

**Higher Education Finance & Policy**  
**PPPA 6085, Section 11**  
**Spring 2024 Syllabus**

**Time & Location:**

Time: Mondays, 6:10pm-8:00pm  
Location: 1957 E Street, Room 314

**Professor: Stephanie Riegg Cellini**

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**Virtual Office Hours:**

Tuesdays, 11am-1pm (<https://doodle.com/bp/stephaniecellini/office-hours>)  
Other times available in-person, phone, or virtual by appointment – email me!

**Course Description**

This course provides an overview of the U.S. higher education system and current policy debates surrounding the value of a college education, who can afford it, and how we pay for it. The primary goals of the course are to (1) familiarize students the U.S. higher education landscape, systems of college finance, policy processes, and key policy debates, (2) understand the theoretical foundations of private and public investment in postsecondary education, and (3) develop the analytic tools to evaluate higher education policy and effectively communicate results. Policy aims we will explore include equity, access, persistence, completion, affordability, efficiency, innovation, and accountability. Specific policy areas include financial aid, student debt and repayment, free community college, affirmative action, state and federal support for colleges, regulation of the for-profit sector, mentoring and advising initiatives, and many others. While there is no pre-requisite for this class and I welcome graduate students from all disciplines, the course is designed for Master's Public Policy (MPP), Master's Public Administration (MPA), and PhD students with a familiarity with policy analysis, economics, statistics, and evaluation.

**Learning Objectives**

Through discussions, readings, and assignments, students will develop knowledge and skills that will enable them to:

- Understand the structure and financing of U.S. higher education
- Understand federal higher education policy processes

- Grasp foundational economic theories underlying private and social investment in postsecondary education
- Assess the equity and efficiency implications of various college financing systems, including student aid and government funding at the federal, state, and local levels
- Interpret academic research and policy analyses of higher education topics
- Articulate and evaluate opposing arguments on current higher education policy topics
- Draft a thoughtful public comment on a rule or regulation
- Conduct an analysis of a higher education policy
- Use quantitative data to create tables and graphs
- Communicate the results of analyses to academic, policy, and lay audiences

## Course Requirements

### Class Participation (15%)

- You are expected to attend class regularly, turn your camera on (if class is online), do the readings, and contribute to class discussion. I will occasionally assign small tasks, reading responses, or activities in class—completing these activities will be part of your class participation grade. Please come to class prepared by doing the readings!

### Public Comment (15%)

- The Department of Education has been extremely active in issuing higher education regulations in the past few years. You will prepare a short public comment on a recent or upcoming regulation. I will identify the rule and provide more specific guidance on this type of writing in class. (~2-3 pages)

### Proposal (15%)

- You will write a memo describing the policy topic or research question you would like to work on for your policy report, op-ed, and presentation. You will be expected to provide some background, identify literature or news stories on the topic, describe the goals of the policy, and identify key questions surrounding the policy. (~3 pages)

### Policy Report (35%)

- You will write a final paper in the form of a policy report assessing a current higher education policy topic or question. It will require you to gather, analyze, and synthesize the theory, data, and empirical evidence (for and against) a higher education policy and make a recommendation. You will be required to include at least one table or graph in your report and you have the option of including additional quantitative or qualitative data and analyses depending on your interests and skills. More detailed instructions will be handed out in class. (~8-10 pages)

### Op-Ed (10%)

- You will craft a short opinion piece of no more than 900 words summarizing your research and making a recommendation. I encourage you to submit this work to a relevant media outlet for publication. (~2 pages)

#### Presentation (10%)

- You will present your policy topic and preliminary results from your paper to the class in about 10-15 minutes. Presentations will take place in the final weeks of class and all students are encouraged to provide feedback to their peers.

#### Grades & Expectations

- A (Excellent): Exceptional work for a graduate student. Shows a strong command of the material. Grade points = 4.0
- A- (Very Good): Very strong work for a graduate student. Shows signs of a strong understanding of appropriate analytical approaches and meets professional standards. Grade points = 3.7
- B+ (Good): Sound work for a graduate student. This grade indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic course objectives. Grade points = 3.3
- B (Adequate): Competent work for a graduate student with some evident weaknesses. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but the understanding or application of some important issues is less than complete. Grade points = 3.0
- B- (Inadequate): Weak work for a graduate student. Understanding of key issues is incomplete. A cumulative GPA of B- will lead to academic probation. Grade points = 2.7
- Grades of below B- indicate extremely weak performance and insufficient grasp of the material.

#### Textbook & Readings

I believe in making higher education affordable, so I am doing my best to use open access materials that will be made available to you on Blackboard (BB). If you encounter any pay walls as you access course materials or materials for your own project or assignments for this class, please check with the GW library for access and contact me if you still cannot access the resource for free. Please note that the readings listed below may change I may change the order of some course sessions depending on current events. Updated topics and readings will always be on BB.

