Higher Education Policy  
MSHE 468  
Location: Annenberg G02  
Time: Fall Term 2013, Mondays, 6-9 pm

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Course Description

This course will introduce students to many of the policies that shape and inform American higher education. The course will provide an opportunity for students to investigate further the controversies, challenges, and benefits endemic to those federal, state, system, and institutional policies.

Course objectives:

- To understand the basic theories of policy and policy making
- To investigate and engage with the major issues of higher education policy
- To become comfortable with the methods used to study policy and be a literate consumer of policy research and reports
- To develop deeper knowledge in one area of higher education policy

Each week represents a policy or set of policy topics. To some degree the distinctions between weeks are artificial. For example, the financial aid policies are directly connected to—and are even a version of—access policies. Student success policies and accountability policies might be considered two sides of the same coin. Ideally, each week’s theme will build on the preceding week, and we will return to certain topics repeatedly throughout the course.

Course Requirements

Expectations of students: This course will be successful as a result of the efforts of both the instructor and the students. As instructor, I commit to being prepared for each class and to ensuring the overall direction of the course. I will endeavor to be responsive to the needs of all of the participants in the course, remaining open to the possibility of appropriate adjustments as the term ensues. I expect the same of my students. To that end, there are specific requirements for this course.

Attendance and class participation (15%). Your attendance is essential to a good course experience. The format of the class requires each student to be prepared to engage with and discuss the full range of topics raised in the readings in both the whole group and smaller groups. In addition, when there is a guest speaker,
students are expected to be conversant enough about the topic to ask questions of the speaker. Students are expected to attend every class (notifying me in advance of an absence).

**Weekly memos (25%).** Each week, every student is required to submit a brief (1-2 page) memo based on the week's readings. As you'll see, the readings may take different positions and are of varying quality. Your memos should identify questions about, reflections of or challenges to the various readings and should reflect analytic thinking about the topic. By this I mean the memos shouldn't simply be a statement of opinion about something, though you may certainly take a position with evidence to support it. Each memo does not need to address every topic raised in the readings, and can focus on larger themes when appropriate. There may also be weeks when there are news stories in the media that you would like to tie into the topic. In the weekly class descriptions there are prompts that can serve as a starting point each week should they be needed. The memos will not be graded, but will help serve as a starting point for the week’s discussion. Each week the memo is **due by 4 pm on Sunday, emailed to bueschel@gmail.com. The first memo will be due before the second class meeting, and no memo will be due in week 9 or 10 due to student presentations those weeks. Although there is no memo due the first week, students should still read the materials in advance of that class.**

**Group Policy Analysis Activity (10%):** In the second and third weeks you will be part of a small group that provides policy analysis to a stakeholder interested in that particular policy. Further instructions will be provided in class.

**Research paper (Proposal and Outline 5%; Paper 30%; Presentation 15%).** Each student will research and analyze one higher education policy topic in depth. Details about this project will be discussed in the first class. Due dates for each piece of the project are listed in the weekly descriptions as well.

**Additional Expectations**

**Academic Integrity:** Students in this course are expected to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide." All papers submitted for credit in this course must be sent as email attachments as well as delivered in printed form. Your written work may be electronically tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern, visit: [http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/](http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/). If you need a copy of the brochure visit the SESP Student Affairs Office.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** In compliance with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Northwestern University is committed to providing equal access to all programming. Students with disabilities seeking accommodations are encouraged to contact the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 467-5530 or
ssd@northwestern.edu. SSD is located in the basement of Scott Hall. SSD also has an excellent website at: http://www.stuaff.northwestern.edu/ssd/

Preferred format: APA style is the preferred citation format for this course.

Feedback: At the end of each class, I will request a “one-minute paper” as a way to capture what each student is taking away from that session. These are anonymous and are only to provide feedback to me about any adjustments necessary to ensure understanding on each of the topics and concepts.

Current events: An important part of understanding and appreciating education policy is staying current with issues of higher education. If you are not already subscribed, please sign up to receive the free daily updates from insidehighered.com and the Chronicle of Higher Education (chronicle.com). In addition, you may want to subscribe to the free updates from EdWeek and Education Commission of the States (ECS). While these last two address K-12 issues primarily, they also feature higher education stories. Often the mainstream media will cover higher education policy issues as well (e.g., The New York Times). News from these academic and mainstream sources may complement the readings and be addressed in the weekly memos.

