Course Overview

“History is not kind to idlers.” – The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983)

The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* generated an abundance of school reform activity in the three decades that followed its release. Efforts to improve U.S. public schools ranged from more rigorous curriculum, longer school days, restructuring, site based management, and teacher empowerment initiatives to increased time for instructional planning and preparation, differentiated roles for teachers, teaming, and alternative assessment. Yet, the quest for large-scale improvement proved elusive because reform efforts failed to meaningfully consider the single most important factor in facilitating student learning and achievement—the practice of teaching. A new wave of reform—backed up by unprecedented federal policies—now promises to change the nature of teaching and learning in public schools across the country. Can such external pressure lead to sustained and meaningful improvement? This course provides students with the theoretical and empirical bases for understanding effective classroom instruction and the processes by which effective instructional practice can be brought to scale at the school and district levels. The course also calls on students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the current policy landscape and research that explores and illuminates the complexities of improving teaching and learning in U.S. public schools.

Graduate School of Education Conceptual Framework

The mission of the University of Massachusetts Lowell is to enhance the intellectual, personal and cultural development of its students through excellent, affordable educational programs. The University seeks to meet the needs of the Commonwealth today and into the future and supports the development of sustainable technologies and communities through its teaching, research, scholarship and engagement. The Graduate School of Education (GSE) contributes to this mission by developing professionals who help transform the region and beyond through leadership roles in education. Through this course, the GSE’s commitment to “Education for Transformation” produces graduates who:

1) Demonstrate instructional leadership by applying their professional knowledge, judgment, and skill in their respective organizations;
2) Promote equity of educational opportunity for all learners by improving the quality of instruction in their respective organizations;
3) Collaborate with other educators, parents, and community representatives to place instructional improvement at the forefront of reform efforts and, in doing so, support educational excellence;
4) Use inquiry and research around issues of practice to address educational challenges; and
5) Have the ability to create productive dialogue about instructional practice and student learning in order to transform relationships among people in schools, mobilizing them to accomplish purposes their shared values.
Scope of the Course and Class Format

This course is grounded in three fundamental assumptions about leadership and instructional improvement. First, leaders must be able to use empirical evidence and structured dialogue as tools for improvement. Throughout the semester students will become skilled observers of classroom practice who establish a shared language that facilitates discussion of classroom teaching as a common “text.” Second, because leaders must be able to make hard decisions based on limited information in ambiguous situations, this course is grounded in the case method approach to teaching and learning. Derived from real events, cases immerse students in the conflicts and challenges they will face as leaders in their organizations. Students will be presented with cases about school improvement in which they take on the role of decision maker (or protagonist). As such, they will identify the problem they are faced with, examine the causes, consider courses of action, and make and defend recommendations. Finally, effective leaders have a working knowledge of relevant theory, which helps them make sense of their organizations. Students will therefore be asked to apply theory in their interpretations and discussions of cases, observations and analyses of teaching, and research and presentations on school improvement efforts.

Leadership In Schooling Outcomes for Doctoral Students

Students enrolled in the Leadership in Schooling Doctoral Program are expected to demonstrate proficiency with outcomes identified by the program faculty as essential to the field and consistent with the Graduate School of Education Framework. Table 1 below identifies the outcomes addressed in this course.

Table 1: Leadership in Schooling Outcomes Covered in Instructional Leadership and School Reform.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Student Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Demonstrates familiarity with seminal and current educational leadership literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thoughtfully discusses the relationship of policy and practice based on research and theory.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Assesses and evaluates educational research, including the benefits and limitations of various methodologies.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Accesses high quality research in general and in connection with specific question(s) and topic(s).</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Distinguishes among empirical research, theory, commentary, journalism, practitioner accounts etc.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Demonstrates a commitment to social justice, meaning the improvement of education for all children and all families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Plans and evaluates curriculum, policy, instructional practice, and administrator/leader effectiveness in light of research and theory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14a</td>
<td>Presents and dialogues effectively in speech and writing about one's research ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14b</td>
<td>Presents and dialogues effectively in speech and writing about one’s research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Thinks flexibly about educational issues, demonstrating openness to new ideas and an ability to integrate them into one’s thinking.</td>
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Course Assignments and Grades

