

# George Mason University

## Education Policy

EDUC 872 DL1: Social Science Research and Education Policy  
POGO 750 D10: Social Science Research and Education Policy  
3 Credits, Fall 2025

Wednesdays 4:30pm – 7:10pm  
Online – Synchronous  
Zoom: [url]

### Faculty

Name: Prof. David Houston  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Office Location: Van Metre 663  
Email: [dhousto@gmu.edu](mailto:dhousto@gmu.edu)

### Note About Cross-listing

This course is cross-listed as EDUC 872 and POGO 750 to facilitate various students' course requirements. Doctoral, Masters, and Graduate Certificate students are all welcome to enroll in this class. Students in the College of Education and Human Development will typically enroll in EDUC 872. Students in the Schar School of Policy and Government will typically enroll in POGO 750. Please email the instructor if you have any questions.

### Prerequisites/Corequisites

Recommended: EDPO 870, EDRS 811, or another graduate-level quantitative research methods course that covers multivariate regression.

### University Catalog Course Description

This course focuses on in-depth analysis and study of selected education policy issues. Particular attention will be given to empirical research that attempts to identify the effects of specific education policies and programs on student outcomes.

### Course Overview

This course is a graduate seminar exploring contemporary education policy issues in the United States. Topics may include—but are not limited to—universal pre-kindergarten, technology in schools, the Common Core State Standards, college admissions, school

turnaround policies, and charter schools. We will focus on the empirical research that attempts to identify the effects of specific interventions on student outcomes. Therefore, this class will also feature brief introductions to research methods used for program and policy evaluation (randomized controlled trials, regression discontinuity designs, difference-in-differences, etc.). Prior coursework in quantitative research methods or EDPO 870 is recommended.

## Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered using a seminar format.

## Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Demonstrate a detailed and sophisticated understanding of major policy issues.
2. Understand and explain the intersections of various policy issues.
3. Recognize, understand, and critically evaluate various research designs for measuring the effectiveness of education policies and programs.
4. Demonstrate ability to describe and analyze the research bases for major policy issues.

## Professional Standards

Not applicable

## Readings (Available on Blackboard)

Abdulkadiroglu, A., Angrist, J. D., & Pathak, P. A. (2014). The elite illusion: Achievement effects at Boston and New York exam schools. *Econometrica*, 82(1), 137-196.

Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. (2015). *Mastering 'metrics: The path from cause to effect*. Princeton University Press.

Atteberry, A., Bassok, D., & Wong, V. C. (2019). The effects of full-day prekindergarten: Experimental evidence of impacts on children's school readiness. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 41(4), 537-562.

Bacher-Hicks, A., & Goodman, J. (2021). The Covid-19 pandemic is a lousy natural experiment for studying the effects of online learning. *Education Next*.

Barshay, J. (2023). Proof points: Taking stock of tutoring. *The Hechinger Report*.

Blagg, K., & Luetmer, G. (2020). Measuring and assessing student achievement in urban school districts. Urban Institute.

- Bleiberg, J. (2021). Does the Common Core have a common effect? An exploration of effects on academically vulnerable students. *AERA Open*, 7(1), 1-18.
- Carter, S. P., Greenberg, K., & Walker, M. S. (2017). The impact of computer usage on academic performance: Evidence from a randomized trial at the United States Military Academy. *Economics of Education Review*, 56, 118-132.
- Chingos, M. M. (2015). Breaking the curve: Promises and pitfalls of using NAEP data to assess the state role in student achievement. Urban Institute.
- Cohodes, S. R., & Parham, K. S. (2021). Charter schools' effectiveness, mechanisms, and competitive influence. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Economics and Finance*.
- 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.
- Dale, S. B., & Krueger, A. B. (2002). Estimating the payoff to attending a more selective college: An application of selection on observables and unobservables. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(4), 1491-1527.
- Dynarski, S., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2018). Evidence on New York City and Boston exam schools. *Education Next*.
- Figlio, D. (2017). Start high school later for better academic outcomes. *Education Next*.
- Figlio, D., Holden, K. L., & Ozek, U. (2018). Do students benefit from longer school days? Regression discontinuity evidence from Florida's additional hour of literacy instruction. *Economics of Education Review*, 67, 171-183.
- Gordon, N., & Conaway, C. (2020). *Common-sense evidence: The education leader's guide to using data and research*. Harvard Education Press.
- Grossmann, M. (2021). *How social science got better: Overcoming bias with more evidence, diversity, and self-reflection*. Oxford University Press.
- Huntington-Klein, N. (2022). *The effect: An introduction to research design and causality*. CRC Press.
- Kraft, M. A. (2020). Interpreting effect sizes of education interventions. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 241-253.
- Murnane, R. J., & Willett, J. B. (2011). *Methods matter: Improving causal inference in educational and social science research*. Oxford University Press
- Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). The impressive effects of tutoring on PreK-12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. EdWorkingPaper Series.

