



Course	POLS 397: Education Politics and Policy in the US (3 credits)
Term	Spring 2022
Meetings	Online asynchronous
Instructor	Austin Barraza
Office Hours	By appointment via Zoom
Contact Method	Please use the Canvas Inbox to contact me

Course Description

Over the last two years, issues of public education have re-emerged onto national and state legislative agendas. Calls for the cancellation of student debt, reopening public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, and addressing critical race theory in the curriculum have become the focus of legislators and policymakers across the country. Given that First Lady Dr. Jill Biden has long been an educator, the debates around fixing broken schools and creating a more equitable education system will likely continue to attract widespread attention. This course helps you make sense of many of these contemporary policy topics by exploring the history and expansion of public education in the United States, with particular attention to the role of the federal and state governments in setting public education policy. This course also looks at how government has both historically restricted and expanded access to education. Issues such as federalism, school reform, and education funding will be covered as well as contemporary issues in public education.

Course Delivery

This course has been created as an online, asynchronous course and can be completed without having to attend any class meeting. However, because this course covers many contemporary policy issues, I have found it helpful in the past to offer a synchronous component. Therefore, for most weeks, I will host an optional 30 minute class meeting over Zoom where we can discuss the week's materials, pose questions, reflect on current events, and more. To find a time that works for us, please fill out this [Doodle](#) with your availability this semester.

Course Inclusivity

You are welcome in this course! Do not hesitate to inform me of your preferred name, pronouns, or any class accommodations you need to be successful. In return, I expect you to be ready to learn and to be respectful of your peers, especially in regards to their various identities.

Student Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the values and competing purposes of public education
2. Describe the history and expansion of public education
3. Understand how public schools are governed and funded
4. Analyze both historical and contemporary instances of education inequality
5. Discuss key legislation and events related to education reform and accountability
6. Describe and evaluate contemporary issues in education policy, such as reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing critical race theory in the curriculum

Course Materials

1. *Schoolhouse Burning: Public Education and the Assault on American Democracy* (2020) by Derek W. Black, available at the [bookstore](#) for \$28 or as low as \$15 for a used copy on [Amazon](#). If cost prohibits you from purchasing the book, consider using [interlibrary loan](#) for temporary access to the book.
2. Additional readings, videos, and audio clips available on Canvas

Assignments and Grading

There are 100 points possible in this course. Grades are assigned using a plus and minus scale with traditional grade cut off points (97-100 is an A+, 93-96 is an A, 90-92 is an A-, etc). All assignments must be submitted by 11:59 PM MT on the date listed in Canvas.

- **Discussion Questions** (20 points): To help you dig deeper into each module's materials, you will respond to a set of weekly discussion questions with a 1-2 minute audio message. Your initial response is due on Wednesday by 11:59 PM and you must reply to one peer by Friday at 11:59 PM. For instructions on how to record an audio message, click [here](#).
- **Analysis Papers** (40 points): To help you think critically about some of the major course themes, you will write two analysis papers that each respond to a set of questions.
- **ECS Data Project** (40 points): To help you investigate contemporary issues in education policy, you will use the State Education Policy Tracking tool from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to describe recent trends in education legislation in one state.

Together, these assignments are meant to provide breadth in the material. The discussion questions, analysis papers, and data project have you engage with a variety of course content. Please see Canvas for specific assignment due dates and general course announcements.

Extra Credit

You can have up to 2 extra points added to your final grade. You can earn one point by presenting a contemporary issue on education policy during one of our synchronous class meetings. That issue should be related to the week's module. You can earn an additional point by completing the end of semester course evaluation. More information about these items will be discussed later.

Late and Makeup Work

You are expected to complete all assignments on time. Late and makeup work will only be accepted on a case by case basis, with a valid reason that is supplemented by proof of an excused absence. Late work may be subject to point penalties.

Email Policy

If you need to contact me, please send me a message through Canvas. Generally, I will respond to messages within 24 hours. However, for messages sent on Fridays and weekends, I may take a bit longer. If you need to contact me regarding a non-course related issue or after the semester is over, please email me at abarraza@western.edu.