Course Materials

Primary Texts


These books will be available in the bookstore (or you may be able to find used copies online). The St. John et al. and Altbach et al. volumes are also available in the library. In addition, other articles, reports and essays will be available free online on the Blackboard site for this class. Each week includes required and recommended readings. The required readings will be discussed in class, and students are expected to be conversant about their content. Recommended readings are for your own interest and can be referred to in the weekly memos if you’ve read them. They can also serve as a starting point and resource for your research topic once you chose your area of focus. Readings listed under each week’s
description should be completed by the Sunday before that class in order to inform the weekly memo.

**Week One, September 30**
*Please try to read the required materials listed below prior to the first class.*

**Topic:** *Framing the higher education policy discussion: who's in charge? Who makes decisions? How?*

One of the unique aspects of higher education in the U.S. is that there is no single governing body for higher education. There are federal, state, system, and institutional policies that dictate and guide how college and universities function, but the strong tradition of autonomy in higher education also informs what occurs on campuses. In this first week, we examine the range of various governing bodies, laws, and policies that provide oversight for our country's campuses, from the federal authorization of the Higher Education Act to state legislative budgets to local campus politics. There will be an introduction to policy terms, policy theories, and policy analysis. There will also be an overview how our system developed (or evolved) in the way it has, highlighting the historical purposes and goals of higher education.

**Required Readings**

St. John et al. (book), Preface
   Chapter 1, “Introduction”


**Recommended Readings**


**Week Two, October 7**

Topic: *Policy Overview*

This week will include an introduction to several policy theories and to basic policy analysis. What are the drivers in educational policy? How are policies developed and made? Which interests “win”? This week we will have a guest speaker who has been both a policy analyst and a policy researcher. She will present a case where her policy research was used in unintended ways. Supporting materials for that case are the Venezia and Jaeger piece, and *The Future of Children Policy Brief* below.

**Guest Speaker**

Andrea Venezia, Associate Professor, Public Policy & Administration, and Associate Director, Institute for Higher Ed Leadership & Policy, California State University, Sacramento

Following the guest speaker, you will begin a small group exercise in which you take on the role of policy analysts, analyzing a proposed policy for the legislator they work for. Next week (week 3), each group will present the strengths and weaknesses to their legislator or stakeholder for a decision during class. Assignment details will be provided in class.
 Required Readings

St. John et al., Chapter 2, “Political Ideologies and Policy Matters”
Chapter 3, “Policy Frames and Market Forces”

Venezia, Andrea and Laura Jaeger (2013). “Transitions from High School to College”

Strategy to Prepare Disadvantaged Students for College,” a Policy Brief from
Princeton University and Brookings.

Education” in Lovell, Cheryl D, Toni E Larson, Diane R Dean and David L
Longanecker (eds.) *Public Policy and Higher Education (2nd Edition) (ASHE

Education State Policy Issues for 2012,” A Higher Education Policy Brief,
January 2012. Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and
Universities.

 Recommended Readings

Bracco, Kathy Reeves, Richard C. Richardson, Jr., Patrick M. Callan, and Joni Finney
Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Callan, Patrick, Joni Finney, Michael Kirst, Michael Usdan, and Andrea Venezia
Readiness and Success*. San Jose, CA: The National Center for Higher Education
and Public Policy.


**Week Three, October 14**

*Research Paper topic due (see handout from first class for details)*

Note: This week will begin with the brief group presentations of their policy problem and analysis that was started in week 2.

**Topic: Student Access to and Success in Higher Education**

There are policies at every level of higher education that affect students’ access to and success in college. This week we examine more closely both the highly visible policies (e.g., affirmative action, immigration policies) and those less visible (e.g., placement and remediation policies, learning disability services) that shape students’ experience in college. We will discuss how they began and how they have evolved. How do these policies serve the goals of the institution (or the state, or the country)? Do these policies continue to achieve the goals intended? In what ways are students affected by these policies, for better or worse? Are there good alternatives?

