

EDUC 716: Public Policy Issues in Higher Education

Summer 2021 – Session II (July 2-August 6, 2021)

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00-5:00pm

Location: Zoom - <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/92372782989>

Co-Instructors

Elaine W. Leigh, Ph.D.

Higher Education

E-mail: eleigh@upenn.edu

Pooja R. Patel, M.A.

Ph.D. Student, Higher Education

E-mail: patelpo@upenn.edu

Student Office Hours

Each instructor will hold a live in-person office hour each week and otherwise schedule meetings by appointment. Please use this time to talk with either of us about course questions, concerns, or your general interests in the class. Each instructor will be available during the following days.

- Live Drop-In via Zoom
 - Pooja Patel – Mondays, 10am-11am (July 12, 19, 26, Aug. 2) | [Zoom Room](#)
 - Elaine Leigh – Wednesdays, 8-9pm (July 14, 21, 28, Aug. 4) | [Zoom Room](#)
- All other times by appointment - schedule with either eleigh@upenn.edu or patelpo@upenn.edu

Course Description

Despite decades of social science research, policy reforms, grassroots organizing, and public dollars spent, deep racial and socioeconomic inequities continue to plague the U.S. higher education system (Cahalan et al., 2020). Only magnified more acutely this past tumultuous year, the vast needs of students pursuing a postsecondary education will likely only begin to be met by policy action across institutions, states, and federal agencies. Such public policy decisions dictate much of how higher education works - and for whom.

In this course, focusing on several current higher education policies (e.g., free college, performance-based funding), we will explore the higher education policymaking process - how policies are formed, implemented and scaled, and how they are assessed for impact. Beyond typical policy discussions, we will also wrestle with what it means to be “critical” in our study of higher education public policy, seeking to “identify the causes and causalities of inequitable access to higher education, as well to craft a view of the discriminatory and unjust experiences of actors in higher education” (Martinez-Aleman et al., 2015, p. 2). The course will explore issues of power and policy intent focusing particularly on higher education finance and accountability with additional attention to their influences on student diversity and success.

We will often return to the following questions in our study of various higher education policies: What are the policies and who are they for? How do policy agendas get set and who sets them? Who benefits from certain policies and who does not? How do we know whether a policy “works” while grappling with the complicated and context-laden processes that determine effectiveness? Centering the experiences of students historically underrepresented in higher education including, but not limited to, BIPOC students, students first in their families to attend college, students from lower socioeconomic status, and currently or formerly incarcerated students, this course aims to provide the foundation to analyze contemporary higher education policies and how they shape student success.

Course Objectives

In this course, students will be able to:

- Develop knowledge on normative and critical public policy theories and conceptual frameworks to understand the policymaking and policy implementation process in higher education
- Identify and analyze major public policy debates happening at federal, state, and institutional levels aimed at improving higher education access, success, affordability, and accountability
- Analyze and explain how current policies address systemic barriers in educational equity for minoritized and other underrepresented students
- Become a more critical consumer of policy research and its limits and opportunities in producing policy reforms

Land Acknowledgement

As a class committed to understanding what informs current higher education policies, and how those policies come to differentially shape the experiences and outcomes of students underrepresented and underserved in higher education, we recognize the histories, struggles, and resilience of communities here in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who we are indebted to as students, faculty, and staff at the University of Pennsylvania. We pay respect to the Lenni-Lenape, original inhabitants of Lenapehoking, in what is now current day eastern PA, NJ, NY, and DE. Their descendants today now include the Delaware Tribe and Delaware Nation of Oklahoma, Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape, Ramapough Lenape, Powhatan Renape of New Jersey, and the Munsee Delaware of Ontario. We also recognize the diverse Native peoples of the Americas (e.g., Taíno, Mexica, Zapotec, Quechua, Mayan, Dine, Mohawks, Wampanoag, Cherokee, Lakota) who also live in present-day Philadelphia.

Expectations

1. Attendance and participation

Each student is expected to come to class prepared, having read and contemplated the readings, and ready to share their perspectives, questions, and insights. This course is conducted primarily as a seminar. The success of the class depends largely on the extent to

which students engage in active discussion and debate around the issues posed in readings and other assignments.

1. Religious holidays

Students will not be penalized because of their religious beliefs and observances. Whenever possible, students will be given reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. Students should inform the instructor of any conflicts between the course schedule and religious observances as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements may be made.

