

Education Politics and Policy | POL 538

Wednesdays (2:30pm – 5:15pm)

Allen Hall 208

Fall 2024

Professor: Matthew D. Nelsen

Office hours: Email me to set up an appointment

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Course Description

This course explores education politics and policy in the United States. We begin with an examination of justice-oriented pedagogies such as Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hook's *Teaching to Transgress* to establish the norms for the course. In particular, we will examine what it means to be in community in the classroom, how our lived experiences constitute meaningful sources of knowledge, and what it means to conduct community engaged research.

Next, we will explore the democratic importance of public schools. Drawing from historic and contemporary examples, we will discuss the ways in which civic learning in schools can help to sustain the vitality of democracy. Concurrently, we will show how policymakers have tried to limit access to meaningful educational experiences for women, LGBTQ individuals, and people of color throughout American history. With this framing in mind, we will spend multiple weeks exploring some of the most prominent policy issues in the realm of education policy, including school choice and reform efforts, online learning, the increasingly polarized nature of school board elections, and massive waves of school closures.

Throughout the semester, students will be asked to observe school board meetings throughout the greater Miami area. Using content analyses, we will examine (1) whose voices are being heard by elected school board officials, (2) which issues are being discussed most frequently, and (3) whether the issues being discussed are representative of the concerns of parents, students, and teachers. We will use this research and the insights of local community stakeholders to think through ways to create education policies that are responsive to needs of Miami area residents and contribute to more equitable educational outcomes. While the course examines the multifaceted educational policy challenges faced by local governments and city residents, it is also meant to be an empowering civic learning experience for those who enroll. As members of the University of Miami community, we have a responsibility to understand the broader sociopolitical dynamics of South Florida. While you will not be an expert on education politics and policy at the end of this course, it will provide you with some basic knowledge, tools, and dispositions for analyzing this policy domain. Most importantly, the course I designed to create opportunities to reflect upon the ways in which individuals can participate in the political processes at the local level.

Student Learning Outcomes

By successfully completing this course, students will be able to...

- Situate the importance of education policy into the broader landscape of American politics.
- Explore historic and contemporary debate over pedagogies and content that aim to be more inclusive of women, LGBTQ individuals, and people of color.
- Describe contemporary education politics issues, including debates over critical race theory, school choice, educational reform, school closures, and online learning.
- Examine how individuals participate in school politics (e.g., electing school board officials, attending board meetings, or mobilizing to prevent school closures).
- Apply existing education politics and policy research to explain/contextualize ongoing school board debates in the greater Miami area.
- Develop an increased sense of civic mindedness and civic agency: the “broader set of capacities and skills required to take confident, skillful, imaginative, collective action in fluid and open environments where there is no script” (Boyte, 2008, p. 11).

Course Policies

600 Level Requirements for Graduate Students

In order to fulfill 600 level requirements, graduate students who enroll in this course can expect to be assigned additional readings and discussion roles in addition to the work highlighted below. For example, graduate students will be asked to read 15-to-20-page segments of older, canonical urban politics texts (e.g., Bowles and Gintis’ *Schooling in Capitalist America*) in order to provide additional contexts for undergraduate students who will have read the more recently published readings assigned in the syllabus.

Grading Policies

This course provides the opportunity for informed discussion of ideas pertaining to urban politics. To be a productive participant in an informed discussion, you need to be prepared for class. If you are not prepared for class, you not only undermine your own learning, you also lower (or at least do not help to elevate) the overall level of the discussion, and thus detract from the learning experience of others. Make sure to budget your time so that you have enough time to engage with the assigned materials before class. You are expected to read the required texts and engage with other assigned materials (e.g., podcasts and documentaries) before each class meeting. These materials will be uploaded to Blackboard prior to the start of the semester.

Assignments must be turned in by their assigned deadline or receive a half letter grade penalty for each day they are late. Of course, you should always prioritize your physical, mental, and emotional well-being, especially during these unprecedented times (see below). You should expect feedback on your assignments as well as number of points earned within a week after submission. For all assignments, I will use a rubric for grading that you will receive ahead of time. Following each assignment, I will also provide an overview of grade distributions in order to maintain

transparency and to ensure that grades do not reflect or reinforce existing societal inequities. I will not accept any assignment for credit after the last day of the semester.

