The United States is currently debating a host of important topics about education, including national standards, charters, data collection, the financing of public schools, and the regulation of homeschools and private schools. This course aims to introduce students to the academic discipline of political science by showing what it can contribute to understanding and entering these debates.

The course starts by reviewing the controversy surrounding the Common Core. Then, we consider how political science studies the institutions, interests, and ideas involved in any policy debate.

Next, we survey how the subfields of political science—American politics, political theory, comparative politics, and international relations—provide insights on current political debates. In American politics, we study the transition from local to state and federal control of education. In political theory, we consider how John Dewey laid the foundation for progressive politics that has been challenged by economists who want to apply market principles to education. In comparative politics, we examine how scholars have studied other countries—particularly in Finland and Singapore—for insights about how the US should reform its education system. And in international relations, we investigate how scholars have used economic and national security arguments to justify transforming American schools and how Yong Zhao argues that America should not emulate Asian countries with high test scores.

In the final part of the course, students present on the current state of debates about federal involvement in education, market reforms, annual testing, data collection, charter schools, P-20 systems, and the regulation of homeschoolers.

Books

Yong Zhao, *World Class Learners* (Corwin 2012) ISBN: 9781452203980
Course Requirements

(1) January 26: Provide a 5-page political science analysis of the Every Student Succeeds Act. What were the main ideas, institutions, and interests? Cite at least three Education Week articles, including Alyson Klein, ESEA Reauthorization.

(2) February 9: Write a 8-10 page paper on how the federal government has played an increasingly large role in education policy in America in the past fifty years. Cite Jesse H. Rhodes’s An Education in Politics and three other academic books or articles. Discuss the Early and Secondary Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top. The essay should begin with a recent new story and have subheadings for the introduction, the three policies, and the conclusion in which you argue which single policy had the greatest impact. Be sure to discuss key ideas, interests, and institutions. Students may revise this paper for up to a one-letter grade improvement within one week of receiving the paper with my comments.

(3) One week before the midterm, I will distribute 6 essay questions, and on the day of the exam we will roll a die to determine 2 questions. Good answers Well-written essays should incorporate material from the lectures, readings, presentations, and your own thoughts. You may study in groups, but the exam is close-booked. The exam is 1 hour.

(4, 5) Near the end of the semester, students will participate a group presentation on the state of the debate on topics such as federal involvement in education, market reforms, data collection, charter schools, P-20 systems, and the regulation of homeschoolers. Each student is expected to write his or her own 8-10 page research paper. You can share sources and ideas with other students in your group, as well as give each other feedback on drafts, but I ask that you write the paper on your own. Good papers should present the best evidence for both sides of the issue, including articles from newspapers, education journals, political science journals, and so forth. Bibliographies due on March 4.

For presentations, I recommend that groups use Powerpoints and discuss the history and recent developments of the topic. It is also important to identify at least three scholars and their arguments on both sides of the debate. End with a few questions. Ideally, presentations spark lively conversations.

(6) The final has the same format as the midterm.

(7) Class participation. Students are expected to come to class on time prepared to discuss the readings. I employ the Socratic method in the classroom, which means that I will often call on you even if your hands are down; be ready!

Grade Distribution

ESSA paper 10
3 Transformations paper 10
Midterm 20
Research paper 20
Research presentation 10
Final exam 20
Class participation 10

Part I. Introduction

   • Wikipedia entry on Common Core State Standards Initiative

2. January 22: Three Political Science Variables: Institutions, Interests, and Ideas

Part II. American Politics

   • Jesse H. Rhodes, An Education in Politics, pp. 26-39
   • First assignment due

   • Jesse H. Rhodes, An Education in Politics, pp. 40-125

   • Jesse H. Rhodes, An Education in Politics, pp. 126-158

6. February 5: The Structure of American Policy from 2008 to the present: Race to the Top
   • Jesse H. Rhodes, An Education in Politics, pp. 1-25, 159-194
   • Race to the Top Executive Summary
   • What Did Race to the Top Accomplish? Education Next, Fall 2015

Part III. Political Theory

7. February 9: John Dewey on the Child and the Curriculum
   • John Dewey, The Child and The Curriculum
   • Second assignment due
8. February 12: John Dewey on School and Society
   • John Dewey, *The School and Society*

9. February 19: Deborah Meier on Democratic Education
   • *Will Standards Save Public Education?*

10. February 23: Friedman on Free Market Principles in Education
    • Milton Friedman, “*The Role of Government in Education*”

11. February 26: The School Choice Paradigm
    • John Chubb and Terry Moe, *America’s Public Schools: Choice is a Panacea,* The Brookings Review (Summer 1990)

12. March 1: Midterm

Part IV. Comparative Politics

    • Linda Darling-Hammond, The Flat World and Education, Ch. 1
    • *Bibliography of research paper due*

14. March 8: America’s Educational Inequality
    • Linda Darling-Hammond, The Flat World and Education, Chs. 2-5

15. March 11: How Other Countries Do It, Part I
    • Linda Darling-Hammond, The Flat World and Education, Ch. 6, 7

16. March 15: How Other Countries Do It, Part II

Part IV. International Relations

17. March 25: Economic Prosperity and PISA

18. March 29: National Security
    • U.S. Education Reform and National Security
19. April 1: Yong Zhao on Chinese Education
   • Yong Zhao, *World Class Learners*, Chapters 1, 5

20. April 5: Yong Zhao on American Education
   • Yong Zhao, *World Class Learners*, Chapters 8-10

Part V: Policy Debates

21. April 8: Should the World Bank pressure countries to reform their education systems?
   • World Bank, *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*

22. April 12: Are the Next Generation Science Standards a good idea?

23. April 15: Are the National Sexuality Education Standards a good idea?
   • *National Sexuality Education Standards*

24. April 19: Should teachers be required to join unions?
   • Alana Semuels, *Why are Unions So Worried about an Upcoming Supreme Court Case?*, *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2016.

25. April 22: No class. I'll be at the New England Political Science Association conference.

26. April 26: Should states put confidential information about students up on the cloud?
   • Joel R. Reidenberg et al., “Privacy and Cloud Computing in Public Schools,”

27. April 29: Should the federal government create an outcomes-based college accreditation system?

27. May 3: Should schools teach grit?
   • USDOE Report on “Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance”
   • Alfie Kohn, “The Downside of ‘Grit’”
Final Exam: Tuesday, May 10, 9:30 a.m.