The readings consist of three types: (1) descriptive papers, reports, and textbook chapters designed to give you background, (2) rigorous academic policy analyses and evaluations, (3) news articles or podcasts on current policy topics.

Please read the assigned readings before the class in which they are assigned. Use your judgement on readings: short news items should be read in detail, but longer technical papers, reports, and textbook chapters can be skimmed (and you may skip technical details – please

read the “how to read a journal article” tips posted on BB). Consider returning to any/all sources for more details and additional resources as you work on your assignments. I will guide you to other resources throughout the semester that you can use for your project and general information on your own, including periodicals, think tanks, journals, library resources, and data sets.

## Technology

If you have a laptop with Excel, there will be some days where it will be helpful to bring it to class, and I will let you know ahead of time if that is the case. However, in-class activities are usually done in pairs or teams, so not everyone needs one.

We will mostly be meeting in person, but there may be a week or two where I need to meet online. Therefore, please ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate. Ideally, you should be able to:

- Connect to Blackboard for course materials.
- Use a webcam and Zoom. The Zoom link for all meetings is on the BB main menu.
- Use PDF-creation software to convert and upload assignments.
- Seek technological help when necessary. Please use help link on the main menu BB. You can also call the [Columbian College IT Help Desk](#).

## Class Schedule & Outline

### Week 1 (Jan. 22)

- Overview and introductions
- The structure of U.S. higher education & the policy processes that shape it
- Policy focus: Higher Education Act of 1965
- Activity: Higher ed choice reflection
  - Lovenheim & Turner, Chapter 13 “Market Dimensions of Higher Ed in the U.S.”
  - Stratford, *Politico: Weekly Education*, January 8, 2024
  - Higher Education Act Primer, *Congressional Research Service*, 2021 (for reference, skim summary and intro only)

For the public comment assignment (in the next few weeks):

- ED’s income-driven repayment announcement, proposed regulations, and request for information, January 10, 2023 (skim)
- Bernard, “What you need to know about Biden’s Income-Driven Repayment Proposal,” *New York Times*, 2023 (a summary)
- Ahmed, Joyce & Looney, “How to Effectively Comment on Regulations,” *Brookings Institution*, 2018 (writing help)

### Week 2 (Jan. 29)

- Human capital theory
- The social and private returns to higher education
- Policy focus: Income-driven repayment
- Activity: Writing a public comment
  - Lovenheim & Turner, Chapter 4, “Human Capital”
  - Lovenheim & Turner, Chapter 6 “The Returns to Education Investment”
  - Tough, “Americans are Losing Faith in the Value of College: Whose Fault is that?” *NYTimes Magazine*, 2023
  - Deming, “The College Backlash Has Gone Too Far,” *The Atlantic*, 2023

#### Week 3 (Feb. 5)

- Paying for college: federal, state, and local finance
- Policy focus: Performance-based funding, recessions, and stimulus funding
- Activity: Exploring the Digest of Education Statistics
  - Pew Trusts, “Two Decades of Change in Federal and State Higher Education Funding,” 2019
  - Whitford, “State Higher Ed Funding Increased...” *Inside Higher Ed*, 2021
  - Riordan, “Why did the CARES Act give more money to a hair schools than to a community college?” *NBC News* 2020
  - DoED, “U.S. Department of Education Announces \$3.2 Billion in Additional Higher Ed Emergency Relief Funds...” *DoED* 2021

#### **Monday, Feb. 12 Public Comment Due Before Class at 6:10pm**

#### Week 4 (Feb. 12)

- Student aid and information
- Policy focus: Types of aid (Pell Grants, Merit Aid, State Aid, GI Bill, and Loans)
- Activity: Exploring the College Scorecard
  - Lovenheim & Turner, Chapter 14, “Paying for College”
  - Hoxby & Avery, “The Missing ‘One-Offs,” Summary *NBER* 2013
  - Hoxby & Turner, “What High-Achieving Low-Income Students Know About College,” *NBER* 2015
  - Dynarski, Page & Scott-Clayton, “College Costs, Financial Aid, and Student Decisions,” *NBER* 2022
  - Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, “The Tax Benefits for Education Don’t Increase Education,” *Brookings* 2018

No Class, Feb. 19 – President’s Day

#### Week 5 (Feb. 26)

- Debt and repayment
- Policy focus: Loan forgiveness
- Possible Guest Speaker: Claire Viall, House Education and Workforce Committee

