Economics of Educational Policy  
(ECON 8310, Spring 2014)

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Catalogue Description:

This course explores policy issues associated with K-12 education, focusing on issues raised since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The course first provides an economic conceptual framework in which to evaluate education policy alternatives and then examines education reform proposals that have been advanced over the last two decades.

Course Objectives:

A variety of education policy issues—from school accountability, teacher evaluation, charter schools, early childhood education and achievement gaps—have been on the front pages of newspapers and at the forefront of political debates during the last few years. Often these discussions are superficial and fail to engage the conceptual foundations of and evidentiary base for these issues. We will explore the goals of policies and the extent to which the intention, implementation and ultimate effects of the policies align. In addition to providing you with an understanding of the results of recent research that bear on important educational policy issues the course will also help you to critically evaluate educational policy research and learn how to communicate key policy findings in the form of policy briefs.

Prerequisites:

Intermediate-level Microeconomics and Basic Statistics are highly recommended

Method of Instruction:

ECON 8310 is taught through a combination of lecture, guided discussion and student presentations.

Required Texts:

There is no required text. Rather, there will be a series of readings which are specified in the course outline, below.

Class Times:

Monday and Wednesday 3:00-4:15 ALC 229
Office Hours:
Monday and Wednesday, 1:30-2:30 and 4:30-5:00. These hours are reserved for students, so do not hesitate to drop in without an appointment and spend as much of this time as you need getting help. If you would like to meet with me at other times of the day, please let me know ahead of time.

E-mail:
Feel free to send e-mail to me at tsass@gsu.edu; you will generally get a prompt reply. Also, please check the course web site and your email on a regular basis for announcements.

Web Page:
The course web page is available on the Desire2Learn system. You can access Desire2Learn by going to the University’s home page, http://www.gsu.edu/ cursor over the “Students” tab at the top and clicking on the Desire2Learn link on the right-hand-side of the menu.

Course Requirements:
There will be a midterm (25%), a written policy brief and classroom presentation (25% in total) and a comprehensive final exam (40%). In addition, 10% of your grade will be based on class participation, which includes completing assigned readings prior to class and participating in classroom discussions. There is no extra credit work available.

Exams:
The midterm and final exam will consist of both short-answer (3-4 sentences) and longer multi-part “essay” questions. Your final exam is comprehensive, covering all of the material presented in class. The dates and times for the exams are given below.

Make-Ups:
If you anticipate a conflict with the midterm, let me know in advance. You can contact me via email anytime or during business hours by phone (if no one answers initially, stay on the line and leave a message). In most cases, it is possible to arrange an alternate time for an individual student to take a midterm. If you miss the midterm, let me know as soon as possible. If you have a valid reason for missing the exam (e.g. illness) and let me know within 24 hours of the scheduled exam, in most cases it is possible to take the exam at a later time. If you miss the midterm and do not contact me within 24 hours, you may be allowed to count your final exam extra. The "double counting" of the final exam will only be allowed under extraordinary circumstances, however.

Policy Briefs:
No matter what professional path you follow, you will have opportunities to write brief memos. Doing this well is critical to making a difference (and to professional advancement). For that reason, the required course work includes writing and presenting a policy brief. You may either work
individually or in a two-person team of your choosing. For the written brief, please type it and submit it to me in both hardcopy and electronic formats. The due dates for initial topic selection and team formation as well as for the final version of the written brief are listed on the course outline below. When grading this assignment I will pay attention to:

- The quality of the economic reasoning
- The use of data to support your argument
- The quality of the writing, including the extent to which the memo or speech is appropriate for the audience to which it is intended.

There is an on-line tutorial developed for the education policy course at Harvard that you may find useful: [http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/articulate/a205/player.html](http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/articulate/a205/player.html)

In addition, the journal *Education Finance and Policy* recently devoted an entire issue to policy briefs which should provide many useful examples: [http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/edfp/8/3](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/edfp/8/3)

In particular I highly recommend you read the article by Carrie Conaway, “The Problem with Briefs, In Brief.” You can also find many good examples of policy briefs at the Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) web site: [http://www.caldercenter.org/publications.cfm#Policybriefs](http://www.caldercenter.org/publications.cfm#Policybriefs)

Classroom presentation of the policy briefs will occur during the last week of classes, as noted on the course outline below. Students will be expected to have a professional looking presentation using Powerpoint or a similar electronic format.

