

COURSE SYLLABUS
Dartmouth College, Spring 2007 Term
PBPL 81.8
Public Education Policy
Local Policies, Local Communities, Local Schools: All Politics is Local

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Office Hours:
Tuesdays/Thursdays 10:00am -12:00pm,
Wednesdays 9:00am -11:00pm,
and by appointment

Class Hours: 2A: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 2:00pm-3:50pm
X-Period: Wednesdays, 4:15-5:05 pm
Classroom: Rockefeller 208
Course Webpage: blackboard.dartmouth.edu

1. Course Objectives:

- To propose that local policy formulation is vital in our society and how it functions with state and national policy development.
- To examine the thesis that our schools have failed, and if so, what policies are necessary to improve the results of public education.
- To apply the class readings, research and discussions to an analysis of public policy issues in a local community school district.
- To introduce students to the reality and opportunities for serious civic contributions at the local community level.
- To learn the complexity, difficulty, and challenges that persist in public policy work.

2. Course Description:

This course seeks to introduce students to the practices and principles that guide local communities. It will challenge existing strategies and develop a fuller understanding of how differences in local decisions influence policy options. The seminar will explore the role of citizen activism in decision-making. It will examine state and federal roles in educational policy and familiarize students with key policy options at the local levels.

There are four sections in the construction of the course. Know that some sections will overlap.

Section One concentrates on a local issue: Greensboro Road, Reservoir Road and High School construction. There will be three teams of students and each team will be assigned one of the local issues. A detailed report from each team will represent the mid-term exam. **Section Two** will also engage three teams. Each team will be assigned to a school: elementary, middle or secondary. Each team will research and analyze a pertinent policy issue and submit a detailed report as the final paper. **Section Three** will require each team to make an oral presentation of their report and its conclusions before a panel of concerned citizens. The course examines educational policies avoiding the top down theory that national and state actions dominate local control. **Section Four** requires actual time and engagement in the schools including attendance at school board meetings; interviews with school officials; and conversations with teachers, parents and students focusing on school policies.

3. Briefs:

Students will be expected to write a succinct 2-3 page paper on an assigned topic that requires research and analysis. (Details as to format will be distributed in class.) The concise accounts will be assigned on Thursdays and turned in no later than 2:00 P.M. on the next Wednesday's class so they can be returned during Thursday's class. Individual topics will be assigned to students. Copies of each paper will be shared with the class. Data from the briefs will be used in the mid-term and final reports.

4. Mid-Term:

Each team will submit a final report on their respective major topic on April 24. Each team is urged to meet and discuss their progress as the term moves forward. (Specific details of the assignment will be distributed in class.) DUE: by 2:00 p.m., April 24

5. Field Work:

In order to better understand the community, students will conduct numerous interviews with community leaders, officials, volunteers and activists. In addition, it will be necessary to attend community meetings, hearings, forums and discussions of issues important to the community. Throughout the term, a record will be kept of the individual observations and perceptions as well as the interview information. (Details regarding the format will be distributed in class.)

6. Final Paper:

Utilizing the data obtained in the earlier weeks of the term, the paper will require a cooperative and coordinated research effort by each team to identify significant educational policy issues. Employing informed opinions and insights gained by extended school visits, each team will focus on policy options important to a local community committed to the delivery of a quality education for each student. (Specific details of the final report will be distributed in class.) DUE: May 30

7. Oral Presentation:

At the end of the term, each team will prepare an oral report on their study. Each member of the team is to play an active role in the presentation which will be made before a panel. At the conclusion of the report (approx. 30 minutes) the panel members will ask questions, offer comments and/or engage in discussion.

DUE May 29 and 30

8. X-Hour:

Wednesdays will be used for guest speakers and/or special topics. Group/team meetings will focus on queries regarding progress of the final paper.

9. Grading:

The approximate breakdown is as follows:

Briefs – 10%

Mid-Term Paper – 30%

Oral Presentation/Class Participation – 20%

Final Team Paper – 40%

10. News:

In order to be fully informed, it will be essential that students read the daily Valley News, become familiar with Channel 6, as well as local radio and television stations.