- Looney, “Putting Student Loan Forgiveness in Perspective: How Costly is it and Who Benefits?” *Brookings*, 2021
- Cellini, “Causal Inference and Omitted Variable Bias in Financial Aid Research: Assessing Solutions,” *Review of Higher Education*, 2008
- Fuller, Benedict, French, “Why Student Debt Keeps Growing, Even When Borrowers Keep Paying,” *WSJ* 2022

**Monday, Mar. 4: Proposal Due Before Class at 6:10pm**

Week 6 (Mar. 4)

- Access, admissions, and equity
- Policy focus: Admissions after affirmative action
  - Lovenheim & Turner, Chapter 15, “The Economics of College Life”
  - Dynarski, “At Elite Colleges Racial Diversity Requires Affirmative Action,” *New York Times*, 2018
  - Arcidiacono, Kinsler, and Ransom “Affirmative Action, Transparency, and the SFFA v. Harvard Case,” *U. of Chicago Law Review* 2020
  - Leohardt, “The Misguided War on the SAT,” *New York Times*, 2024

No Class, Mar. 11 – Spring Break

Week 7 (Mar. 18)

- Performance, equity, and accountability
- Policy focus: Gainful employment
- Activity: Using the College Scorecard
  - Baker et. al, “Why Information Alone is not Enough to Improve Higher Education Outcomes,” *Brookings* 2021
  - Cellini, “The Alarming Rise in For-Profit College Enrollment,” *Brookings* 2020
  - Cunningham, Park, Engle, “Minority-Serving Institutions: Doing More with Less,” *Institute for Higher Education Policy*, 2014

Week 8 (Mar. 25)

- Persistence and completion
- Policy focus: Promising interventions
- Activity: Using ED’s Powerstats
  - Bound, Lovenheim, Turner “Why Have College Completion Rates Declined? An Analysis of Changing Student Preparation and Collegiate Resources”. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2010
  - Scrivener et al. “Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students,” *MDRC* 2015

- Bettinger & Baker “The Effects of Student Coaching an Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Advising,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 2014

#### Week 9 (Apr. 1)

- Social mobility and community colleges
- Policy focus: Free community college
- Activity: Exploring the Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes Data
  - Chetty et al. “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility” Executive Summary, 2017
  - Denning, “College on the Cheap: Consequences of Community College Tuition Reductions,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2017
  - Deming, “Tuition-Free Community College Could Cost Less Than You Think” *New York Times*, 2019
  - Carey, “The Biden Plan for Free Community College has a Big Challenge” 2021

#### Week 10 (Apr. 8)

- The rise of for-profit, online education, third-party servicers, and AI
- Policy focus: Virtual learning and AI policy
  - Cellini, “How Does Virtual Learning Impact Students in Higher Education?” Brookings 2020
  - Kofoed et al. “Zooming to Class: Experimental Evidence on College Students’ Online Learning During COVID-19” IZA, 2021
  - Cellini, “For-profit colleges in the United States: Insights from Two Decades of Research,” Ch. 17 of the *Routledge Handbook of the Economics of Education*, 2021

#### Week 11 (Apr. 15)

- Institutional funding: Endowments, college sports, and campus culture
- Policy focus: Paying players, Title IX, culture wars
- Activity: Crafting an op-ed
  - Scott-Clayton, “Do Big-Time Sports Mean Big-Time Support for Universities?” *NYT* 2012
  - Economist, “America’s Supreme Court Paves the Way for College Athletes to get Paid” 2021
  - Carrasco, “Some College Athletes Cash In While Others Lose Out,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 2021
  - *Consider This* Podcast, “How Name, Image, and Likeness Contracts Are Transforming College Sports” 2022
  - Fendrick & Pell, “In AP survey, ADs raise worries about women’s college sports” *Associated Press*, 2021

#### Week 12 (Apr. 22)

- The future of higher education
- Other topics in the news or guest speaker

Week 13 (Apr. 29)

- **Presentation Day 1**

Week 14 (Wed., May 1, GWU's "Designated Monday")

