

**George Mason University
College of Education and Human
Development PhD Program**

EDUC 856 Section 002 – Critical Praxis in Education
3 Credits, Spring 2024
Thursdays 4:30-7:10pm
Horizon Hall Room 3001, Fairfax Campus

Faculty

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Prerequisites

EDUC 855

University Catalog Course Description

Applies critical perspectives in education research, in the analysis of laws, policies, and practices in education and related fields, and in strategic action planning to advance social justice. Engages students in critical praxis for systems change in education and interlinked institutions.

Course Overview

This course critically studies education and education-linked policies and practices that differentially affect individuals, families, and groups. Drawing upon critical perspectives in education, students will examine the ways in which social inequalities are structurally-reproduced through policies, laws, rules, and regulations in education and interlinked systems (e.g., social welfare, health care, criminal justice). Students will engage in policy analysis and the translation of research to action. Students will study social movements for justice, identify different forms of engagement, including education, research, advocacy, and activism, and plan action steps to catalyze systems change in education and interlinked systems at local to international levels.

Learner Outcomes

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

1. Engage with the work of foundational and modern critical theorists to develop their own critical praxis;
2. Apply critical perspectives in their education research, policy analysis, and strategic action-planning;

3. Identify the ways in which educational systems are interlinked with other systems that reproduce structural inequalities and individual, family, and group (dis)advantage;
4. Examine their positionality, allyship, and accompliceship to position themselves as informed, reflexive, and strategic critical actors;
5. Using a critical lens, conduct policy analysis to inform strategic action planning;
6. Differentiate strategic ways of engaging in systems transformation, from education to scholar advocacy and scholar activism;
7. Develop effective writing and presentation skills for translating research to policy and practice to advance systems change and social justice within education and related fields.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered using a seminar format, including such activities as: 1. Dialogue during class time and beyond class time, 2. Close and critical readings of course texts, 3. Class facilitation, 4. Independent reading and study in a research area of interest.

Professional Standards

Not applicable.

Required Text

Collins, P.H. (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press.

Suggested Reading List (you can order these online if you so choose; I can provide a few chapters of each on pdf upon request. Please share your favorites too!):

Chrisinger, D. (2022). *Public policy writing that matters*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversation on education and social change*. Temple.

Kelly, K. (2023). *Fight like hell: The untold history of American labor*. One Signal Publishers.

Lipsky, M. *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

McAlevy, J. (2014). *Raising expectations (and raising hell): My decade fighting for the labor movement*. Verso.

McGhee, H. (2021). *The sum of us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together*. One World.

Paik, L. (2021). *Trapped in a maze: How social control institutions drive family poverty and inequality*. University of California Press.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton.

Other Required Readings (Available in Blackboard)

Articles or chapters will be additional required readings. All of these readings can be found on Blackboard. In addition to these readings, I may assign videos, podcasts, or other multimedia. These are required as well.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy). As an 800-level course, this class requires a significant time commitment. It is reading intensive.

In all of your assignments, I am looking for evidence of: (1) understanding and the application of the concepts and processes learned and discussed in class and online; (2) critical reflection and responses to issues and concepts; (3) clarity of expression; (4) explicit connections among ideas; and (5) complete work with no grammatical or spelling errors. All assignments are due on the date listed in the Schedule table below. Incompletes and Withdrawals are strongly discouraged and are only given when the conditions of the university are met and after a conference with the instructor at the initiation of the student.

Assignments	Points
1. Participation	20
2. Reflexive Memos (4 @ 5points each)	20
3. Critical Research and Policy Analysis Brief	25
4. Strategic Action Plan	25
5. Final Presentation	10
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Total	100

Participation (20 points)

Your participation grade (20%) will be based on your familiarity with the assigned readings, videos, interviews, and other resources, and with your communication of that familiarity in class discussions. You do not need to display brilliance, but you do need to engage with the authors, speakers, instructors, and your classmates and try to make sense of the ideas brought out. At the beginning of the course, you will be assigned to a small group (2-3 people) to participate in the discussions and practices, allowing for mini learning communities to grow within the class, and for richer and more meaningful discussions to unfold. I will also ask students to co-lead discussions weekly. We will discuss this more in class.

Reflexive Memos (20 points)

Students will engage in memoing throughout the semester to develop a critical reflexive practice, considering their own positionality and experiences, course readings and discussions, and notions of allyship and accompliceship while working toward systems change. Students are encouraged to dialogue with scholar advocates and activists and reflect on what they are learning about themselves and systems change. In total, students will write 4 memos, approximately 2 pages in length, single-spaced (5 points each). Be sure to cite your sources following APA format.

Critical Research and Policy Analysis Brief (25 points)

Select a policy or social problem in the field of education (or related) in need of policy attention (could be an education-related policy or a policy interlinked with educational system, e.g., policy related to juvenile justice, health care, or social welfare). Drawing upon a critical perspective, review the literature relevant to your topic to identify the historical, social, cultural, and political issues which might impact your policy topic (e.g., political movements, social trends, philosophies). Provide a description of the education or related policy and activities associated with it and consider the impact of the policy on individuals, families, and groups (e.g., consider the intended and unintended consequences of your chosen policy for student well-being, family engagement, community well-being, etc.). Use the evaluation tools and policy impact questions provided in class as a framework for conducting this analysis and producing a policy brief.