11. In-Class Distributions (I.C.D.)

During the term there will be a fair number of in-class distributions such as excerpts, clippings, notes or similar reading material pertinent to the topic under discussion. References to I.C.D. in the syllabus assure distribution during a class session.

COURSE SYLLABUS

TEXTS

Friday Night Lights,

H.G. Bissinger, Harper Perennial Edition, 1991 (PB)

Cities, Counties, Kids and Families:

The Essential Role of Local Government

Sidney L. Gardner, University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 2005 (PB)

Many Children Left Behind (How the No Child Left Behind Act is damaging our children and our schools.) Edited by Deborah Meier and George Wood, Beacon Press, Boston 2004 (PB)

Ten Thousand Democracies:

Politics and Public Opinion in America's School Districts

Michael B. Berman and Eric Plutzer, Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., 2005 (PB)

Tinkering Toward Reform:

A Century of Public School Reform

David Tyack and Larry Cuban, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995 (PB)

What Does It Mean To Be Well Educated? (And more essays on standards, grading and other follies) by Alfie Kohn, Beacon Press, Boston 2004 (PB)

WEEK ONE

March 27 - We the People
History of Education in America
Policy at the Local Levels: What is a policy?
Assignment #1 – Survey Due Noon. March 28
Assignment #2 – Policy Choice Due 2:00 p.m. March 29
Reading Assignment - Text: *Friday Night Lights*

March 28 Session for those with questions regarding syllabus.

March 29 Discussion of *Friday Night Lights*
Note: This book is not the movie or the TV sitcom
Discussion of Teams – Team members and assigned task
Explanation of Mid-Term Paper
Assignment: Brief DUE: 2:00 p.m. April 4

- May 9 Reading materials to be picked up at the office.
- May 10 Review of attendance at events: observations and questions
Readings: “Teachers Recruited to Find Solutions to Vexing Policy Issues”,
Education Week, July 12, 2006
“How to Define an ‘Adequate Education’?” by Wayne Gerson,
Valley News, September 16, 2006
“The Not-So Public Part of the Public Schools”, by
Samuel Freedman, NYT, September 12, 2006

WEEK EIGHT

- May 15 Discussion of Field Work: Review of Team Summaries
Readings: “Mayoral Takeovers in Education”, Harvard Educational Review,
Vol. 76, No. 2, 2006, Cambridge, MA
“It Takes More Than Schools to Close Achievement Gap” On
Education by Diane J. Schemo, NYT, Aug. 9, 2006

May 15 GUEST: DR WAYNE GERSEN on SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE

- May 16 Field Visits – Teacher/school staff: observations
- May 17 Discussion: Critical Policy Issues in the Local Schools
Discussion: Town Budget and Competition for Limited Resources
Readings: “Fuzzy Policy, Not Fuzzy Math Is The Problem” by Jere Confry,
Commentary, Education Week, Nov. 1, 2006
“Educators Question AVP” by Carolyn Lorie, Valley News,
September 17, 2006
“The Wounds of Schooling” by Kirsten Olsen, Commentary,
Education Week, November 8, 2006

WEEK NINE

- May 22 Discussion: School Policy: written and unwritten
No Child Left Behind: politics of bi-partisan legislation
Standards, Testing and Accountability
Teacher Education: Higher Education Cash Cows
190 vs. 220: Too Much Stress vs. Too Few Days
Vocation vs. Profession: Respect or Lack of Same
Funding and the Rising Costs of Education
- May 23 Oral Presentation: Explanation and Format
- May 24 Summary: Who really makes local policy?
What are the real power lines between the state and town?
How significant is the federal role in terms of local schools?
Readings: “Even in Iraq, All Politics is Local” by Rory Stewart, NYT, Op-Ed,
July 13, 2006
“Powerless Pipsqueaks and the Myth of Local Con” excerpt from the
Source, Governing, June 1999

WEEK TEN

May 29 Oral presentation

May 30 Oral presentation

May 31 Submission of Final Report from each Team Due 5:00 p.m. Deadline

Note: In the quest for the most current news and literature, some changes in the listing of readings are likely to occur. New material will be substituted.