

POLA 4350 – The Politics of Education Policy

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Although there have always been debates about curriculum and teaching methods, for over 100 years, the basic governance and structure of public elementary and secondary education in the United States remained unchanged. In the last 25 years, in response to new interest groups and new framing of educational problems, many new models of governance have emerged. In many cities and towns, schools no longer answer to an elected school board due to mayoral control or state takeover districts. In some states and cities, public funding follows the student to private schools through voucher programs. Teachers in some areas do not have to be state certified and their jobs are subject to their students' performance. Students as young as kindergarten spend an increasing amount of their school year taking standardized tests and there may be serious consequences for schools if its students do not perform highly enough.

Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans has emerged as a leader in this movement, shifting from a central bureaucracy that made most operational decisions to a system of decentralized charter schools.

These changes have been shaped by politics and have subsequently altered politics around education policy. This course studies these politics.

In particular, we consider these questions:

- Who governs America's public schools and who *should* govern America's schools?
- What groups have had power in education policy debates? Which groups have not? And what explains where power lies currently?
- What role has race played in school governance, teaching, and problem identification?
- Where does New Orleans fit into the larger national picture with regard to its education system? How did this system come to be and how well is the experiment working?

The class will also focus on education policy research and students will work in groups to conduct their own research. The course will examine the political debates over governance, accountability, and school choice and privatization (including charter schools), with a particular focus on how these issues play out in New Orleans.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the relationship of the federal, state and local governments in the creation and implementation of policy in local schools.
2. Identify and describe roles of agencies and organizations that have historically influenced educational policy.
3. Describe the debates on current education policy controversies and be able to defend arguments related to them.
4. Develop an understanding of the values and ideologies that permeate discussion of education and school reform.
5. Learn to conduct policy-relevant research in the form of policy briefs

and gain experience presenting work orally to stakeholders.

Students will demonstrate they have mastered these objectives through written and oral presentations, class discussion, and satisfactory completion of all assignments and exams.

Required Materials:

Jeffrey Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform*, Harvard Education Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1612505114.

Jesse Rhodes, *An Education in Politics: The Origins and Evolution of No Child Left Behind*, Cornell University Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0801479540.

James E. Ryan, *Five Miles Away, A World Apart: One City, Two Schools, and the Story of Educational Opportunity in America*, Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0199836857

All other readings are either on Canvas or the link is provided.

Course Requirements:

Regular Attendance and Active Class Participation: 15%

All students are expected to attend class, **be on time**, and be prepared for class by having read the assigned material for that day. Participation **is a function not only of attendance, but also the quality of contributions**. This means students must demonstrate through their questions and discussion that they have done the assigned reading and that they have thought about the issues under examination.

As this is an advanced course, I do not intend to give pop quizzes or exams.

However, I reserve the right to institute them and rearrange the assignments and/or their allocation if I sense that students are coming to class unprepared.

Response Papers: (45%): There are three mandatory response papers due during the semester (see course schedule for prompts). Each paper should be about 1000 words and is worth 15% of the total grade. Each will require citations to class materials and some outside research.

Policy Brief (40%) – Students will work in groups to conduct research and write briefs on current education issues facing New Orleans. Students will present the results of the research.

NOTE ABOUT WRITTEN WORK:

Students must turn in two copies of each part of their papers. One should be uploaded to Canvas. The other should be a hard copy. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Once I have taken attendance and started class, assignments are considered late and will be docked 5 points (half letter grade). Papers turned in after class is over are docked one letter grade **per day** (not per class).

In written assignments, grammar and style count nearly as much as the content. Proofread your work. Go to the Writing Center. **Put the word count at the top of page 1.**
Number all pages.

Grading Scale:

A	92.5 - 100
A-	89.5 - 92.4
B+	87.5 - 89.4
B	82.5 - 87.4
B-	79.5 - 82.4
C+	77.5 - 79.4
C	72.5 - 77.4
C-	69.5 - 72.4
D	59.5 - 69.4
F	Lower than 59.4

Absence Policy:

Attendance is mandatory. If you miss class due to an excused absence, I will work with you to make up work. Whether excused or unexcused, it is **your responsibility** to communicate with me and to get notes from a classmate.