**Required Readings**

St. John et al., Chapter 5, “Access to Higher Education”

Chapter 7, “The Old Liberal Model: The California Case”


**Recommended Readings**


St. John et al., Chapter 4, “College Preparation”
Chapter 6, “College Success and Degree Completion”

**Week Four, October 21**

**Topic: Affordability: Who pays?**

It is hard to avoid media accounts of how much college costs and how quickly those costs go up. While the accounts are often framed as costs to individual families, it is not just they who fund higher education. This week we will examine the various funding models in higher education, models that go beyond the private/public division. Is higher education a public good? If so, how much should society (primarily through government) invest? Why are most colleges tax exempt? What role do federal and state legislation play? How do different states come up with different models? How have those models changed over time? What is the relationship between funding models, tuition, and the cost of providing specific types of educational experiences?

*Note: The reading lists for weeks 4 and 5 are extensive, which reflects the visible and influential policies associated with paying for higher education.*

**Required Readings**


St. John et al., Chapter 8, “The Market Model: The Minnesota Case”

Recommended Readings


St. John et al., Chapter 10, “Comprehensive Strategy: The Indiana Case”

**Week Five, October 28**

*Research Paper proposal due (see handout from first class for details)*

**Topic:** Affordability: How do you pay?

In the prior week, our discussion of higher education funding focused on state and federal policies and finance models. This week the focus on funding higher education zooms in on individual students and their families. What are the primary forms of student financial aid? How are they shaped by federal, state, and institutional policy? What goals are these policies and programs—from grants to loans to work study to merit awards to athletic scholarships—serving? Financial aid is one of the most powerful policy levers in higher education, and we will discuss what that means for students and institutions. We are fortunate to have two of the foremost financial aid experts in the country join us in person for this class.

**Guest Speakers**

Sandy Baum, Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute and the George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development

Michael McPherson, President of Spencer Foundation and Past President, Macalester College

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


St. John et al., Chapter 9, “Merit Aid: The Florida Case”

Week Six, November 4  
*Research Paper outline due (see handout from first class for details)*

**Topic:** Accountability

While colleges and universities have generally enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, there are several reasons there has been greater focus more recently on holding institutions accountable, whether through performance funding, or productivity outcomes, or student learning outcomes. Each campus goes through accrediting processes that hold institutions accountable for certain policies, practices, and outcomes. There are also many different “scorecards” trying to document student, faculty and institutional performance. What can accurately be captured on a scorecard or accreditation report? What measures of higher education do we/should we care about? Are the measures valid? What does success look like (for students and the institutions)? Who is responsible for student success? What is the relationship between accountability and improvement?

**Guest Speaker**
Kelli J. Armstrong, Vice President for Planning and Assessment  
Boston College

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week Seven, November 11**

**Topic: Governance: Who’s in charge redux**

While American higher education is not centralized federally, or fully at the state level, there are governance structures that oversee systems and institutions. In some cases, these are state governing or coordinating boards for public systems. There are also trustees or regents who are the stewards of campuses. On each campus there are faculty and administrative governance structures. How does each of these function? What happens when governance is contested (e.g., the recent University of Virginia case)? How do these various actors make policy, from tenure systems to setting tuition? Whose interests inform governance policy decisions?

*Note: During this class we will also spend part of our time discussing scholarly presentations in preparation for the research paper presentations at the end of the quarter. The required readings for weeks 7 and 8 are limited to allow for more time to work on your research paper.*
Week Eight, November 18

Topic: Emerging Pressures on Higher Education—what’s next?

Despite having a recognizable model for hundreds of years, higher education must address external forces that may affect how it operates in different settings. The for-profit sector (represented most visibly by the University of Phoenix, but others as well) has grown tremendously. Emerging technologies and MOOCs (massive open online courses) present both an opportunity and a challenge to traditional in-class instruction. Some philanthropists have channeled their resources into reshaping certain aspects of higher education. And, as we discussed earlier, accountability pressures are forcing institutions to justify many more of their functions and outcomes in ways they were not expected to before. Who benefits from these changes? Who loses out? What responses are available to institutions? Who are some of the new policy makers that might influence colleges and universities?

Required Readings


St. John et al., Chapter 13, “Reframing Policy Decisions”
Chapter 14, “Reframing the Social Good”
Recommended Readings


**Week Nine, November 25**

*Research Paper due by 6 pm (see handout from first class for details)*

Student presentations

**Week Ten, December 2**

Student presentations