2. Timeliness of work

Students are expected to complete all required readings and assignments as scheduled. Late assignments may result in the lowering of a student's grade. Incompletes will be granted only for exceptional circumstances. Please reach out to course instructors whenever you may have conflicts, need extensions, or have other concerns about your work. Open communication is critical to ensure we can address student needs.

3. APA style

All formal work should utilize APA style as described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Please refer to the following website for information on the citation of electronic resources: www.apastyle.org/electref.html For guidance on use of APA style, see Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

4. Ethical practices

All students are expected to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity throughout this course and all other courses offered at the University of Pennsylvania. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication will not be tolerated and will be reported to the University administration. The University of Pennsylvania's official policies regarding academic misconduct are available for your reference in the Pennbook student handbook: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

The APA manual is one of many resources available for determining how to properly cite the ideas and published work of others. The University of Pennsylvania's Ethics and Original Research Handbook clearly spells out what constitutes plagiarism: <https://provost.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/users/user96/Penn-ethics-handbook.original.pdf>. Please access and read this handbook, as personal interpretations of academic dishonesty are sometimes confusing. The Weingarten Learning Resource Center offers additional workshops and appointments to address writing issues: <https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu/>

5. Turnitin

“Turnitin” is a product used by GSE and incorporated into all materials submitted to Canvas. GSE faculty may run anything you write or submit—including theses and comprehensive exams—through this (or possibly other) verification platforms. Uncovering large amounts of unoriginal written work is common, but proper citation is expected. These software platforms algorithmically verify and check written work against more than 60 billion web pages, 600 million student papers (including those written by GSE students), and 150 million journal articles, periodicals, and books. We want to make you aware of these tools to further encourage proper usage and deter plagiarism.

6. Netiquette

Netiquette refers to a set of rules or norms for behaving appropriately and courteously online. Especially as a public policy course where differences of opinion may abound, we must recognize and respect the different backgrounds and perspectives of classmates and instructors in engaging with each other and course materials. Please consider the following guidelines, sourced from the [University of Hawaii Hilo](#), that we expect all students to follow during our virtual class gatherings and in asynchronous settings.

- Be sensitive to the fact that there will be cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as different political and religious beliefs, plus just differences in general.
- Use good taste when composing your responses in Discussion Forums. Swearing and profanity is also part of being sensitive to your classmates and should be avoided. Also consider that slang can be misunderstood or misinterpreted.
- Don't use all capital letters when composing your responses as this is considered “shouting” on the Internet and is regarded as impolite or aggressive. It can also be stressful on the eye when trying to read your message.
- Be respectful of others' views and opinions. Avoid “flaming” (publicly attacking or insulting) them as this can cause hurt feelings and decrease the chances of getting all different types of points of view.
- Be careful when using acronyms. If you use an acronym it is best to spell out its meaning first, then put the acronym in parentheses afterward, for example: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). After that you can use the acronym freely throughout your message.

Another good resource to understand our expectations around netiquette can be found [here](#) from Lake Superior College.

7. Instructor Responsibilities

The instructors for this course have high expectations not only for students in the course, but also for themselves. Students should expect that the instructors will:

- Be prepared for class, read and return students' work in a timely manner, and be interested and engaged in students' projects;
- Recognize that each student brings a different background, experience, and perspective to this course;
- Learn from the students;

- Meet with students individually or in groups upon request and be available by Zoom (or an alternative video sharing platform), by telephone, and by e-mail; and
- Work hard, have fun, and empower students to pursue their interest in this area.

Resources and Other Considerations

1. Students with disabilities and/or other special needs

The University of Pennsylvania is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. The University is obligated, whenever possible, to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. The Office of Student Disabilities Services serves students from all of Penn's undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools. It provides comprehensive, professional services and programs for students with disabilities to ensure equal academic opportunities and participation in University-sponsored programs. For further information contact: Weingarten Learning Resources Center, Office of Student Disabilities Services, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300 (Stouffer Commons) or <https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu/sds/>. Students who have questions about their rights or accommodations may contact the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunities (<https://www.upenn.edu/affirm-action/>).