Your paper should be typed, double-spaced (using 12-point font) and up to a maximum of **10 pages** in length (not including title page, abstract, and references). **You are required to use a minimum of 15 professional sources** (e.g., refereed journal articles, chapters from edited volumes). **You can also use materials from think tanks, government agencies, NGOs, etc.** It is critical that you cite all sources (including government, think tank, and other related websites). All citations should be referenced using APA format (7th edition).

Below is an example format that your research paper might follow; however, recognize that each topic will most likely require additional or alternative subject headers, etc.

- Page 1: Title, abstract, 3-5 key points (bulleted)
- Headers (beginning on page 2):
 - Introduction/Policy/Problem Overview: Brief description of the policy under investigation
 - Critical Perspectives
 - Brief Review of Literature
 - Analysis: Policy Impact (intended and unintended consequences)
 - Policy Recommendations
- References in APA format (May be single spaced if needed)

****At least one peer and I will read a draft of your policy brief and provide feedback prior to final paper submission. Your final grade for this assignment includes your engagement in peer review.****

Strategic Action Plan and Acton Taking (25 points)

Students will develop a strategic action plan to carry out a social action related to their policy research and analysis. The action must be approved by the instructor and can be linked to an on-going activity or be a new endeavor. Students can engage in this plan together—even as a class—forming a mini-collective. The action can be educational, advocacy-related, or a form of scholar activism. The strategic action plan should include goals, organizational considerations, an analysis of constituents, allies and opponents, targets, and possible tactics. We will discuss this more deeply in class. Students will share out and debrief about their action taking in class and utilize memos to demonstrate reflexive praxis.

Final Presentation (10 points)

At the end of the semester, students will prepare a final presentation that includes their critical reflections of their policy analyses and strategic action planning and action taking. We will discuss this final assignment in greater detail in class.

Grading

The following is the grading scale. As noted above, your final grade is based on the number of points you earn throughout the semester.

Grading Scale

A	93% - 100%
A-	90% - 92.9%
B+	87% - 89.9%
B	83% - 86.9%
B-	80% - 82.9%
C+	77% - 79.9%
C	74% - 76.9%

Professional Dispositions

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>

Class Schedule*(Optional Readings in Italics)*

DATE	TOPIC/FOCUS	READINGS TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Jan 18	<p>Introduction to the course and each other</p> <p>In Class: Discussion of Projects, Policies, and Strategic Action Plans</p>	<p>Syllabus</p> <p>Collins Introduction pp. 1-18</p> <p>Brook, C., Pedler, M., Abbott, C., & Burgoyne, J. (2016). On stopping doing those things that are not getting us to where we want to be: Unlearning, wicked problems and critical action learning. <i>Human Relations</i>, 69(2), 369-389. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715586243</p>	Read Syllabus; Dive into Collins; Identify Issues/Policies for Analysis, Action
Jan 25	Framing the Issues: Intersectionality and Critical Social Theory	<p>Collins Part I, pp. 19-86</p> <p>Smith, A. (2006). Heteropatriarchy and the three pillars of white supremacy: Rethinking women of color organizing. In <i>Incite! Women of Color Against Violence</i> (Eds.). Duke.</p>	Memo 1 due: Initial thinking about intersectionality, positionality, policies, planning for the course
Feb 1	Intersectionality, Critical Social Theory, and Praxis; Critical Action	<p>Collins Part II-III, pp. 87-221</p> <p>Rapa, L. J., Diemer, M. A., & Bañales, J. (2018). Critical action as a pathway to social mobility among marginalized youth. <i>Developmental Psychology</i>, 54(1), 127–137.</p>	Memo 2 due: Intersectional thinking, Critical action

		https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000414	
Feb 8	<p>Intersectionality and Public Policy (See Examples); Structural Analysis</p> <p>In Class: Conducting a Policy Analysis; How to write a policy brief</p>	<p>Search up research and policy briefs on-line related to your areas of interest. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/trauma • https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/policymakers-can-redesign-early-childhood-and-education-system-root-out-structural-racism • https://www.srcd.org/research/gender-affirming-policies-support-transgender-and-gender-diverse-youths-health • (Optional examples: https://www.ncfr.org/policy/research-and-policy-briefs) 	Policy Topic Due
Feb 15	<p>How Power Matters: Intellectual Resistance and Resistant Knowledge Projects; Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership</p> <p>Linking Policy Analysis to Strategic Action Planning</p>	<p>Young (1990): Excerpts Leticq et al. (2022)</p> <p>EXPLORE: https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf</p>	DRAFT Policy Outline Due
Feb 22	<p>Education and Interlinked Systems: The reproduction of structural inequalities</p>	<p>EXPLORE: https://novahealthfdn.org/resources/deeply-rooted-report</p>	DRAFT Policy Brief due for peer review

