.

Critical Race Theory

Racism is endemic to the United States and a permanent factor in American social life, politics, and policy. White people are the beneficiaries of most civil rights legislation and educational policy reforms; ideologies of meritocracy, individualism, and colorblindness undergird and reinforce white supremacy.

Course Calendar

The schedule below will change during the semester based on class discussions and student interests. Please check your email regularly for notifications of revisions.

After reviewing the syllabus carefully, please contact the instructor if you foresee a conflict between the due date for an assignment and your religious observations.

Date	Focus	Texts	Due This Week
8/31	What is educational policy?	<p>Course syllabus (please come with questions)</p> <p>“The President’s Physical Fitness Test.” (2020). <i>Maintenance Phase Podcast</i>. https://www.maintenancephase.com/</p> <p>CONTENT WARNING: Profanity. There’s quite a bit of swearing in this podcast. If that’s going to interfere with your engagement, let me know.</p> <p>In class: Labaree, D.L. et al. (2018). Public schools for private gain: The declining American commitment to serving the public good. <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i>, 100 (3), 8-13. https://kappanonline.org/labaree-public-schools-private-gain-decline-american-commitment-public-good/</p>	<p>Check your email and write me back!</p> <p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> What factors influenced the development of this policy? What were its goals? Was it effective? Why or why not?</p>
9/7	How do we define policy problems?	<p>Stone, D. (2012). <i>Policy Paradox: The art of political decision making</i>. 3rd edition. Norton. (Ch. 7 & 8).</p> <p>McGee, H. (2021). <i>The Sum of Us</i>. Random House. (Introduction).</p> <p>Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools,</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> Why do problem definitions matter for policy analysis? What problem does “the achievement gap” define? What is</p>

		<p><i>Educational Researcher</i>, 35(7), 3-12.</p> <p>Bulkley, K. E. (2013). Conceptions of equity: How influential actors view a contested concept. <i>Peabody Journal of Education</i>, 88(1), 10–21.</p>	<p>framed into – and out of – consideration?</p> <p>Write a memo (optional)***</p>
9/14	<p>What can educational policy do (and not do)?</p> <p>Policy issue: Accountability</p>	<p>Stone, D. (2012). <i>Policy as paradox: The art of political decision making</i>. 3rd edition. Norton. (Ch. 12-14).</p> <p>Ravitch, D., Forte, D., Moss, P., & Reville, P. (2022). Policy Dialogue: Twenty Years of Test-Based Accountability. <i>History of Education Quarterly</i> 3, 337–352. https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2022.19</p> <p>Pawlewicz, D. D. A. (2022). Teacher Blame as the Grammar of Public School Reform. <i>History of Education Quarterly</i> 3, 291–311. https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2022.16</p> <p>Recommended NOT required: “History Test: The Tangled Roots of Standardized Testing.” (2021). <i>Have You Heard Podcast</i>. https://haveyouheardblog.com/history-test-the-tangled-roots-of-standardized-testing/</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u></p> <p>What characterizes a “successful” educational policy? What tools are available to policymakers? What determines their effectiveness?</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
9/21	<p>How is educational policy made?</p>	<p>Kirst, M. W. (2004). Turning Points: A History of American School Governance. In <i>Who’s in Charge Here?: The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy</i>. Brookings Institution Press. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.43sup-0522</p> <p>Stone, D. (2012). <i>Policy as paradox: The art of political decision making</i>. 3rd edition. Norton. (Ch. 15-16).</p> <p><u>Policy Issue: The Role of the Courts</u></p> <p>Book Club: <i>The Schoolhouse Gate: Public Education, the Supreme Court, and the Battle for the American Mind</i> (1-2 chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u></p> <p>See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
9/28	<p>What can educational policy do (and not do)?</p>	<p>Anyon, J. (2005). What “Counts” as Educational Policy? Notes toward a New Paradigm. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i>, 75(1), 65–89.</p> <p><u>Policy Issue: School Segregation</u></p> <p>School Colors Episode 2: “Tales From The Southside.” (2022). <i>NPR Code Switch</i>. https://www.npr.org/2022/05/10/1097873098/a-tale-of-two-school-districts-the-making-of-the-southside</p> <p>Book Club: <i>Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation</i> (1-2 Chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u></p> <p>See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
10/5	<p>NO CLASS – YOM KIPPUR</p> <p>Review: Case study assignment and documents on writing groups</p>		