Any student with a documented disability or any other special need who wishes to discuss academic accommodations is also encouraged to contact the instructors as early as possible. In accordance with the American's with Disabilities Act, Penn GSE can offer appropriate and accommodations and will make every effort to be supportive.

2. Managing multiple responsibilities

We recognize during this time that our daily schedules and personal and professional responsibilities look very different working remotely. If you are managing caregiving and other responsibilities, please know we are flexible and happy to make all reasonable accommodations necessary to ensure you can engage in your coursework. Please be in touch with any concerns or issues in order to meet your needs.

3. Writing help

Along with feedback from the instructors, students are encouraged to take advantage of resources at the Weingarten Learning Center early and often for assistance on writing clarity, organization, and reference lists. Learn more about Weingarten's individual appointments and workshops here: <https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu/lr/>

4. Mental health and wellness resources at Penn

Your mental health and overall well-being should take priority as you pursue your coursework and complete your program. We advocate for utilizing campus resources to help support your mental health and wellness, such as Penn Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) (<https://caps.wellness.upenn.edu/>). For a full list of support services available to you at Penn, make sure to visit <https://onepenn.gse.upenn.edu/student-services>.

Course Evaluation and Grade Inflation

Student evaluation is an important educative act. Grades are the means by which such evaluations are efficiently communicated to external groups (e.g., employers) and, most importantly, to the student. The compression of grades in the upper range (grade inflation) has occurred at many colleges and universities. However, without variation in grades, it is impossible to differentiate between “distinguished” work (the criterion for an A in the graduate grading system at Penn) and “good” work (the criterion for a B). Grade inflation unfairly penalizes students whose exemplary work deserves to stand apart through the recognition of an A. Inflated grades also can mislead students and give them an unreasonably optimistic assessment of their performance. At Penn GSE, the expectation is that grade distributions in courses fall predominantly in the A to B range and that the notional mean of most courses is B+.

Course Requirements

Each student is expected to complete the following assignments:

1. Choosing a policy topic | **Due: Sunday, July 11, 11:59pm**

You will be asked to identify a policy topic you are interested in pursuing further during this summer course by filling out a brief 5-minute survey from the instructors. Examples of policy topics are available on Canvas.

2. Policy memo – 25% of grade | **Due: Sunday, July 18, 11:59pm**

Each student is expected to prepare a 2–3-page memo (single-spaced) that describes a federal, state, or institutional policy of interest related to higher education. The memo should answer the following questions:

- What is the history and context for the policy? How was the policy formulated?
- What is the problem that the policy is trying to address?
- Who are the policy actors involved in implementing the policy?

The paper should include at least 10 references from publicly available policy briefs, public sources of data from government/institutional databases and reports, institutional/organizational websites, academic articles, news media, or other sources of data, using appropriate APA style citations. You should plan to utilize portions of this memo in your final paper on the same topic in order to build on your work.

3. Critical policy analysis paper – 35% of grade | **Due: Friday, August 6, 5pm**

Building on your policy memo, this paper’s purpose is for you to pursue your policy topic of interest in greater depth and go beyond the assigned readings of the course. You are expected to use revised sections of your policy memo (addressing feedback from course instructors) to expand on the history and context of your policy, its current implementation, and documented impacts for its target population or programming. In your discussion of the policy, you should also consider the following questions to critically analyze your policy of interest:

- Who or what does your policy target and, by extension, who/what is not targeted for the particular policy benefits?
- How are resources allocated for your policy and how might resources need to be allocated differently to achieve policy goals?
- What are the potential intended or unintended consequences of this policy in shaping students access and/or success in higher education?
- In what ways does your policy define, discuss, or otherwise address student equity?

The paper should be 12-15 pages (double-spaced), excluding citations. You are expected to use academic literature, policy reports and briefs, federal/state/institutional websites, publicly available data, and other data sources to inform your analysis and back up your claims with evidence (at least 20-25 references in APA Style). The paper should showcase your ability to clearly synthesize the scope and effects of a policy topic of interest and critique the policy's intent or efficacy in delivering its goals.

4. Final paper presentation – 15% of grade | **Due: Thursday, August 5 (at last class)**

During the final class session, students will summarize the content of their final papers and respond to questions from the class. The time allotted for each presentation will depend on the number of presentations (typically 10-15 minutes per presentation).