		<p><i>Choose one:</i> Bailey et al. (2021) Ocen (2012) Letiecq (2023)</p> <p><i>Also of interest:</i> Desmond (2016): Evicted; Paik (2021): Trapped in a Maze Roberts (2020): Torn Apart</p>	
Feb 29	Education and Interlinked Systems: Family Privilege and Disadvantage	<p>Collins (1989) Letiecq (2019; 2024)</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Brown (2021): The Whiteness of Wealth</p>	Peer Review Due to Peer
Mar 7	Spring Break		
Mar 14	From Analysis to Action: Strategic Action Planning	<p>Fields et al. (2022) McAlevy (2012): Excerpts</p> <p>Midwest Academy Strategy Chart</p>	Final Research Policy Brief due
Mar 21	From Analysis to Action: Positionality, Inter-Relational Reflexivity, and Risk Assessment; Scholar Advocacy and Scholar Activism	<p>Gilbert, A., & Sliep, Y. (2009). Reflexivity in the Practice of Social Action: From Self-to Inter-Relational Reflexivity. South African Journal of Psychology, 39(4), 468–479. https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630903900408</p> <p>Letiecq & Anderson. (2017), From Education to Advocacy and Activism: Alternative Approaches for Translating Family Science to Policy. Fam Relat, 66: 729-740.</p>	<p>In Class: Strategic Action Planning (Draft)</p> <p>Memo 3 Due: Contemplate moving from analysis to action – organizing, advocacy, activism</p>

		https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12274	
Mar 28	From Analysis to Action: Strategic Planning	No readings assigned (Work on any remaining data gathering for Strategic Planning)	Strategic Action Planning
Apr 4	From Analysis to Action: Strategic Planning to Taking Action	No readings assigned	Strategic Action Plan Due: Take Action
Apr 11	No Class: AERA and/or Action Taking		Strategic Action Plan: Take Action
Apr 18	From Analysis to Action: Challenges, Barriers, Resistance, Sustainability	No readings assigned	In Class: Peer-debriefing Memo 4 due: Final Reflections
Apr 25	Final Presentations Course Wrap-Up Course Evaluations	No readings assigned	
May 2	No Class Meeting		Submit any remaining work for final grading

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

Anti-Racism Statement

I affirm that in this class, faculty and students will work together to cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just learning environment for all participants, regardless of racial/ethnic background. We will actively seek ways to

- Make constant, conscious decisions to interrupt racism and cultivate equity, inclusion, and justice for people of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, and in particular those from Black communities, indigenous communities, and other communities of color, who are most likely to bear the direct and indirect costs of systems of white supremacy;
- Interrogate histories of White supremacy and White-dominant culture, and to examine the ways in which these histories have impacted our individual beliefs, our interpersonal relationships, our institutional and structural policies and processes, and our entire society;
- Make a commitment to being responsible for our own relationships to, and actions within, systems of White supremacy; and
- Cultivate a practice of self-awareness and self-reflection that allows us to critically evaluate our own role in upholding White supremacy and identify the ways we can interrupt cycles of racism at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The College of Education and Human Development, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic/class status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and ability status, among other characteristics.

- We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.
- We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, and become aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

Names and Pronouns Use Statement

If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and how best to address you in class and via email. I use she/her/hers for myself. Additionally, I invite students to approach me before or after class and during office hours. I recognize that a student's name and pronoun(s) can change during a semester if they are in transition. I encourage students to use the

tools Mason provides to change your name and pronouns on Mason records if you so choose:
<https://registrar.gmu.edu/updatingchosen-name-pronouns/>

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: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Below are listed my/Mason's usual course policies. However, this is not a "usual" time. I fully understand that each of us may face new obstacles, or old obstacles in novel ways, during this time. Please communicate with me if such things are getting in your way in this class. **My goal is to facilitate your growth and success in this strange and uncertain time**; I can only do that if you tell me what is happening.

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/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 (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>). **Covid-19 Note:** Students who have a Covid-related disability should contact the Disability Services office; DS will contact faculty using standard protocols about any students who require accommodations. Faculty are not expected to create accommodations for students outside of the Disability Services official guidelines.
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, sadness during the semester, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services Offices (703-993-2380) provides a range of resources to assist and support you. Students can call (703-993-2831) or walk-in during open hours to schedule an appointment to talk with a healthcare provider. If you or someone you know experiences a mental health crisis or emergency, seek help immediately. Call 911 for local emergency services, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (741-741) anytime. I am also available to speak with you about stresses related to your work in my course.
- I believe we learn best when we can show up as whole and healthy people. To learn effectively we need to have basic security: a roof over our head, a safe place to sleep, a stable place to live, and enough food to eat. If you are struggling to meet any of these basic needs please talk to me, visit our campus food pantry (<https://ssac.gmu.edu/patriot-pantry/>), or reach out to other Mason resources <https://learningservices.gmu.edu/campus-resources/>. Remember, asking for assistance and advocating for yourself is an important part of your collegiate experience. I am here to help, and **YOU** are not alone.
- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

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.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/> .