- Pigott, T. D., & Polanin, J. R. (2020). Methodological guidance paper: High-quality meta-analysis in a systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(1), 24-46.
- Raymond, M. E., Woodworth, J. L., Lee, W. F., & Bachofer, S. (2023). As a matter of fact: The National Charter School Study III. Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford University.
- Schueler, B. E. (2019). A third way: The politics of school district takeover and turnaround in Lawrence, Massachusetts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 116-153.
- Schueler, B. E., Goodman, J. S., & Deming, D. J. (2017). Can states take over and turn around school districts? Evidence from Lawrence, Massachusetts. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(2), 311-332.
- Unterman, R. (2017). An early look at the effects of Success Academy charter schools. MDRC.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2012). The value of experiments in education. *Education Finance and Policy*, 7(2), 107-123.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2014). Does pre-k work? It depends how picky you are. Brookings Institution.

## Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments via Blackboard by 11:59pm on the day before the class session when the assignment is due.

### *Assignments and/or Examinations*

Pre-Class Questions: Prior to class 2 and class 3, there will be two short questionnaires to assess students' prior knowledge about descriptive and causal research. These questionnaires are diagnostic rather than evaluative. They will be graded for completion only.

Article Summaries: For classes 4-9, students will write a one-page (single-spaced) summary of the reading designated with an asterisk (\*) in the syllabus. Students must answer seven prompts:

1. Research Question(s): What is/are the primary research question(s)? When possible, try to write the research question in the following form: "What is the effect of \_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_?"
2. Treatment: What is the treatment? In other words, what is the program/policy/practice that is being evaluated?
3. Outcome(s): What is/are the outcome(s)? In other words, the researchers are looking at the effect of the treatment on \_\_\_\_.

4. Treatment and Comparison Groups: Describe the group that receives the treatment and the group that does not receive the treatment.
5. Internal Validity: To what extent is this study able to recover an unbiased estimate of the causal effect of the treatment? Ideally, the only meaningful difference between the treatment and the comparison group should be that the treatment group gets the treatment (and the comparison group does not). If there are other differences between the two groups, that may bias the estimate of the causal effect of the treatment.
6. External Validity: Is the study population unique in a way that makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts?
7. Findings: In 1-3 sentences, summarize the primary findings of the study.

Quizzes: There will be three short quizzes (5-10 minutes each) that assess students' understanding of various research designs. These quizzes will focus on the basic intuition behind the research designs covered in this class. They will not focus on technical details.

Midterm course evaluation: About half-way through the semester, students must complete a brief midterm course evaluation. This is an opportunity to provide feedback to the instructor on the strengths and weaknesses of the class.

Final Paper (Critical Literature Review): Students will choose an education policy research topic to review. With the guidance of the instructor, students will identify 10+ research articles and/or books relevant to their topic. Students will then compose a 10-12 page (double-spaced) paper in APA format that:

1. Introduces the topic (context, importance, relevance, etc.)
2. Critically evaluates the existing research on that topic
  - a. For each study, you should identify the research design, note potential threats to internal validity and external validity, summarize the findings, and provide a personal assessment of the credibility of those findings
3. Summarizes the broad findings across all 10+ studies for a general audience
4. Identifies unanswered questions that future researchers should pursue
5. Draws actionable implications for policymakers and practitioners

Please see the scoring rubric at the end of the syllabus.

