COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Much discussion surrounding educational policy currently is international in character. Presidents, prime ministers, and legislators, professional associations, and various policymakers (including those in countries of both the developed and developing worlds, and also many international organizations) have become concerned with how policies, practices, and outcomes in one country compare to those in other countries.

In the United States, federal, state and even some district-level policy call for benchmarking the performance of its educational system with that of other nations. Many other nations are also engaged in the collection and use of data on the comparative performance of their educational systems, and using them as important inputs for policymaking. Aware of the increasingly cross-national competitive nature of current trends in educational policy making, nations of the developing world, newly democratic countries, and post-communist countries are also looking to comparisons of educational systems to inform domestic policy making.

Comparing educational systems is not new. As modern educational systems have arisen, a vast body of scholarship has also originated, comparing causes and outcomes of a variety of different educational practices and purposes. But what does it mean to compare educational systems? What kind of knowledge do comparative studies of educational systems provide and how does this knowledge differ from that produced by other types of educational research? What is the difference between Comparative and International studies in education policy? How do these approaches to inquiry in education inform our knowledge of educational policy and politics and inform specific policies in education?

This course will explore these questions. First, we will review the ways in which comparative and international educational research has been pursued, focusing on issues of theory and methodology. We will be balancing our reading between theoretical and methodological treatments of comparative education. We will also review a number of
recent examples of empirical work. After a general exploration of major methodological and theoretical issues in the area of Comparative and International Education, we will examine literature addressing two overarching themes:

- Education and Economic Development
- Quality, Standards, and Accountability

These themes will provide the opportunity to pursue fundamental questions of purpose, theory, method, and various empirical logics in international and cross-national inquiry in educational policy studies. Each will also provide the opportunity to understand the cross-national state-of-play in policy making (and the consideration of policy alternatives) concerning the themes themselves, and how the themes are related to specific policy directions in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the education system.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Reading and Writing Assignments: There are weekly reading/writing assignments that together will be worth 40% of the final grade. Students must prepare a written response in the form of a 4 page (maximum) memorandum, addressing the week’s reading assignment. This must be delivered to the instructor’s departmental mailbox – or sent by E-mail (valverde@uamail.albany.edu) – by 9:00 am on the day of the class.

The first 3 pages of each memorandum must be a brief essay addressing the following questions:

- What are the central problem(s) of policy scholarship or practice addressed in the readings?
- What are the main theoretical and methodological strengths or weaknesses of each reading in illuminating problems? How do these compare across readings?
- What is the specific value (or lack of value) of cross-national comparison in these works’ efforts to resolve the issues of scholarship or practice that they address?

These first three pages should not be a summary of the readings, rather they should be used to carry out an analytical commentary and critical evaluation of the issues that arise in the works. These memos will be evaluated according to the effectiveness, insight, and originality with which they assess the literature. They cannot cover all of the conceivable issues and should not attempt to – an additional criterion for evaluation will be the degree of focus and analytical depth attained. You are encouraged to endeavor to connect these reading to your own experience if possible - to cases or examples you know off, other
country contexts (including your own) etc. Follow the rules and guidelines for writing assignments distributed separately.

The final page of the memorandum must contain a list of discussion points – themes, issued, specific points (or even specific passages of the readings) that the student proposes as topics for classroom discussion. Here you will put forward specific ideas for class discussion: you might mention specific parts of readings that you would like to understand better, or discuss; perhaps methodological features that you would like to explore further; maybe questionable logic, evidence or argument that you would like to debate further; etc.

Any memorandum turned in after the deadline, for any reason, will be assessed a penalty of one full letter grade. There are no memoranda due on the days in which the class symposia are conducted.

There are no books assigned for this course. Most of the articles to be read are available electronically through the U. Albany library electronic journals service (SFX). Those that are not will be available in the form of scanned articles on Electronic Reserve. Articles available as scanned documents through the library’s ERes service (the course password is eaps666) are indicated in this syllabus with the symbol “§”.