Excused absences include:

- University-sponsored events (not athletic practices – games only),
- Deaths in the family,
- Religious observance,
- Jury duty,
- Illnesses with appropriate documentation.

They do not include:

- Family reunions, weddings, graduations,
- Illnesses without documentation,
- Traffic, parking difficulties,
- Court dates, getting pulled over,
- Computer crashes, lines for the printer, running out of paper/ink,
- and most of the other reasons students commonly miss class.

Any unexcused absence on an exam or quiz means you forfeit all points. There are no exceptions and do not bother to ask for one. If absences, tardiness, or under-preparation becomes a problem, your grade will suffer.

Academic Dishonesty:

Academic honesty is expected of all students at Tulane. Your responsibilities as a Tulane student include being familiar with the honor code and the plagiarism policy of the University.

Cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Board, and may result in a failing grade for the class, academic probation, or expulsion.

Ignorance is not a valid excuse.

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to the following actions:

- a) presenting another's work, ideas, expressions or research as if it were one's own;
- b) failing to acknowledge or document a source even if the action is unintended (i.e., plagiarism);
- c) fabricating or altering citations;
- d) giving or receiving, or attempting to give or receive, unauthorized assistance or information in an assignment or examination;
- e) submitting the same assignment in two or more courses without prior permission of both instructors;
- f) having another person write a paper or sit for an examination (includes online paper-mills);
- g) using tests or papers from students in prior semesters;
- h) sabotaging the work of another through destroying or preventing work from receiving fair assessment (especially in group projects)

Plagiarism includes copying & pasting material from any source (Wikipedia, paper mill, other internet site, book, journal, newspaper, magazine, etc.) without proper attribution. Plagiarism also includes non-verbatim borrowing of words or ideas through paraphrasing or summarizing

another's work(s) without proper attribution.

Special Circumstances:

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment, please feel free to contact me and/or the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility. This information is confidential. Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or to email me to schedule an appointment.

If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations, please contact the Goldman Center online or at 504.862.8433.

Students needing accommodations must provide me with a Course Accommodation Form and if applicable, an Exam Request Form ("blue sheet") to schedule an exam to be taken at the Goldman Center.

Accommodations involving exams must be requested **well in advance**. Any student receiving an exam-related accommodation should plan to take the exam at the Goldman Center.

If you have any other special circumstances, such as involvement with a university activity that requires you to miss class, let me know as soon as possible. If, during the semester, issues arise that are likely to affect your participation, attendance or performance, it is in your interest to let me know as soon as they arise. You may consult with your academic advisor or Erica Woodley in Student Affairs if issues are serious enough that you need temporary accommodations.

Classroom Rules

1. **No electronic devices may be used in class**, including lap top computers (unless you have a documented disability), cell phones, tablets, I-watches, etc.

This policy extends to audio and video recording of lectures. Students are expected to respect the intellectual property of course instructors. All course materials are copyrighted property of the instructor. As such:

- Students must obtain permission to record classroom activities.
- When permission is given, such content is restricted to personal use.
- Recordings are not to be shared with other students and should not be posted online.

Devices are not allowed to be out of backpacks or purses during quizzes and exams. **Any student who is caught with one of these devices out will have his/her test/quiz taken and will be charged with the Honor Code violation of cheating.**

2. Students must not be chronically late, absent or disruptive; otherwise, your grade will suffer.

If you have an activity (class, work, athletic practice, etc.) that meets just before this class, you are still expected to make it to class on time. **If you cannot make it to class on time, then do not take this course.**

Once class has started, students should only leave the room in cases of emergency. This means students should take care of all personal business before class begins. **Except in emergencies, students will not be allowed to leave and return to the classroom during an exam.**

Sexual Harassment & Classroom Conduct

Tulane University recognizes the inherent dignity of all individuals and promotes respect for all people. As such, Tulane is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination including sexual and gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence like sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or is experiencing these types of behaviors, know that you are not alone. Resources and support are available: you can learn more at titleix.tulane.edu. Any and all of your communications on these matters will be treated as either “Confidential” or “Private” as explained in the chart below.

