K-16 Pathways Policy Seminar  
EDUC 771-001  
Fall 2011  
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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:30-12  
Class Room: 2320 SEB  
Time: Tuesday 1-4

**Background**

For more than two decades, the federal government has pushed K-12 reforms as a means of improving college access while using loans to fund financial access. Many national organizations have defined the *K-16 pipeline* as a set of steps that must be taken by students to gain access to college. The National Governors Association (NGA) and other groups have advocated increasing requirements for high school graduation as means of improving preparation, college enrollment, and degree attainment. In contrast, the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (ACFSA) and others have argued that the decline in federal funding for need-based grants increased inequalities in postsecondary opportunity during the past quarter century. In addition, new approaches to accountability and finance have been advocated as strategies for improving the quality of educational opportunity in the United States. These policy initiatives are not only resulting in changes in graduation requirements for high school students and in college enrollment rates, but are also changing the patterns of the relationships between schools and colleges. However, not all policies have their intended effects (i.e., not all changes are in intended directions), so there has been uneven progress. It is crucial to use evaluative information on the effects of existing reforms in the design of new reform efforts, a step that is too often overlooked.

**Course Format**

The course is organized to provide an overview of the elements of K-16 education. This course uses a mixture of instructional methods to encourage students to:

- Consider how research is used to rationalize reform agendas.
- Critically examine research in relation to claims made by reformers.
- Enable students to investigate topics of their own choice in depth.
- Engage in action projects to inform reform initiatives.

A seminar format will be used to encourage discussion of readings and to provide students an opportunity to present their work. The seminar process will involve the entire class in reviews and critiques of current and proposed policies, relative to research evidence.
A series of mini-workshops are integrated into the class structure to help students conduct action-research projects in support of an on-going reform initiative. Workshops will be used to introduce elements of action research methods, and students will have the opportunity to practice these processes in a collaborative project.

In addition, a presentation format will be used by the professor to convey new information, encourage discussions, and conduct facilitative workshops.

Collaborative Projects

During the first half of the course students will work in groups using action inquiry in support of a reform initiative. The groups will assist reform initiatives by: examining why a problem exists; looking at research related to the problem; and identifying and assessing alternative action strategies. Each team will draft a report for review by a practitioner and the professor, present the report, and revise the report based on feedback.

Independent Student Work

Students will explore specific issues and research related to their own interests. Students can select a topic related to: educational improvement in elementary, middle and/or high school; postsecondary transitions, including mentoring, information services and student aid; policies and programs that finance, encourage and support student engagement and success in colleges; or in-depth analyses of topics related to their collaborative action inquiry project.

Shared Conversations

We will explore the current political landscape in education, examine political agendas, consider the research designed to support the underlying rationales and consider ways to better conduct research designed to address policy questions. Students will examine and compare research that has been completed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and other groups to inform the new policy agenda, along with research that evaluates the effects of the newer policies and reform programs. While many groups espouse policy agendas related to K-16 reform, very few studies actually assess the linkages between these policies (i.e., accountability, standards, graduation requirements, etc.) and the outcomes they are designed to influence.

Critical Thinking

Successful class participation involves using critical thinking and analysis to discern claims that are used in policy and research texts, as well as analyze the use of research evidence to support or test claims. Students are encouraged to distinguish between:

- Using research to build and support arguments for policies; and
- Using research and evaluation research to assess the intended and unintended effects of policies.
**Preparation for Class:**

To prepare for class, students should: read required texts; browse recommended texts to see which, if any, are of interest; review the policy reports to see how authors make claims and use evidence to build arguments; and review research to see what linkages are being examined and whether conclusions reach beyond the findings. Students should be prepared to engage in dialogue—discuss questions about claims and the use of research evidence—as well as conversations with classmates about the positions, beliefs, and ideologies inherent in the policy discourse of K-16 education.

**Assignments and Grading**

**Student participation**

Active involvement in seminar time, workshops, and scheduled briefings will count as **10% of the course grade.** The quality of participation will be judged relative to critical analysis of readings and constructive commentary on peers’ discussions. Students who have not read the required readings are encouraged to refrain from the discussion for the sake of their peers who have done the reading (10 points toward possible 100 points in class).

**Action Inquiry Report (Assignment 1)**

The objective for this assignment is to engage in collaborative action research on a problem that is relevant to education policy and/or practice. Teams of masters and doctoral students should work collaboratively to develop reports that will inform an ongoing reform initiative. Practitioners engaged in the reform will give feedback to the student team. This assignment counts as 30% of grade (30 Points). Key dates:

- Join project team (after seminar, September 13)
- Draft project report due (November 8)
- Final group project due (November 29)

**Critical Reviews (Assignments 2-5):**

The purpose of a critical review is to examine both the intended and unintended effects of reform-oriented public policies. Three questions will be handed out. **Typically, a question will be given out one week before the assignment is due.** If students miss a class, they need to check with classmates to see if a question was handed out. Hint: students may want to read all recommended reading the day a question is due; outside reading can also be used.