Final Paper Proposal: About half-way through the semester, students will submit a one-paragraph proposal for their critical literature review (see description above). This paragraph should begin with the presentation of a research question in the form of "What is the effect of \_\_\_ on \_\_\_?" If necessary, the rest of the proposal can provide more context about the treatment(s), outcome(s), location(s), time period(s), etc. that will be the focus of your critical literature review.

Final Paper Abstracts: Later in the semester, students will compile a list of at least 10 studies that they plan to review in their critical literature review (see description above). The list should include the author(s), year, title, journal name, and abstract for each study.

**Final Paper Presentation:** On the last day of class, students will present the content of their final papers. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long and organized around slides (PowerPoint or equivalent). If time allows, each student will lead a short Q&A session after their presentation. *Suggestion: In a 10-15 minute presentation, you won't have time to review all 10+ studies. Choose 2-3 studies that tell the most important parts of your overall story.*

### *Participation*

This is a participation-intensive class. Students are expected to:

1. Attend all classes and provide advance notice, if possible, if you must miss a class
2. Read all assignments prior to class and bring copies to class
3. Actively participate in discussions of the readings and treat one another with respect
4. Submit all assignments on time. Late work will be penalized by 2pts/day, unless prior arrangements are made

### *Course Grades*

- Pre-class questions: 5% (completion only)
- Article summaries: 20%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Final paper proposal: 5% (completion only)
- Final paper abstracts: 5% (completion only)
- Final paper: 20%
- Final paper presentation: 20%
- In-class participation: 15%

### *Grading Scale*

A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C	70-79
F	69 and below

### **Professional Dispositions**

See the [Policies and Procedures page on the CEHD website](#). Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

### **Core Values Commitment**

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. [Students are expected to adhere to these principles.](#)

## GMU Policies and Resources for Students

### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the [Mason Honor Code](#).
- Students must follow the university policy for [Responsible Use of Computing](#).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with [George Mason University Disability Services](#). Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor.
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to VIA should be directed to [viahelp@gmu.edu](mailto:viahelp@gmu.edu) or [CEHD's Online Assessment System](#). Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to the [ITS Knowledge Base](#).

### **Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:**

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing [titleix@gmu.edu](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu).

[For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website.](#)

## EDUC 872 / POGO 750 Final Paper Scoring Rubric

Criteria	Points Possible
Student articulates a clear education policy research topic to review. This will typically take the form of a sentence such as, "I will critically evaluate the existing research literature on the effects of X on Y."	5
Student provides a brief but thorough introduction to the topic, offering necessary contextual information and explaining why the topic is important and relevant to education policymakers.	5
Student critically evaluates the existing research on the topic. Specifically, for each study, the student should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the research design</li> <li>• Note potential threats to internal validity and external validity</li> <li>• Summarize the findings</li> <li>• Provide a personal assessment of the credibility of those findings</li> </ul>	20
Student summarizes the broad findings of the existing research for a general audience. In other words, the student should answer the following question: What, generally speaking, do we know about the effects of X on Y?	10
Student identifies unanswered questions that future researchers should pursue.	5
Student draws actionable implications for policymakers and practitioners.	5
List of references in APA format	5
Overall clear, compelling writing in APA style, free of mechanical errors	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

Exemplary paper	Adequate paper	Marginal paper	Inadequate paper	No paper
51-60	41-50	31-40	<31	0



## Academic Standards

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, coauthored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. [The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures here.](#) Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu). Phone: (703) 993-2474.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

## FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

## Title IX Resources and Required Reporting

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: [Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to [TitleIX@gmu.edu](mailto:TitleIX@gmu.edu), by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

**Student opportunity:** If you prefer to speak to someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in [Student Support & Advocacy \(SSAC\)](#), Counseling and [Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#), and/or the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).