Please know that if you choose to confide in me I am mandated by the university to report to the Title IX Coordinator, as Tulane and I want to be sure you are connected with all the support the university can offer. You do not need to respond to outreach from the university if you do not want.

Private
<i>Conversations are kept as confidential as possible, but information is shared with key staff members so the University can offer resources and accommodations and take action if necessary for safety reasons.</i>
Case Management & Victim Support Services (504) 314-2160 or srss@tulane.edu
Tulane University Police (TUPD) (504) 865-5911
Title IX Coordinator (504) 314-2160 or msmith76@tulane.edu

Confidential
<i>Except in extreme circumstances, involving imminent danger to one's self or others, nothing will be shared without your explicit permission</i>
Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) (504) 314-2277
The Line (24/7) (504) 264-6074
Student Health Center (504) 865-5255
Sexual Aggression Peer Hotline and Education (SAPHE) (504) 654-9543

Course Topics, Readings and Due Dates

I. PURPOSE & GOVERNANCE

Jan. 16: Introductions

Jan. 18: No Class

Jan. 23: American Values & Public Education

- ["Education as Great Equalizer' Deforming Myth, Not Reality,"](#) Paul Thomas
- ["Education Reform: Unsubstantiated Benefit Claims: Unreported Side Effects,"](#) Arthur Camins

Jan. 25: History of New Orleans Schools

- "New Orleans Public Schools History"
- Online: ["An Interactive Timeline of New Orleans Public Education, 1718-present,"](#) (Read everything associated with the interactive timeline)
- "The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960," Alan Wieder

III: NEW ORLEANS SCHOOLS – RHETORIC & REALITY

Jan. 30: Contemporary New Orleans Education System(s)

- ["The Great Charter Tryout,"](#) Andrea Gabor
- ["What Makes New Orleans Unique"](#) (watch all videos, read all sections 1-8)

Feb. 1: Has Performance Improved in NOLA Schools?

- ["The Effects of the New Orleans Post-Katrina School Reforms on Student Academic Outcomes,"](#) Douglas Harris & Matthew Larsen
- ["10 Years Later,"](#) Barbara Ferguson
- ["The Great NOLA Train Wreck,"](#) Peter C. Cook

Feb 6: Are Parents Making Good Choices?

- ["What Schools Do Families Want \(and Why\)?"](#) Doug Harris & Matthew Larsen
- "OneApp, Many Considerations," Alexios Rosario-Moore
- "Big Easy, Little Choice," Ashana Bigard

Response Paper #1:

Find the New Orleans OneApp and create an account. Fill out the application as if you are a parent of a child entering kindergarten. Move through the application and make choices about where you would want your child to attend school. Rank these preferences. DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION! Keep the following in mind: Assume you earn \$18,000 per year (average per capita income in New Orleans), so you must consider where you are likely to be living and how much time, education, and other resources you have at your disposal.

Answer the following questions in your paper: What was the ranking of your schools and why? Could you easily find the information about schools that would be relevant to your choice? How does the OneApp system work? How do parents get their child placed in their first choices? What important information was not included that you needed to be able to make a wise choice?

Feb. 8: Effects of Competition

- "Market-based Pedagogies: Assessment, Instruction, and Purpose at a 'No Excuses' Charter School," Beth Sondel
- "Every Kid Is Money," Huriya Jabbar
- ["Many Options in New Orleans Choice System,"](#) Paula Arce-Trigatti, et al.

Feb. 13: No Class (Mardi Gras)

Feb. 15: Meet in groups to work on policy brief

Feb. 20: Decentralization Effects

- ["Orleans Parish School Board to Study Long Bus Rides,"](#) Marta Jewson
- ["Equity Matters,"](#) LCCR, OPEN & Converge
- ["A 'No Excuses' New Orleans Charter School Has a Change of Heart,"](#) Mallory Falk & Eve Troeh

****First Draft of Policy Brief Due****

Feb. 22: What Has Happened to New Orleans Teachers?