The critical review should provide a “brief” on an issue, summarizing claims and research evidence related to the topic (5 pages of text plus attachments as appropriate), as a response to the question. To address the questions, students should review claims and research used to build rationales for a reform, as well as research that relates to the
advocated policies. It will be possible to answer these questions through course readings, but students are encouraged to do other research (web links are provided through CTTools).

Students can meet to discuss the question and research as informal study teams. However, these are *individual assignments*, so be careful to avoid submitting briefs that appear duplicative.

Given the short length of these papers, students may need to find a systematic way to summarize study results. If necessary, students can append analyses they used to address the question. The limit on length is set under the assumption that most policymakers will only look at a briefing document, but may want access to details if the analysis confronts their closely held assumptions (so attachments can help).

Critical reviews will receive up to 5 points each for: discerning claims made by reformers; analysis of research related to intended claims; and review of research related to unintended outcomes. The grades for the best two of these assignments will be used (i.e., the worst of the three grades will not be considered). *The best two grades on these assignments will count as 30% of the grade (30 points).*

**Final Assignment**

The final assignment is a major paper on a topic related to K-16 education chosen by the student. Any policy or reform topic can be chosen, but students will be required to make the links between their specific topic and the K-16 policy agenda. The key elements of this assignment are to demonstrate an understanding of policy claims and the roles and influence of research. The paper can take the form of a literature review, a research design, a position statement, or a research paper. Students are encouraged to discuss their topic with the professor and are expected to brief the class as a whole about their topic on at least one occasion. *The final assignment counts as 30% of the course grade (30 points).*

**Grading System**

We will use a point system for grades, as a means of demystifying the process. The percentage distribution of grades (above) can be viewed as points. Grades will be assigned as: A+ for 96-100 points; A for 91-95; A- for 86-90; B+ for 81-85 points; B for 76-80 and so forth. For assignments 2 through 5, one point will be deducted for assignments that are turned in late. Two points will be deducted from the final assignment score if it is late. (If students are out of town they can submit via the fax number above or by electronic submission to the email above.)
Course Readings

Primary Texts


Additional readings for the course will be made available by one of two methods. A great deal of material will be available through a CTools site created for the course. All members of the class will be given access to the site and it can be reached at the following link and accessed with your unique name and Kerberos password: https://ctools.umich.edu/portal

Electronic Reserves

The university library maintains an electronic reserve system where materials housed in the library in electronic form can be accessed. A link for the electronic reserves site at the library can be found on the CTools main page or you can access it through the library web pages.

Recommended Texts


Weekly Schedule: Topics and Readings

September 6: Public Policy and K-16 Education

Readings

- Barriers, Introduction and Chapter 1

**September 13: Agenda Setting: Focus on Assessing Problems**

*Panel (Potential Partners in Action Inquiry) (2:45-4:00)*

- Marie Ting, Center for Educational Outreach
- Derrick Scott, Center for Engineering Diversity and Outreach
- Cinda Sue Davis, Women in Science and Engineering
- Dilip Das, Provost’s Office

*Required Readings*

- *Gap*, Introduction and Chapter 1 & 2
- Pathways to College *Network Agenda – A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Success* (Executive Summary).

- *Barriers*, Chapter 2

**September 20: Thinking Critically about Policy and Research**

*Required Readings*


- *Barriers*, Chapter 3

*Recommended Readings*


**September 27: Research of the Effects of School Reform**

*Required Readings*

• Chapters in Part II of *Gap*
• *Barriers*, Chapter 4

*Recommended Readings*

• Search a website on a specific K-12 reform model. Examine the research sponsored by the organization.

**October 4: Alignment of K-12 and Higher Education**

*Required Readings*

• *Gap*, Part III
• *Barriers*, Chapter 4
**Recommended Readings**

- Search a website from a state education agency or a national organization for information on college transition programs. Also check research information and other reports that are noted on the site.

**Optional Session: October 7, Special (Optional) Session**

"The Ethics of Higher Education Access--Normative and Comparative Perspectives."
Lecture and Brown Bag Lunch with Heinz-Deiter Meyer
Associate Professor, SUNY-Albany
Co-author, *The New Institutionalism in Education*

**October 11: College Transitions**

**Required Readings**

- *Gap*, Part IV
- *Barriers*, Chapter 5

**October 25: Engagement in College**

**Required Reading**

- *Gap*, Part V
- *Barriers*, Chapter 6 & 7

**Nov 1: Accountability and Privatization in Higher Education**

**Required Readings**

- *Gap*, Part VI
- *Barriers*, Chapters 8 & 9

**November 8, 15, 22 & 19 & : Student Projects & Action Studies**

**Optional Session: 2011 Michigan Pre-College and Youth Outreach Conference (Nov. 14, 9-5PM at the Michigan League)**

**All assignments due: December 6**