At the end of the semester, I will convert points to letter grades using the following scale:

- 93-100 = A
- 90-92 = A-
- 87-89 = B+
- 83-86 = B
- 80-82 = B-
- 77-79 = C+
- 73-76 = C
- 70-72 = C-
- 67-69 = D+
- 63-66 = D
- 60-62 = D-
- 59 or less = F

Navigating School During a Pandemic

These are unprecedented times. Let us all acknowledge this and prioritize taking care of ourselves and one another. I am happy adjust course materials and expectations as much as possible while still pursuing our main learning objectives. Please check in with me if you're struggling. I'm happy to be flexible and to explore ways to ensure you successfully navigate the course. However, I need to have some idea what is going in order to be helpful.

Academic Integrity

While the work you submit for class should engage with course materials, I will not accept assignments that include plagiarism. The University of Miami defines plagiarism as “representing the words or ideas of someone else as your own. Examples include, but are not limited to, failing to properly cite direct quotes, and failing to give credit for someone else's ideas.” Synthesizing someone else's ideas into your own words is fine, but you should still include a citation to be safe. You can read more about the university's academic integrity policies by clicking on the following link: <https://dosso.studentaffairs.miami.edu/honor-council/honor-code/index.html>

Recording Policy

Students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Meetings of this course might be recorded by the university. Any recordings will be available to students registered for this class as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. Students are expected to follow appropriate university policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments. If the instructor or a University of Miami office plans any other uses for the recordings, beyond this class, students identifiable in the recordings will be notified to request consent prior to such use.

Professor Nelsen is the copyright owner of the courseware; individual recordings of the materials on Blackboard and/or of virtual sessions (i.e., class held on Zoom) are not allowed; such materials cannot be shared outside the physical or virtual classroom environment.

Participation

Informed participation in discussions is required of each student. The *quality* of participation will weigh more heavily than the *quantity* of participation. This course *is* an exercise in democracy, so it is essential to find ways to engage in discourse with individuals who may not share your perspective of ideological predispositions. In the process, I commit to fostering an environment that is inclusive for all voices. However, I am also committed to facilitating conversations that do not rearticulate existing inequalities or violate the norms of pluralist democracy. We will discuss acceptable forms, styles, and levels of participation during the first week of class. Students who are concerned about this course requirement, due to shyness or for any other reason, are encouraged to meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss individual strategies for meeting this course requirement. However, I will provide opportunities for individual reflection throughout the course that will also contribute to the overall participation grade.

Religious Holidays and Other Excused Absences

Please let me know about any absences due to religious holidays during the first two weeks of class so we can be proactive about making sure that you stay on track. Of course, personal emergencies and illness arise unexpectedly. Your physical, mental, and emotional health should be prioritized. The sooner you let me know about an impending absence, the quicker we can make accommodations to help you complete the course while navigating other obligations.

Accommodations

If you have a disability concern and/or accommodation, talk to me the first week of class in office hours or over email. If you haven't already, familiarize yourself with the services available through the Camner Center: <http://camnercenter.miami.edu>.

A Note on Positionality

I believe that it is impossible to provide a comprehensive account of American politics without centering racial and ethnic identity. As a white person who specializes in the study of race, ethnicity, and politics in the United States, I can be a source of knowledge about ongoing social and academic debates pertaining to these topics. However, students are encouraged to bring their own expertise and lived experiences to the conversation as a means of building upon/critiquing this academic discourse. Though I believe it is the responsibility of everyone to talk about racism, racial inequities, and potential remedies to address these injustices, it is also critical to recognize that the knowledge associated with mastering a subfield is distinct from the knowledge that derives from the lived experiences of marginalized groups.

Graded Assignments

Class Participation (50 points)

Your attendance and quality of participation in each class session will be taken into consideration as part of your final grade (see engagement rubric). In order to account for different learning styles, multiple forms of participation will be taken into consideration (in-class discussion, written reflections, Blackboard posts) when evaluating student engagement throughout the course.

School Board Meeting Content Analyses (100 points)

You will be asked to submit completed content analyses of a Miami-Dade school board meeting. This includes both an analysis of both the meeting minutes and an analysis of the video recorded public comment section. Analyses will be graded using three criteria: (1) preemptively bringing any coding challenges to class so we can discuss how to proceed as a group, (2) accuracy of formatting the data, (3) accuracy of the coding analyses (Cohen's Kappa score for Inter-rater reliability). The goal of this assignment is not only to equip you with an important research method frequently invoked in the social sciences, but to help you build the data set that you will ultimately use in your final project. A more detailed description of this project and a corresponding rubric will be distributed early on in the semester.

Content Analysis Presentation (50 points)

During the content analysis presentation, you will have 5-7 minutes to present key findings from your content analysis to your peers. The goal of this exercise is for the class to gain a better understand of themes present within individual school board meetings. This will allow us to identify themes that we will incorporate into our final report and presentation to community stakeholders.