- ["Significant Changes in the New Orleans Teacher Workforce,"](#) Nathan Barrett & Doug Harris
- "Mapping the Terrain: Teach for America, Charter School Reform, & Corporate Sponsorship," Kerry Kretchmar, et al.
- ["New Orleans' Uphill Battle for More Black and Homegrown Teachers,"](#) Emmanuel Felton
- ["Teachers' Perspectives on Learning and Work Environments Under the New Orleans School Reforms,"](#) Lindsay Bell Weixler, et al.

II. EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Feb. 27: Changing Governance in Education

- Henig, Chapters 1-3

March 1: New Ideas from Above

- Henig, Chapter 4-5

March 6: Segregation & Integration

- Ryan, chapters 1-2;

Response Paper #2: For most of American history, education policy has been governed locally, primarily by elected school boards. Today, power has shifted away from local school boards with regard to curriculum, funding, and governance. Consider the

tensions between general purpose vs. single purpose government and elected vs. unelected policy decision-making to develop an argument about whether this shift is primarily a good or bad thing for the public/citizenry as well as for students/parents. Where does New Orleans education system fit into the broader, national movement described in Henig's book? How is the city's system an outgrowth of its history?

Mar. 8: Modern-day Segregation

- ["The City that Believed in Desegregation,"](#) Alana Semuels
- ["Has Gentrification Begun in New Orleans Public Schools?"](#) Danielle Dreilinger
- ["School Segregation Didn't Go Away. It Just Evolved,"](#) Alvin Chang
- ["Did the New Orleans School Reforms Increase Segregation,"](#) Lindsay Bell Weixler, et al.

Mar 13: U.S. Education Policy prior to 1980

- Rhodes, Intro & Chapter 1
- Ryan, chapter 3
- "Can Charlotte-Mecklenburg Desegregate Its Schools...Again?" Rachel Cohen

Mar 15: *A Nation at Risk* and its effects

- Rhodes, Chapters 2-4
- ["Why Americans Think So Poorly of the Country's Schools,"](#) Jack Schneider

Mar 20: NCLB & RTTT

- Rhodes, chapter 5-6
- Ryan, chapter 7

Mar 22: The Rise of Public School Choice

- Ryan, chapters 5-6
- ["A Sea of Charter Schools in Detroit Leaves Students Adrift,"](#) Kate Zernike

- [“For These Families, the School Choice Fight Isn’t Just Political – It’s Personal.”](#) Andy Kopsa

Mar. 27-29: No Class (Spring Break)

IV: ED REFORM, POLITICS & DEMOCRACY

Apr 3: Democratic Institutions & Practice

- “Comparing Nonprofit Charter and Traditional Public School Board Member Perceptions” Michael R. Ford & Douglas M. Ihrke
- “Re-forming the Post-Political City?” Alice Huff
- “Private Governance of Public Schools,” J. Celeste Lay & Anna Bauman

Apr. 5: Outside Groups & Ed Reform: Foundations & Contractors

- “The Expanding Role of Philanthropy in Education Politics,” Sarah Reckhow & Jeffrey Snyder
- “Private Sector Contracting and Democratic Accountability,” Catherine DiMartino & Janelle Scott
- “‘Outsiders with Deep Pockets’: The Nationalization of Local School Board Elections” Reckhow, et al.

****Second Draft Policy Brief Due****

Apr. 10: Teachers Unions & Ed Reform

- “Teachers Unions & American Education Reform: The Politics of Blocking;” Terry Moe
- [“Teachers Unions: Scourge of the Nation?”](#) Bruce Baker

Apr. 12: Shifting Political Power in Education Policy

- “‘Ideas about Interests’: Explaining the Changing Partisan Politics of Education,” Christina Wolbrecht & Matthew Hartney

Response Paper #3: Writer Scott Woods writes, “The problem is that white people see racism as conscious hate, when racism is bigger than that. Racism is a complex system of social and political levers and pulleys set up generations ago to continue working on the behalf of whites at other people’s expense, whether whites know/like it or not.” [Examine the history of New Orleans public education through this lens of racism.](#) Discuss the evidence of structural or systemic racism along the lines of this “complex system” described by Woods. Some argue the post-Katrina reforms are an attempt to redress racism of the past, while others contend the reforms merely build upon a racist foundation that was laid long ago. What do you think: how does the history in New Orleans given birth to the education reforms that took place after Hurricane Katrina?