10/12	How is educational policy implemented?	<p>Loose Coupling: Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 21(1), 1–19.</p> <p><u>POLICY ISSUE/ADDITIONAL TEXTS TBA</u></p> <p>School funding OR Title IX OR COVID responses OR...</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> TBA</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)</p> <p>Come prepared with your proposal ideas/outline/draft and questions you would like to ask your group.</p>
10/19	How is educational policy implemented?	<p>Street Level Bureaucracy: Lipsky, M. (2010). <i>Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service</i>. Russell Sage Foundation. Preface and Ch. 2.</p> <p>Weatherley, D., & Lipsky, M. (1977). Street-level bureaucrats and institutional innovation: Implementing special-education reform. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i>, 47(2), 171-197.</p> <p><u>Policy Issue: Tracking and Discipline Policies</u></p> <p>Book Club: <i>Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools</i> (1-2 Chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p> <p>Case study proposal due</p>
10/26	How is educational policy implemented?	<p>Sensemaking: Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Gomez, L. M. (2006). Policy implementation and cognition: The role of human, social, and distributed cognition in framing policy implementation. In <i>New directions in education policy implementation</i> ed by M. Honig. SUNY Press.</p> <p>Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. <i>Educational evaluation and policy analysis</i>, 23(2), 145-170.</p> <p><u>Policy Issue: District Management</u></p> <p>Book Club: <i>Suddenly Diverse: How School Districts Manage Race and Inequality</i>. (1-2 Chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
11/2		<p>FLEX WEEK: Stay tuned for topics and readings/preparation</p> <p>CLASS MEETS ONLINE: Check your email for Zoom link</p>	
11/9	How is educational policy changed?	<p>Critical Policy Analysis: Lipman, P. (2011). <i>The New Political Economy of Urban Education</i> (Chapters TBA)</p> <p><u>Policy issue: School Reform Movements</u></p> <p>Book Club: <i>This is Our School: Race and Community Resistance to School Reform</i> (1-2 Chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
11/16	Writing Workshop	WRITING GROUPS MEET: Details TBA	Before Class: Rough Draft of Policy Case Study due to writing group

			After Class: Revised drafts and revision notes due to me by 9am on 11/21
11/23	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK		
11/30	How is educational policy changed?	<p>Critical Race Theory: Ray, V. (2022). <i>On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters and Why You Should Care</i> (Chapters TBA)</p> <p>Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. I. (1995). Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education. <i>Teachers College Record</i>, 97(1), 47–68.</p> <p>Policy issue: School Closures</p> <p>Book Club: <i>Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago’s South Side</i> (1-2 Chapters TBA)</p>	<p><u>Reflection Prompts</u> See book club email for reflection prompts</p> <p>Write or revise a memo (optional)***</p>
12/7	Sharing & Celebration		MINI-PRESENTATIONS (details TBA)
FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 9am on 12/12			

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Texts

Most readings will be available in our class Google Drive folder and/or as links in the course schedule above. You will be required to get your book club selection (which may be available as a free ebook via the library system).

Some students like to refer to textbooks for factual questions. I recommend the following references:

Fowler, Frances C. (2008). *Policy Studies for Educational Leaders: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Stone, D. (2011). *The Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Norton.

Course Expectations

- **Please expect the unexpected. We will adjust the course schedule based on how things go. Please check your UConn email regularly for updates.**
- **Please be generous with yourselves, your colleagues, and me.** Class plans may need to be adapted. Children and family members may pop up into video screens. You may face unexpected

or particularly challenging circumstances. It may be difficult for me to identify students who need extra help. If you need additional support, please reach out when you can.