Stakeholder Report and Presentation (50 points)

By the end of the semester, we will present findings from our collective research endeavors to our community partners: Engage Miami, Mino Learning Collaborative, and P.S.305. The findings will be presented both as a written report and a final presentation to the community stakeholders. You will work in small groups to take on specific aspects of this report to ensure that the final product truly reflects a collective effort. A more detailed description of this project and a corresponding rubric will be distributed early on in the semester.

Final Reflection (50 points)

In lieu of an in-class final exam, you will submit a final 3-5-page reflection. While the prompt has yet to be determined, it will ask you to think about the research and civic skills you developed over the trajectory of the semester.

Required Texts

There are no required books for this class. However, a subscription to a reputable daily newspaper such as the New York Times or the Washington Post is strongly encouraged. Student subscriptions to the New York Times are free through the University of Miami library.

Week 1: August 21st, 2024 Justice Oriented Education

Freire, Paulo. 2018. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA. **(15 pages)**

hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge. **(9 pages)**

Morel, Domingo. 2018. *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **(6 pages; Preface)**

Week 2: August 28th, 2024 School Governance | Community Engaged Research

Morel, Domingo. 2018. *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **(27 pages; Chapters 1 and 4)**

Duncan-Andrade, Jeffrey M., and Ernest Morrell. 2008. "Youth Participatory Action Research as Critical Pedagogy." *Counterpoints*. **(26 pages)**

Abel et al. 2023. "Miami-Dade County School Board Meetings and What They Mean for the Community."

Engage Miami visits class.

Week 3: September 4th, 2024 Segregation, School Choice, and Educational Reform

Joffe-Walt, Chana, Julie Snyder, Sarah Koenig, Neil Drumming, Ira Glass, Eve L. Ewing, Rachel Lissy, and Stowe Nelson. 2020. "Nice White Parents." *The New York Times*, July 23, 2020, sec. Podcasts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/podcasts/nice-white-parents-serial.html>. **(Episodes 1-2, but it's worth listening to all 5)**

Bois, W. E. B. Du. 2008. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford University Press **(“Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”)**

Bois, W. E. Burghardt Du. 1935. "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" *The Journal of Negro Education* 4 (3): 328–35. **(7 Pages)**

Todd-Breland, Elizabeth. 2018. *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. **(27 pages)**

Content Analysis Training | Intercoder Reliability Check

Week 4: September 11th, 2024

The Democratic Importance of Public Schools

Nelsen, Matthew D. 2023. *The Color of Civics: Civic Education for a Multiracial Democracy*. Oxford University Press. **(59 pages; Chapters 3 and 4)**

P.S.305 visits class | Intercoder Reliability Check #2 (If needed)

Week 5: September 18th, 2024

Schools and the Carceral State

Bruch, Sarah K., and Joe Soss. 2018. "Schooling as a Formative Political Experience: Authority Relations and the Education of Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (1). **(21 pages)**

Nuamah, Sally A., and Quinn Mulroy. 2023. "'I Am a Child!': Public Perceptions of Black Girls and Their Punitive Consequences." *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 8 (2). **(19 pages)**

Mino Learning Collaborative Visits Class

Week 6: September 25th, 2024

Zoom School: Education during a Global Pandemic (Online)

Brown, Annie, Sindhu Gnanasambandan, Soraya Shockley, Liz O. Baylen, Lisa Tobin, Tamir Kalifa, and Lauren Jackson. 2021. "Odessa." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2021, sec. Podcasts.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/podcasts/the-daily/texas-schools-reopening-covid.html>. **(Parts 1-4)**

Week 7: October 2, 2024

School Board Wars | What is CRT?

Barbaro, Michael, Jessica Cheung, Eric Krupke, Michael Simon Johnson, Lisa Tobin, Dan Powell, Marion Lozano, and Chris Wood. 2021. "The School Board Wars, Part 1." *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/podcasts/the-daily/school-boards-mask-mandates-crt-bucks-county.html>. **(44 minute listen)**

Barbaro, Michael, Eric Krupke, Jessica Cheung, Lisa Tobin, Corey Schreppel, and Chris Wood. 2021. "The School Board Wars, Part 2." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/podcasts/the-daily/school-board-bucks-county.html>. **(44-minute listen)**

Collins, Jonathan E. 2021. "Does the Meeting Style Matter? The Effects of Exposure to Participatory and Deliberative School Board Meetings." *American Political Science Review* 115 (3): 790–804. **(15 pages)**.