Academic Integrity and Respect

Please have respect for yourself and refrain from cheating or plagiarizing. This means any work submitted must be solely authored by you the student and where appropriate, must contain citations that recognize ideas that are not your own. Failure to abide by this may result in a failing grade, dismissal from the class, and/or subject to other disciplinary measures determined by the university. Please review the [university catalog](#) for more information regarding academic integrity.

In addition, please have respect for others and be courteous when addressing fellow course participants in person or online, especially those who hold dissimilar views. Also, please have respect for the class environment and limit the use of electronics that could serve as a distraction, such as cell phones. Please note that any type of recording is not permitted in class.

Campus Resources

Disability Services: If you have a disability, whether physical, learning, or psychological, and wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, please contact [Disability Services](#).

Counseling Center: If you experience any sort of mental or emotional setback throughout the term, please visit the [Counseling Center](#) to explore the variety of support options for students.

Student Help Desk: If you have any problems accessing Canvas, Zoom, or another learning platform, please contact the [Student Help Desk](#) for assistance.

COVID-19: We will follow all local, state, and federal policies related to COVID-19. For the most recent updates on policies that relate to Western campus, please visit the [COVID-19 Updates](#) page.

Other Important Things

If you have any concerns about the course, your performance, or anything else, please feel free to reach out to me after class, during office hours, or via Canvas. I'm happy to chat about various topics such as your academic interests, career goals, or ways you think this course can be improved. Finally, please note that this syllabus, as with all things in life, is subject to change.

Course Schedule

Week	#	Module
January 10th	1	Course Introduction
January 17th	2	Public Policy
January 24th	3	Purpose of Public Education
January 31st	4	History and Expansion of Public Education: Part 1
February 7th	5	History and Expansion of Public Education: Part 2
February 14th	6	Education Governance and Funding: State and Local
February 21st	7	Education Governance and Funding: Federal
February 28th	8	Education Inequality
March 7th	9	Education Reform and Accountability
March 14th	--	Enjoy your spring break!
March 21st	10	Education and Democracy
March 28th	11	Current Issues in Education: Reopening schools amidst COVID-19
April 4th	12	Current Issues in Education: Critical race theory in the curriculum
April 11th	13	ECS Data Project: Initial Proposal
April 18th	14	ECS Data Project: Individual Consultations
April 25th	15	Course Wrap Up and Reflection

Module 1: Course Introduction

- Skim: "[Education Politics and Policy: Emerging Institutions, Interests, and Ideas](#)" by Galey (2015) in the *Policy Studies Journal*

Module 2: Public Policy

- Watch: [What is Policy?](#)
- Skim: "The Structure of Policy Making in American Government" by Peters (2016) in *American Public Policy: Promise and Performance*
- Read: "Chapter 1: The Current Crisis" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*

Module 3: Purpose of Public Education

- Watch: [Why Did We Create Public Schools?: A Short History of Education](#)
- Read: "[Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals](#)" by Labaree (1997) in the *American Educational Research Journal*
- Read: "Chapter 2: A Nation Founded on Education" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Read: "Chapter 3: Education as Freedom" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Skim: "A State Should Have a University" by Henderson (1890) in *Thomans Jefferson's Views on Public Education*

Module 4: History and Expansion of Public Education Part 1

- Watch: [A History of Education in the U.S.](#)
- Read: [The Human Capital Century](#) by Goldin (2003) in *Education Next*
- Read: "Chapter 4: Reconstruction" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Read: "Chapter 5: A Constitutional Chorus" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Read: "Chapter 6: The Fall" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*

Module 5: History and Expansion of Public Education Part 2

- Watch: [Brown v. Board of Education explained](#)
- Read: "Chapter 7: The Second Reconstruction" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Listen: [Before 'Brown V. Board,' Mendez Fought California's Segregated Schools](#) by Meraji (2014) from *Code Switch* and *NPR Morning Edition*
- Read: "[Mendez v. Westminster School District: How it affected Brown v. Board of Education](#)" by Aguirre (2005) in the *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*
- Read: [Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965](#) by Paul (2016) for the Social Welfare History Project at Virginia Commonwealth University