In order to demonstrate proficiency in the areas outlined above, students will be expected to complete of the following assignments, which will be explained in detail as the course proceeds:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Class Participation (Briefs &amp; Discussion)</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
<th>50 points</th>
<th>25%</th>
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The success of this course is contingent upon thoughtful, engaged participation of all class members. Students should come to class well prepared to discuss all readings and to take part in class activities. Each week’s preparation typically includes a selection of background readings, a case, and study questions. Students are expected to prepare a one-page brief prior to class. Briefs are intended to be short, informal notes that help students articulate the main ideas they take away from the readings and that provide the instructor a snapshot of student thinking. Students may use briefs to capture and reflect on controversies or interesting insights, but briefs are not to be used to summarize the readings. A typical brief might contain a paragraph or two and/or a list of bullet points; the writing does not have to be polished or formal, but it should be clear and on point.

Briefs should be posted on the course Blackboard in the appropriate weekly assignment folder no later than 9:00 AM each Wednesday morning. Students may choose not to submit a brief one time over the course of the semester without penalty. However, students not submitting briefs are expected to come to class prepared to participate in discussion. The weekly briefs serve as a basis for organizing class discussion. They will not be given a letter grade nor will they be returned with comments, but they will constitute part of the basis for determining how well students are prepared for class.

A few notes about in-class discussion:

- Talk to each other as much as possible; don’t expect the right answer or direct mediation from the front of the room.
- Don’t be afraid of dead air; it could mean people are thinking hard about what they are going to say.
- Listen to each other and build on the discussion. Rephrase, repeat, and acknowledge to establish clarity and to stay on point.
- Don’t be afraid to disagree, respectfully and thoughtfully. (Check out tips for using advocacy/inquiry language on the Blackboard.)
- Don’t be afraid to take risks, to float controversial ideas, or to be wrong. Rather than focusing on being right, make an argument and marshal evidence to support your ideas. Think about how your contributions really contribute…do they help you and other people understand the issues in constructive ways?
Policy Roundtable Due 2.5 20 points 10%
Students are expected to work in teams of two to examine and lead discussion about the evolution and impact (real or potential) of an educational policy. The guidelines for this assignment will be presented and discussed during the first class meeting.

Analysis of Teaching Paper Due 2.26 50 points 25%
Students are expected to analyze one teacher’s instructional practice. This will require an observation of and interview with the teacher. The final product will be a 10-12 page paper. The guidelines for this assignment will be presented and discussed during the third class meeting.

Case Analysis Paper Due 3.12 20 points 10%
Students are expected to analyze a case (provided by the instructor) using empirical and theoretical research discussed in class. The guidelines for this assignment will be presented and discussed during the sixth class meeting.

Final Research Proposal Due 5.10 60 points 30%
Students are expected to craft a research proposal that explores a question related to leadership’s role in building instructional capacity. A structure for the proposal will be provided; the final product will be a 12-15 page paper. Students will present their proposal ideas in roundtables on the last day of class. The guidelines for this assignment will be presented and discussed in the seventh class meeting.

% Scale | Grade | GPA | Comment
---|---|---|---
99-100 | A+ | 4.0 | Work of the highest professional standard
Demonstrating independent and exemplary performance.

95-98 | A | 4.0 | Excellent work demonstrating independent and high quality performance

90-94 | A- | 3.7 | Very good work, indicating consistent and careful thought and attention to the task, but requiring some areas of improvement.

88-89 | B+ | 3.3 | Good work, carefully executed for the most part, yet requiring several areas of improvement.

84-87 | B | 3.0 | Work of graduate standard, but omissions exist or careful analysis is not evident.

Below Graduate Standard:
80-83 | B- | 2.7 | Effort is evident, but work indicates lack of understanding of the demands of the task

Required Texts, Cases, and Notes


HBR Case: Timility Middle School [http://hbr.org/] $6.95
Session 1 (1/22): Introductions and Course Overview

Introductions
Case-based Discussion
How to Analyze a Case [CW]
Course Overview/Blackboard
Syllabus Q&A

Assignment #1: Policy Roundtable [HO/CW]

Session 2 (1/29): Education Reform as a Public Policy Priority

Discussion: How are issues related to education conceptualized as problems? How have problems or issues in education become subjects for public policymaking? What factors have influenced the emergence of education as a public problem? How has the agenda for education policy changed over the past three decades? What issues drive the agenda and why? Who and/or what institutions are given the responsibility for doing something about the issue?