- **I have set deadlines in order to make sure you work through the assignments in a logical sequence.** I know there may be challenges; please communicate as proactively as possible if deadlines prove a major challenge. Be sure to back up all of your work.
- **Your success in this class is important to me. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know so we can work together develop strategies that meet both your needs and the course requirements. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met.** The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at UConn provides accommodations and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability for which you wish to request academic accommodations and have not contacted the CSD, please do so as soon as possible. The CSD is located in Wilbur Cross, Room 204 and can be reached at (860) 486-2020 or at csd@uconn.edu. Detailed information regarding the accommodations process is also available on their website at www.csd.uconn.edu. Please contact either me or the Center for Students with Disabilities if you feel you may be qualified.
- **Academic Integrity: All work that you submit for this class must be your own. Building on the ideas of others is a critical part of academic work, but you must clearly credit the people whose ideas and/or words you are using every time you use them.** When you paraphrase, include the author and date of publication you are referencing in your text and have complete bibliographic information at the end of the paper; use quotation marks every time you borrow another author's language, even if you also cite them. Student behavior shall be consistent with conduct delineated in the University of Connecticut statement on *Academic Integrity in Graduate Education and Research* contained in the May 2001 edition of the University of Connecticut *Responsibilities for Community Life: The Student Code*. Students are responsible for the understanding: (a) forms of academic and scholarly misconduct described in the statement, and (b) procedures to be followed by an instructor, the Graduate School, and a student in the event of alleged misconduct.
- **Some of you may experience challenges because you cannot afford sufficient food, you lack a safe place to live, or you struggle to balance school with paid work or family responsibilities.** If you are experiencing these or other challenges, I encourage you to reach out to the [Dean of Students](#) for support and referral to services that can help. If you feel overwhelmed or are experiencing anxiety or depression, please reach out to [Mental Health Services](#) for free, confidential support. If you feel comfortable doing so, please let me know so that I can assist you in accessing support.

**How to Ask a Question About an Academic Text That Will
Provoke Conversation and Further Discussion from Your Colleagues
(Some starter notes)**

- **Read carefully.** Identify the questions, assumptions, and connections both you (as reader) and the author are making. Think about the pieces of the text, phrases, expressions, moments that tweak your instincts, that bother and harass you. These intuitions and “feelings” are the ends of intellectual threads that you may want to excavate. Linger over passages that are unclear or that strike you as particularly helpful or that don’t jar well with you. *Why* do those passages set off your instincts?
- **Contextualize the work.** You should identify, and you should share with the class, the following information: who wrote the book; what is their discipline or interdisciplinary nexus; what is/are the book’s central goals and questions; what are the essential features of the book’s design; what is/are the book’s central arguments; who is the writer in conversation with; what are some key passages; what are some key terms; what did you not understand?
- **Make reference to specific parts of the text** with quotes or page numbers: direct the class to look at a relevant passage, read it together out loud, and drill down to get at the problem you are looking at.
- **Reframe some of the problems of the text to think through the consequences, implications and applications of the study.** Questions about “experience” or “responses” or “feelings” tend not to be helpful questions – try to step back from personal responses and instead focus on the shape of the argument, evidence, and analysis.
- **Often we are tempted to ask the “what about” question:** e.g., what about the people who are excluded from this work? Although this is a reasonable question, it doesn’t open up conversation. The only answer is: they aren’t there. More productive: what choices did the author make in developing this book and what were their consequences; how do the exclusions inherent facilitate certain conclusions, problems or paradigms; what are these paradigms and what happens when we consider this work in a broader context?
- **Ask discussion questions that will help the class unpack ideas,** e.g. open-ended questions that are not immediately answerable with direct reference to the text. Make sure the question does not rely on information the rest of the class doesn’t have (or share the information and background the class needs in order to engage with the question ahead of time). Keep questions simple, straightforward and jargon-free. Proofread so that you catch grammar and spelling mistakes.
- **It’s not the worst idea to make sure you have figured out possible answers for the questions before you ask.** However, sometimes you are just really stumped and need to work through this question with your classmates. That’s okay too. On the other hand, if you can easily answer your question while you are writing it, you probably need to just state your point of view and move on to another question that you have not already fully answered.
- **Sometimes your initial question is simply the jumping-off point for more developed questions the class brings to the reading.** That is fine! The point is to catalyze inquiry, not perform mastery: good pedagogy means letting go of your ego and investments in your own ideas.

These guidelines are adapted from:

Kyla Wazana Tompkins in *Avidly*. September 13, 2016.

<http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/12/we-arent-here-to-learnwhat-we-know-we-already-know>