Apr. 17: The Politics of Accountability & Standards

- “Educational Accountability and Policy Feedback,” Lorraine McDonnell
- “The Evolving Politics of the Common Core,” Ashley Jochim & Lesley Lavery

Apr. 19: Too Much Testing? Stakes Too High? Or, Appropriate Motivator?

- “High-Stakes Testing, Uncertainty, and Student Learning,” Audrey Amrein & David Berliner
- “Continuing Tensions in Standardized Testing,” Thomas Haladyna, et al.

Apr. 24: The Role of Poverty

- [“Poverty Cannot Explain America’s Mediocre Test Scores,”](#) Michael Petrilli & Brandon Wright
- [“Effects of Inequality & Poverty vs. Teachers and Schooling on America’s Youth,”](#) David Berliner

Apr. 26: Class Presentations

****Final Drafts of Policy Brief Due****

May 1: The Use of Policy Research

- "How Policymakers Define 'Evidence,'" Huriya Jabbar, et al.
- "Intermediary Organizations in Charter School Policy Coalitions: Evidence from New Orleans," Elizabeth DeBray, et al.

Policy Brief Topics

1. One of the most contentious issues in local education policy is the OneApp system. A centralized enrollment system, it requires parents to rank their preferences for schools. A computer algorithm then matches each child to a school based on the available seats, parents' preferences, and other characteristics. This group will write a policy brief that explains the OneApp system – its history, mechanics, and controversies – and makes recommendations about what the OPSB should do to improve the enrollment system or to improve the information around it. The brief should address public skepticism about OneApp and what can be done to address it.

2. There have been several scandals involving local charter schools – financial impropriety, cheating on tests, fudging numbers of special needs students, and more. This group will chronicle the history of these scandals. It will develop categories and create a timeline, as well as discuss the outcomes of the scandals. Were individuals fired or removed from boards? Were schools closed or transferred to other operators? The timeline will allow the group to discuss trends: are there fewer scandals over time, or more? Are there patterns, such as, are certain types of scandals more common at some points in time? The group will also make recommendations to the OPSB about how to prevent these crises. What oversight is currently missing that should be put in place?

3. This group will examine the media's attention on charter schools in New Orleans. Using my data as a starting point, the group will chronicle the history of how the transformation in this city was covered by local media, and how that coverage has or has not changed over time. Has coverage generally been positive or negative? What is the focus? Has it become more critical, and on what types of issues? What are the differences between different media outlets? What voices are most prominent and which voices are missing? Why do we care?

4. Some residents believe that the motivating force for education reform in the city was money – a belief that certain individuals pushed these reforms so they could make money. This group will chronicle the “edu-preneur” industry and the educational nonprofits in New Orleans. What do these organizations do? Who runs them? Who sits on their boards? Who do they represent? Are there noticeable conflicts of interest? What are their goals, and what are their achievements? How are they funded? Do you find support that certain groups or individuals have profited from the reforms? And, is this necessarily problematic? Explain, using examples.

5. This group will examine the gender dynamics of school choice in New Orleans. They will design a survey of parents about their school choices and examine whether there are gender differences. We will put the survey in the field and examine the results. Are women more likely to make the school choice? Do they do this in consultation with a partner or spouse? Are there differences in the sources used to make the decision, feelings of efficacy about the system, confidence in one's choices, and blame attribution? What are the implications of the findings? Is “parental choice” really code for “mother's choice”?

In addition to the paper/policy brief, each group will create some content around their results that is easily accessible for the general public. It might be a video, a cartoon, or some other creative content that explains the results clearly and simply.