Readings to prepare:


Case: Mapping the Evolution of Education Policy
“Education Emerges as Major Issue in 1984 Presidential Campaigning” [CW]
“The Road to Charlottesville”
http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/negp30.pdf [CW]
“The White House at Work: President Clinton Calling for Accountability”
“Accountability as a Civil Rights Issue”
http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/sites/default/files/ssn_key_findings_rhodes_on_education_as_a_civil_rights_cause.pdf [CW]
No Child Left Behind http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html
“President Bush on the No Child Left Behind Act”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=invKzk3vaRI
“Testing Our Schools” (Frontline)
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/etc/video.html
“Race to the Top Executive Summary”
“Race to the Top for Education Reform”
“Parsing Fact From Fiction in ‘Won’t Back Down’”
“Education Emerges as Pivotal Issue in 2012 Presidential Election”

Assignment #1: Preparation for Roundtables (team time)

Session 3 (2/5): The Policy Landscape
Discussion: Policy Roundtables
Readings to prepare:
http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=learning+from+experience+mcLaughlin&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C22 [CW]

Assignment #1: Policy Roundtables due
Assignment #2: Observation and Analysis of Teaching [HO]

Session 4 (2/12): The Relationship Between Teaching and Learning
If instructional practice matters, how does it matter? What is the core technology of teaching? What do we know about the transactions and interactions that occur within the classroom—why
are some more effective than others? How do we talk about the instructional practice we observe? Why is it so hard for many teachers to change their practice?

Readings to prepare:
Case: Mrs. Oublier [CW] In-Class Video: Every Child a Reader/Writer

Session 5 (2/19): On-line The Relationship Between Teaching and Learning (Winter Break MA Public Schools)
If instructional practice matters, how does it matter? What is the core technology of teaching? What do we know about the transactions and interactions that occur within the classroom—why are some more effective than others? How do we talk about the instructional practice we observe? Why is it so hard for many teachers to change their practice? Can we learn from other countries?

Readings to prepare:

Case: (In-class video) US Algebra & Japanese Geometry

Session 6 (2/26): The Relationship Between School-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
How, if at all, can school leaders create conditions for improved teaching and learning? To what degree, if any, should principals be involved in instructional improvement efforts?

Readings to prepare:
Case: The Turn-Around at Highland Elementary School [RC]

Assignment #2: Teaching Analysis due
Assignment #3: Case Analysis [HO]

Session 7 (3/5): The Relationship Between School-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
How, if at all, can school leaders create conditions for improved teaching and learning? How do relationships and expectations influence teachers’ work and students’ achievement?

Readings to prepare:

Case: South River [RC] In-class Video: Writing a Complex Problem
Final Assignment: Research Proposal [HO]

Session 8 (3/12): The Relationship Between School-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
How, if at all, can school leaders create conditions for improved teaching and learning? What role does teacher collaboration play in capacity building?

Readings:

Case: Souhegan HS [HO & In-class video]

NO CLASS 3/19 (UML Spring Break)
Session 9 (3/26): The Relationship Between School-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
How, if at all, can school leaders create conditions for improved teaching and learning?

Readings to prepare:
Case: Worcester East Middle School [CW] or Timilty MS [RC]

Assignment #3 due
Assignment #4 prospectus due

Session 10 (4/2): The Relationship Between District-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
What role should district level leadership in school improvement efforts? Can district leaders influence the quality of instructional practice across schools?

Readings to prepare:

Case: NYC Community District 2 [CW]

Session 11 (4/9): The Relationship Between District-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
How can district leaders create coherence across schools? Why should they? What does strategy have to do with it? What’s tight? What’s loose?

Readings to prepare:


Case: Bristol City Schools [RC]

Session 12 (4/16): The Relationship Between District-Level Leadership and Teaching and Learning
Can unions forge the path to large-scale improvement? What gets bargained and what doesn’t (and does it matter)?
Readings:
Case: Central High School [RC]

Session 13 (4/23): On-line Workshops (Spring Break MA Public Schools)

Session 14 (4/30): Course Evaluation and Research Proposal Roundtables