5. Reading Reflections/In-Class Discussion – 25% of grade | **Due: 6pm the night before each class session**

The quality of class discussion depends on students' preparation and readiness to engage in the topic of the day. To encourage lively discussions, students should prepare short responses to be submitted on the Canvas Discussion Board labeled for that class session (250-400 words). Each post should demonstrate your reflection on the following:

- What are your main takeaways from the readings?
- What questions do you still have?
- How do the readings/materials compare to your own experiences or observations in higher education?

These reflections will help the instructors shape discussions on the day of class based on student interests and reactions.

Course Access

The course will be organized using Canvas. The Canvas site may be accessed by directing your browser to <http://canvas.upenn.edu>. Login using your PennKey and password. Refer here for help in accessing Canvas and other frequently asked questions:

<https://onepenn.gse.upenn.edu/information-technology/canvas/student-faqs>

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to public policy in higher education

Class 1 **Tuesday, July 6**

The policy process and agenda-setting

What is public policy?

Read:

Birkland, T.A. (2011). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policymaking*. Routledge. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/lib/upenn-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1900063>

- Read Ch. 1: Introducing the policy process (pp. 3-24)
- Read Ch. 6: Agenda setting, power, and interest groups (pp. 168-201)

How can we critically analyze policy agendas in higher education?

Teranishi, R.T., & Bezbatchenko, A. (2015). A critical examination of the college completion agenda. In A.M. Martinez-Aleman, B. Pusser, & E.M. Bensimon (Eds.), *Critical approaches to the study of higher education* (pp. 241-256). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Class 2 **Thursday, July 8**

Understanding public policy implementation and evaluation

What are the dimensions of policy implementation?

Read:

Birkland, T.A. (2011). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policymaking*. Routledge. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/lib/upenn-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1900063>

- Ch. 9: Policy implementation, failure, & learning (pp. 263-286)

How do we critically analyze policy implementation in higher education?

Ching, C.D., Felix, E.R., Castro, M.F., & Trinidad, A. (2020). Achieving racial equity from the bottom-up? The Student Equity Policy in California community colleges. *Educational Policy*, 34(6), 819-863.

What's Due

Reading Reflection #1

Choosing a policy topic (Sunday, July 11, 11:59pm)

Week 2: Federal Policy

Class 3 Tuesday, July 13

Making college affordable: Reforming the Federal Pell Grant

What is the policy?
Why does the policy need to change?

Watch:

Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2014). Looking back to move forward: A history of federal student aid. Washington, DC: Author. Watch at least these two videos:

<http://www.ihep.org/research/initiatives/looking-back-move-forward-history-federal-student-aid>.

- How did we get here: Growth of federal student loans
- Pell Grant: Building block of student-based aid

Read:

Baum, S., & Reuben, K.S. (2020). *Simplifying student aid*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/simplifying-student-aid>

What are the implications for the policy on specific student groups?

Green, E.L. (2020 December). Financial aid is restored for prisoners as part of stimulus bill. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/21/us/politics/stimulus-law-education.html>

Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2020). Supporting Success: Higher Education in Prison (HEP) Federal Level. Washington, DC: Author. https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IHEP_KPI_onepager_Hill.pdf

Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2020). Supporting Success: Higher Education in Prison (HEP) State Level. Washington, DC: Author. https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IHEP_HEPKPI_state.pdf

Special Guests

Dr. Erin Corbett (CEO, Second Chance Educational Alliance) (2-3pm EST)

What's Due

Reading Reflection #2

Class 4
Thursday, July 15

Making college affordable: The emergence of “free college”

What is the policy? Why does the policy need to change?

Read:

Perna, L.W., & Smith, E.J. (2020). Improving research-based knowledge of college promise programs. In L.W. Perna & E.J. Smith (Eds.), *Improving research-based knowledge of college promise programs* (pp. 1-16). American Educational Research Association.

Jones, T., Ramirez-Mendoza, J., & Jackson, V. (2020). A promise worth keeping: An updated equity-driven framework for free college programs. The Education Trust.

<https://edtrust.org/resource/a-promise-worth-keeping/>

How does policy evaluation inform understanding of the policy?

Gándara, D., & Li, A. (2020). Promise for whom? “Free college” programs and enrollments by race and gender classifications at public 2-year colleges. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(4), 603-627.