Module 6: Education Governance and Funding: State and Local

- Read: "Local School Boards, Politics and the Community" by Wirt and Kirst (2005) in *The Political Dynamics of American Education*
- Read: "The History and Evolution of the State Role in Education Policy" by Wirt and Kirst (2005) in *The Political Dynamics of American Education*

- Read: [Making Sense of State School Funding Policy](#) by Chingos and Blagg (2017) from The Urban Institute

Module 7: Education Governance and Funding: Federal

- Watch: [Why America's School Funding Crisis Is Only Getting Worse \(HBO\)](#)
- Read: "Patterns of Federal Interest in Education" by Manna (2007) in *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda*
- Read: "Patterns of Federal Involvement in Education" by Manna (2007) in *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda*
- Read: [No Child Left Behind: An Overview](#) by Klein (2015) in *Education Week*
- Read: [The Every Student Succeeds Act: An ESSA Overview](#) by Klein (2016) in *Education Week*

Module 8: Education Inequality

- Watch: [U.S. Schools Still Segregated](#)
- Read: [Harming Our Common Future: America's Segregated Schools 65 Years after Brown](#) by Frankenberg et al. (2019) for The Civil Rights Project at UCLA (read only the executive summary, briefly skim the rest)
- Read: "Chapter 8: The Civil Rights Backlash" by Black (2020) in *Schoolhouse Burning*
- Read: [School Segregation, the Continuing Tragedy](#) by Hannah-Jones (2014) in *ProPublica*
- Skim: [Segregation and Racial Gaps in Special Education](#) by Elder et al. (2021) in *Education Next* (read only the introduction, briefly skim the rest)

Module 9: Education Reform and Accountability

- Watch: [35 Years After 'A Nation at Risk': 36 Pages that Bent the Arc of Education](#)
- Watch: [Charter Schools May Be the Future of Public Education](#)
- Read: [The Untold History of Charter Schools](#) by Cohen (2017) in *Democracy: Journal of Ideas* (read only the first section)
- Read: [Holding Teachers Responsible For Fixing Failing Schools: The Battle Over Education Reform In Central Falls, Rhode Island](#) by Rochefort and Donnelly (2011) in *Electronic Hallway*
- Skim: [A Nation At Risk](#) (1983) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education

Module 10: Education and Democracy

- Read: [What the Capitol Riot Means for Civics Education](#) by Chu (2021) from The Thomas B. Fordham Institute
- Read: [After Capitol Riot, Some States Turn to Civics Education](#) by Vasilogambros (2021) from *Pew*
- Read: [The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021](#) by Stern, et al. (2021) from The Thomas B. Fordham Institute
 - After opening the PDF, read the Executive Summary (pages 14-17) and the Get Wrong/Get Right section (24-35)

Module 11: Current Issues in Education - Reopening schools amidst COVID-19

- Read: [13,000 School Districts, 13,000 Approaches to Teaching During Covid](#) by Taylor (2021) in *The New York Times*
- Read: [Lawsuit Over Florida School Mask Mandates Now Before Judge](#) by AP (2021) in *NPR*
- Read: [Pandemic Parent Survey Finds Perverse Pattern: Students Are More Likely to Be Attending School in Person Where Covid Is Spreading More Rapidly](#) by Henderson, Peterson, and West (2020) in *Education Next*
- Read: [What's Behind Racial Differences in Attitudes Toward School Reopening \(and What to Do About Them\)](#) by Kogan (2021) from the American Enterprise Institute
- Listen: [Why School Boards are a Nexus of America's Culture Wars](#) by Scheimer and Chakrabarti (2021) in *On Point* and *NPR*

Module 12: Current Issues in Education - Critical race theory in curriculum

- Watch: [The Trials of Critical Race Theory | CBSN Originals](#)
- Read: [Why are states banning critical race theory?](#) by Ray and Gibbons (2021) in *Brookings*
- Read: [Where Critical Race Theory Comes From](#) by Buck (2022) in *National Review*

Note: There are no assigned course materials for the remaining three modules of the course. Instead, you will spend the last three weeks working on your ECS Data Project. For Module 13, you will submit a short proposal that outlines your project and then engage in a peer feedback activity. For Module 14, you will meet with me for an individual consultation on your project, which is your chance to ask any remaining questions. Finally, you will submit your project in Module 15.