Carbone, Mia, Allison Harell, and Stuart Soroka. 2024. "Critical Race Theory: How Policy Language Differentially Engages Symbolic Racism and Partisanship." *Perspectives on Politics*, March, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592724000240>. **(12 pages)**

Safarpour, Alauna, Kristin Lunz Trujillo, Jon Green, Caroline High Pippert, Jennifer Lin, and James N. Druckman. 2024. "Divisive or Descriptive?: How Americans Understand Critical Race Theory." *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 9 (1): 157–81. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2023.39>. **(24 pages)**

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 2021. "Critical Race Theory—What It Is Not!" In *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, 2nd ed. Routledge. **(30 pages)**

Week 8: October 9, 2024

Individual Content Analysis Presentations

Content Analyses Due.

Week 9: October 16th, 2024

School Board Elections

Cheung, Jessica, Asthaa Chaturvedi, Rob Szytko, Lisa Tobin, M. J. Davis Lin, Lisa Chow, Marion Lozano, Dan Powell, and Chris Wood. 2022. "One Elite High School's Struggle Over Admissions." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/podcasts/the-daily/admissions-lowell-high-school-lottery-merit-system.html>. **(52-minute listen)**

Henig, Jeffrey R., Rebecca Jacobsen, and Sarah Reckhow. 2019. *Outside Money in School Board Elections: The Nationalization of Education Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press. **(Selections TBD)**

Perez Jr., Juan. 2019. "90% of U.S. School Boards Are Picked by Voters, but Not in Chicago. Here's Why That Could Change." *Chicago Tribune*. Accessed July 12, 2022. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-chicago-elected-school-board-debate-20190418-story.html>. **(6 pages)**

Weeks 10: October 23rd, 2024

The Politics of School Closures

Ewing, Eve. 2018. "What Led Chicago to Shutter Dozens of Majority-Black Schools? Racism." *The Guardian*, December 6, 2018, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/06/chicago-public-schools-closures-racism-ghosts-in-the-schoolyard-extract>. **(5 pages)**

Nuamah, Sally A. 2022. *Closed for Democracy: How Mass School Closure Undermines the Citizenship of Black Americans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/closed-for-democracy/7D8721B165F3D1D09057A52006FC68AB>. **(Chapters 1 and 4)**

Shaw, Kevin, Steve James, and Rachel Dickson. 2022. *Let the Little Light Shine*. PBS. **(90-minutes in class)**

Week 11: October 30th, 2024

Education Activism

Nuamah, Sally A. 2022. *Closed for Democracy: How Mass School Closure Undermines the Citizenship of Black Americans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/closed-for-democracy/7D8721B165F3D1D09057A52006FC68AB>. **(Chapter 5)**

Wachter, Christine. 2015. "Why I'm Hunger Striking for Dyett High School." *The Chicago Reporter*. August 24, 2015. <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/why-im-hunger-striking-for-dyett-high-school/>. **(6 pages)**

Campbell, Alexia Fernández. 2019. "The 11-Day Teachers Strike in Chicago Paid Off." *Vox*. November 1, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/11/1/20943464/chicago-teachers-strike-deal>. **(4 pages)**

Moskowitz, Rachel L. 2023. "Educational Equality in the Twenty-First Century: White Voter Conflict over Integration and Community Control." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 11 (5): 954–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2022.2065319>. **(24 pages)**

Week 12: November 6th, 2024
No Class

Use this time to work on final presentation/final report for community partners

Week 12: November 13th, 2024
Higher Education

Barbaro, Michael, Jessica Cheung, Lynsea Garrison, Michael Benoist, Marion Lozano, Pat McCusker, Rowan Niemisto, and Alyssa Moxley. 2024. "A Confusing New World for College Applicants." *The New York Times*, January 5, 2024, sec. Podcasts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/05/podcasts/the-daily/college-admissions.html>. **(34 minutes)**

Morel, Domingo. 2023. *Developing Scholars: Race, Politics, and the Pursuit of Higher Education*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **(29 pages; Introduction and Conclusion)**

Week 13: November 20th, 2024
Final Reflections | Presentation to Community Stakeholders

Nelsen, Matthew D. 2023. *The Color of Civics: Civic Education for a Multiracial Democracy*. Oxford University Press. **(14 pages; Conclusion)**

Nuamah, Sally A. 2019. *How Girls Achieve*. Illustrated edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press. **(Selections TBD).**

Finals Week

Final reflection due on Blackboard on December 11th by 5:00pm (EST).