**Note: For the Gándara & Li reading, please read it for the core framing and results. It is okay skim over the methods section.*

What’s Due

Reading Reflection #3
Policy brief (Sunday, July 18, 11:59pm)

Week 3: State Policy

Class 5
Tuesday, July 20

State finance and budget volatility

What is the policy context?

Read:

Zumeta, W., Breneman, D.W., Callan, P.M., & Finney, J.E. (2012). *Financing American higher education in the era of globalization*. Harvard Education Press.

- Ch.5 – State higher education policy (pp.99-129).

What are other ways of thinking about the state of higher education finance?

Pusser, B. (2015). A critical approach to power in higher education. In A.M. Martinez-Aleman, B. Pusser, & E.M. Bensimon (Eds.), *Critical approaches to the study of higher education* (pp. 59-79). Johns Hopkins University Press.

What are the implications of finance policies for higher education performance? Patel, P.R., & Van Ostenbridge, L.A. (2020). Uncertain and volatile state funding. In T.K. Odle, & J.E. Finney (Eds.), "Faultlines" Shaping Higher Education Policy and Opportunity in California (pp. 61-71). Philadelphia, PA: Institute for Research on Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

Special Guests Dr. Jennifer Delaney (Associate Professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign & Board Member, Illinois Board of Higher Education) (4-5pm EST)

What's Due Reading Reflection #4

Class 6
Thursday, July 22
Performance-based funding

What is the policy?
What are the intended and unintended consequences of the policy?
Read:
Ortagus, J.C., Kelchen, R., Rosinger, K.O., & Voorhees, N. (2020). Performance funding in American higher education: A systematic synthesis of the intended and unintended consequences. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(4), 520-550.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373720953128>

Optional:
Dougherty, K. J., & Natow, R. S. (2015). *The politics of performance funding for higher education: Origins, discontinuations, and transformations*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
• Chapter 7

What's Due Reading Reflection #5

Week 4: Institutional Policy

Class 7
Tuesday, July 27
Affirmative action & institutional diversity issues

What is the policy? Why does
Read:

the policy need to change? Wright, D. K., & Garces, L. M. (2018). Understanding the controversy around race-based affirmative action in American higher education. *Controversies on campus: Debating the issues confronting American universities in the 21st century*, 3-21.

How do institutions implement and respond to policies? Glasener, K. M., Martell, C. A., & Posselt, J. R. (2019). Framing diversity: Examining the place of race in institutional policy and practice post-affirmative action. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000086>

Special Guests Leykia Brill Nulan (Dean of Admissions, Mount Holyoke College) (3-4pm EST)
Dr. Julie Wollman (President, Widener University) (3-4pm EST)

What's Due Reading Reflection #6

Class 8 **Institutional reforms for student access and equity**
Thursday, July 29

What is the policy problem? **CHOOSE ONE**
Watch:
ASHE Presidential [webinar](#): Invisible No More: How Three Vital Postsecondary Sectors are Navigating the Pandemic While Serving their Students and Communities.
<https://www.ashe.ws/webinars2020>

OR

Listen:
MDRC Rural Higher Education Initiative Podcast:
<https://www.mdrc.org/podcast/rural-higher-education-challenges-opportunities-part-i> &
<https://www.mdrc.org/podcast/rural-higher-education-challenges-and-opportunities-part-iii>

How do institutions respond to policy problems? **Read:**
Nienhusser, H.K. (2014). Role of community colleges in the implementation of postsecondary education enrollment policies

for undocumented students. *Community College Review*, 42(1), 3-22.

What's Due Reading Reflection #7

Week 5: Future of higher education and wrapping up

Class 9 **Future of higher education**
Tuesday, August
3

What should
policy agendas
look like for the
future?

Read:

Carey, K. (2020 September/October). How to save higher education: A New Deal for America's sinking colleges. *Washington Monthly*.

<https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/september-october-2020/how-to-save-higher-education/>

Finney, J. E., Hultquist, K. D., Pattison, S. D., & Snyder, M. J. (June 2020). *A generational challenge: State postsecondary education policies to support economic recovery and individual opportunity*. HCM Strategists and Institute for Research on Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

<https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/covid-19-higher-education-budgets>

What's Due Reading Reflection #8

Class 10 **Final Presentations**
Thursday, August
5

No assigned readings

What's Due Final presentation
Critical policy analysis paper (Friday, August 6, 5pm)