**Make-Ups:**

If you anticipate a conflict with the midterm, *let me know in advance*. In most cases, it is possible to arrange an alternate time for an individual student to take a midterm. If you miss the midterm, let me know as soon as possible. If you have a valid reason for missing the exam (e.g. illness) and *let me know within 24 hours* of the scheduled exam, in most cases it is possible to take the exam at a later time. If you miss the midterm and do not contact me within 24 hours, you may be allowed to count your final exam extra. The "double counting" of the final exam will only be allowed under extraordinary circumstances, however.

**Policy on Academic Honesty:**

All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to GSU’s Policy on Academic Honesty as published in *On Campus: The Undergraduate Co-Curricular Affairs Handbook*. Put simply, cheating will not be tolerated. If an instance of academic dishonesty takes place, all students involved will receive a zero for that exam or assignment.

**Attendance and Conduct:**

It is essential that you come to class prepared to actively participate in classroom discussions. This includes having read the required assignments ahead of time; 10% of your grade will be based on class participation. When in class, each student is expected to respect the rights of fellow students to learn in the best possible environment. This includes avoiding any personal attacks or dis-respective behavior toward fellow students. Behavior that restricts the ability of others to learn (e.g. talking during lecture or when another student asks a question) will not be tolerated and violators may be asked to leave the classroom. *In respect for other students, turn off all cell phones and pagers before coming to class.*
**Students With Disabilities:**

Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which an accommodation is sought.

**Class Assessment:**

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

**Disclaimer:**

The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.
Course Outline (*=required reading)

January 13 - A Brief History of U.S. Education Policy and Performance


January 15 - Determining What Works in Education


January 20 - No Class (MLK Holiday)

January 22 - A Framework for Analysis: The Education Production Function


January 27 - The Budget Constraint: Does Money Matter?

*Kreisman, Daniel. “The Effect of Increased Funding on Budget Allocations and Student Outcomes: RD and IV Estimates from Texas’s Small District Adjustment,” unpublished manuscript.

January 29 - Non-School Inputs: Family Resources


February 3 - Non-School Inputs: Student Motivation


February 5 - Schools: Choice (Part I)


February 10 - Schools: Choice (Part II)


February 12 - Schools: Accountability


February 17 - Classrooms: Class Size


February 19 - Classrooms: Peer Effects and Tracking


February 24 - Teachers: Measuring Teacher Quality (Part I)


February 26 - Teachers: Measuring Teacher Quality (Part II)

March 3 - Teacher Labor Markets: Supply and Hiring

March 5 - Teacher Labor Markets: Retention & Mobility

March 10 - Midterm Review
March 12 - Midterm
March 17 - No Class (Spring Break)

March 19 - No Class (Spring Break)

March 24 - Teacher Training: Pre-Service


March 26 - Teacher Training: In-Service [Policy Brief Topic due]


March 31 - Teacher Compensation (Part I)


April 2 - Teacher Compensation (Part II)


April 7 - The Distribution of Teacher Quality


April 9 - Special Populations: Special Education


April 14 - Special Populations: ESL and Gifted

- Billie Davis, John Engberg, Dennis Epple, Holger Sieg and Ron Zimmer Bounding the Impact of a Gifted Program On Student Retention using a Modified Regression Discontinuity Design, unpublished manuscript.

April 16 - Early Childhood Education (Part I)

- Heckman, James J., Seong Hyeok Moon, Rodrigo Pinto, Peter A. Savelyev and Adam Yavitz, Adam. 2010. “Analyzing Social Experiments as Implemented: A Reexamination

April 21 - Early Childhood Education (Part II) [Written Policy Briefs Due]


April 23 - Class Presentations

April 28 - Class Presentations

May 5 - Final Exam (1:30 – 4:00)