Economics of Educational Policy  
(EXON 8310, Spring 2018)

Professor: Tim Sass  
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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—including 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 several 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 intentions, 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 Text:  

Additional required readings will be based on journal articles as specified in the course outline below.
**Class Times:**
Tuesdays 1:00-3:30p.m. Petit Science Center 233.

**Office Hours:**
Tuesday 10:00-11:30am and Wednesday 3:00-4:30pm. 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 and I can arrange a mutually agreeable appointment 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 iCollege system. You can access it by going to the University’s home page, [http://www.gsu.edu/](http://www.gsu.edu/), click on the “Students” tab at the top and click on the iCollege link under “Technology” 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.*

PhD students in economics are required to complete a “grant proposal” rather than the policy brief and associated presentation.

**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. 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 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

In addition, the journal Education Finance and Policy recently devoted an entire issue to policy briefs (http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/edfp/8/3) which should provide many useful examples. 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 (select “Yes” in the drop down menu under policy briefs). Additional examples, along with a list of potential topics, will be posted on the class web site. 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, Beamer or a similar electronic format.

Grant Proposals (Economics PhD Students Only):

Grant writing is often a critical component of professional life for both academic economists and economists working in think tanks and consulting firms. A good proposal involves all of the steps involved in a research project, except for actually gathering the data and analyzing it. Thus the process of writing a grant proposal requires you to go through the thought process required for any research project. In lieu of a policy brief, economics PhD students are required to write and present a grant proposal on a topic of their choosing. Sample grant proposals will be available on the class web site. Deadlines are specified below. The standards for the presentation of the grant proposals are the same as for the policy briefs.

Policy on Academic Honesty:

All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to GSU’s Policy on Academic Honesty. 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 percent 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-respectful 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 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; L&T=Lovenheim and Turner, Economics of Education)

January 9

A Brief History of U.S. Education Policy and Performance

- *L&T – Chapter 2

Determining What Works in Education

- *L&T – Chapter 3

January 16

A Framework for Analysis: The Education Production Function

- *L&T – Chapter 7

The Budget Constraint: School Financing

- *L&T – Chapter 8 and Section 9.1
• 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 23

Non-School Inputs: Families, Neighborhoods and Ancillary Services

• *L&T – pp. 241-242

Schools: Accountability

• *L&T – Chapter 11
January 30

Schools: Charters

- *L&T – Chapter 10

Schools: Vouchers and Private Schools

- *L&T – Chapter 10

February 6

Classrooms: Class Size

- *L&T – Section 9.2


### Classrooms: Peer Effects and Tracking


### February 13

#### Teachers: Measuring Teacher Quality (Part I)

- *L&T – Section 9.3

#### Teachers: Measuring Teacher Quality (Part II)


February 20

**Teacher Labor Markets: Supply and Hiring**

- *L&T – Sections 12.1 – 12.3

**Teacher Labor Markets: Retention & Mobility**


**February 27**

**Teacher Labor Markets: Teacher Shortages and What to Do About Them**


**Review for Midterm**

**March 6 - Midterm**

**March 13 - No Class (Spring Break)**

**March 20 [Policy Brief/ Grant Proposal Topic due]**

**Teacher Training: Pre-Service**

• *L&T – Section 12.5


**Teacher Training: In-Service**


• Glazerman, Steven, Eric Isenberg, Sarah Dolfin, Martha Bleeker, Amy Johnson, Mary Grider and Matthew Jacobus. 2010. *Impacts of Comprehensive Teacher Induction Final Results from a Randomized Controlled Study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.


**March 27**

**Performance-Based Teacher Compensation:**

• *L&T – Section 12.4


• Springer, M. G., et al. (2010). *Teacher pay for performance: Experimental*


The Distribution of Teacher Quality


April 3

Special Populations: Special Education


Special Populations: ESL and Gifted


April 10

**Early Childhood Education**


**Class Presentations of Grant Proposals**

April 17

**Class Presentations of Policy Briefs**

April 24 -- Final Exam (10:45-1:15)