Class Symposia: 30% of the final grade will be based upon the student’s preparation and presentation of a paper in a class symposium. There will be two symposia – one at the end of each ‘theme’ segment of the course. Students will be randomly assigned to the symposia at the Week 2 session of the course. Once a student is assigned, she or he will be responsible for:

- Coordinating with other panel members responsibility for preparing a 20 minute presentation, reviewing literature from peer-reviewed research in comparative and/or international education policy as it addresses a specific topic suited to the symposium theme.
- Students will be responsible for making decisions with other symposia members and the Instructor concerning how they will interpret the themes and which sorts of papers they will write to address the theme. Students are urged to think of specific questions that will help them articulate the overall symposium theme in terms of their own interests as researchers or practitioners. As a general guideline, students should anticipate writing a paper reviewing about 8 scholarly journal articles focusing on their specific topic, all of which represent empirical comparative or international policy research, in a paper of approximately 20 double-spaced typed pages in length (not counting references, displays or illustrations). Instructor
approval of the specific topic, outline and literature, is required.
- Students will discuss their ideas with the instructor, during a planning session that is set aside on the course syllabus. Here students will decide how they will present interrelated papers and their strategies for identifying and reviewing the literature. This session will also be devoted to further clarifying student roles and expectations regarding student performance on these panels. Students are urged to follow-up with individual meetings with the instructor and meetings with their symposia colleagues outside of class.
- Students are urged to relate the symposium theme to their own interests, coming up with specific paper topics that interpret the general theme as it addresses perhaps a part of the educational system (primary, secondary, tertiary, formal sector, non-formal, etc.), or a specific world region or country, or perhaps a research area or specific policy challenge.
- Students will be responsible for preparing a 20-minute presentation based on their paper. This presentation will begin reviewing the assigned readings, and other sources identified and reviewed by the discussion leader in consultation with the instructor, and proceed with a critical evaluation and assessment of their findings / conclusions.
- The instructor will serve as convener of each symposium – monitoring the use of time, serving as discussant, and managing the question and answer period that must follow each symposium discussion.
- Students are urged to consider the papers that they present in the symposia as penultimate drafts. Results from the symposia should be used in final revisions. All symposia papers are due to the instructor on May 2.

*Essay Examination:* This course will conclude with a final examination. This will be an essay examination that students will be given one-week to solve independently - consulting their class notes, books, or any other material they wish. The questions will be based on the readings required for the course and material presented and discussed in class. There will be no short-answer or multiple-choice questions.

*Preparedness and participation:* Regular attendance, preparedness, and contribution to class discussions and activities are necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for a passing grade in this course. Absences, lack of preparation, or failure to contribute will be taken into account in the final course grade.

*Standards for written work:* A separate document, entitled “Rules and Guidelines for Writing Assignments” distributed with the syllabus, describes standards and expectations in this regard. It is the student’s responsibility to understand and adhere to these rules. Consult
the instructor if you have any questions regarding these

*University statement regarding accommodations for students with disabilities:* Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe that you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Student Disabled Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.

*Office Hours:* Regular office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm. Outside of these hours, appointments are available by prior arrangement only.

*Procedures and schedule of assignments and activities:* The above procedures and the schedule that follows are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion in the event of extenuating circumstances.
# Topics and Assignments

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<th>WEEK</th>
<th>THEME / TOPIC</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS / ACTIVITIES</th>
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<td>1 –  Jan 24</td>
<td>No assignment</td>
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<td>2 – Jan 31</td>
<td>Overview of comparative education</td>
<td>- Read the special number of the journal: <em>Comparative Education</em> Vol 36, No 3, 2000 - “Comparative Education for the Twenty First Century”</td>
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| 3 – Feb 7 | Overview of comparative education                 | - Read the special theme issue of the journal: *Higher Education*: Vol. 32, No. 4, 1996  
- This class will also be devoted to organizing student roles and responsibilities regarding in-class symposia.                                                                                           |
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| 5 – Feb 28 | Education and Economic Development (cont.)                           | • (participants in Week 7 symposium will have final approval from instructor of outlines for their papers and presentations no later than today)  
IN ADDITION, ALL MUST READ  
|            |                                                                     | **SYMPOSIUM – THEME 1**                                                                                                                                                                                   |
### Theme 2: Quality, Standards and Accountability

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(participants in Week 11 symposium will have final approval from instructor of outlines for their papers and presentations no later than today) |
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<td>11 – April 18</td>
<td>SYMPOSIUM – THEME 2</td>
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| 12 – May 2  | Full Circle: Potential, Strengths and Weaknesses in Comparative and International Studies in Education Policy | • All Symposium Papers Due  
• No reading assignment  
• Final Examination will be distributed at end of class, it will be due (physical copy delivered to Instructor’s departmental mailbox) on Monday, May 9th at 7:05 pm. |