- **Presentation Day 2**

**Monday, May 6: Policy Report & Op-Ed Due by 11:59pm**

### **Class Policies & Information**

- **Blackboard:** The course website is accessible with your GW email address through GW's Blackboard academic software at <http://blackboard.gwu.edu>. The most important link for this class is the "Outline & Readings" on the main menu. There you will find all readings organized by week, as well as in-class materials, and recordings (posted after class). Under "Assignments" you will find instructions and links to upload your assignments.
- **Turning Things In:** Assignments should be uploaded as a single pdf document on Blackboard by the due date.
- **Deadlines:** This syllabus provides all relevant due dates for assignments. Unless otherwise noted, please turn in assignments before class time (6:10pm) on the date it is due, unless noted otherwise on the syllabus. It is your responsibility to ensure that you upload them in time. Late assignments will be marked down for each day they are late. Please let me know ahead of time if you need an extension.
- **Collaboration:** Please feel free to get feedback on your assignments from a peer, but you must turn in your own work.
- **Camera:** If we need to have virtual meetings, please turn on your camera, if possible. It helps improve my teaching and helps us get to know each other. I understand that interruptions, technical glitches, and personal circumstances may not always make this possible, but please try.
- **Recordings:** I will try my best to record our class sessions and I will post them on BB after the class meets. These recordings are only to be used for academic purposes and are not to be distributed or quoted to others outside of our class.
- **Missing Class:** If you need to miss class for any reason, please let me know, since attendance will count toward your class participation grade. If you are sick, please stay

home. There will be no penalty for missing for sickness, religious holidays, family emergencies, or other unavoidable conflicts. All class materials will be made available on BB and it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate and watch the recording.

- **Technology in Class:** You may bring a laptop or tablet to class, but please put away your phone (with an exception if you are responsible for someone else's life). I will lower your class participation grade if I see you texting or otherwise engaging in activities unrelated to class.
- **Credit Hours:** Over 15 weeks, students will spend about 2 hours per week on direct instruction. Required readings, assignments, and activities are expected to take up about 6 hours of independent work per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend at least 120 hours on this class.
- **Inclusive Classroom:** It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I strive to create an inclusive classroom and present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, culture, and political affiliation. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated.
- **Etiquette:** Free expression is an integral part of graduate education, at the same time, learning works best when we have empathy and respect for others. I strive to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their views and exchanging ideas, while remaining respectful and inclusive. Please ensure that all of your interactions are professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
- **Extra Help:** Please be sure to contact me if you are struggling with course materials. I encourage you join office hours or schedule an appointment early in the semester if you are having trouble.
- **Feedback:** I welcome your feedback on my teaching and the course in general. Please send along interesting articles to share with your classmates or for next year's students.

### **University Policies & Information**

- **Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings:** Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who

impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact [Disability Support Services](#) if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

- **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) Tools:** GAI tools such as ChatGPT are becoming important resources in many fields. Accordingly, you are permitted to use such tools for this class. While you may use GAI tools to help generate ideas and brainstorm, you should note that the material generated by these tools may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that use may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity. If you include content (e.g., ideas, text, code, images, etc.) that was generated, in whole or in part, by GAI tools in work submitted for evaluation in this course, you must document and credit your source, just like you would any other source. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-4 should include a citation such as: "ChatGPT-4. (YYYY, MM DD of query). 'Text of your query.' Generated using OpenAI. chat.openai.com." Material generated using other tools should be cited accordingly. In addition, even if you do not directly quote material in your work from a GAI tool but use it for other purposes such as generating ideas, still include a footnote in your submission indicating how it was used. Failure to do so in this course constitutes failure to attribute under the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.
- **Academic Integrity Code:** Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Academic Integrity to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University, including a transcript notation. The Office of Academic Integrity maintains a permanent record of the violation.

More information is available from the Office of Academic Integrity at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity). The University's "Guide of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments" is available at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments). Contact information: [rights@gwu.edu](mailto:rights@gwu.edu) or 202-994-6757.

- **University policy on observance of religious holidays:** In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see "Religious Holidays" at [provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines](http://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines)

- **Student Support:** For help with GW technology, GWorld, and other support service during fall 2020, go here: <https://online.gwu.edu/student-support>.
- **Virtual academic support:** A full range of academic support is offered through Academic Commons <https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/>. Although it is focused on undergraduates, Academic Commons offers several short videos addressing different virtual learning strategies for the unique circumstances of the fall 2020 semester, [academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills](https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills). They also offer a variety of live virtual workshops to equip students with the tools they need to succeed in a virtual environment, see [tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning](https://tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning).
- **Writing Center:** GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See [gwu.mywconline](https://gwu.mywconline).
- **Disability Support Services (DSS):** Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu) or 202-994-8250.
- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. <https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services> or 202-994-5300.
- **Accessing Reproductive and Sexual Healthcare on Campus:** Accessing reproductive and sexual healthcare can be hard, but there are a variety of resources available to students on and near campus. For a full list of resources see GW RAGE (Reproductive Autonomy and Gender Equity): [gwurage.org/resources](https://gwurage.org/resources).
- **Safety and Security:** In an emergency call GWPD 202-994-6111 or 911. For situation-specific actions, review the Emergency Response Handbook at [safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook](https://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook). In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out. See [go.gwu.edu/shooterpret](https://go.gwu.edu/shooterpret). Stay informed: [safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed](https://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed).