

**Public Policy 632: Practicum in Education Policy  
Education 658: Practicum in Educational Administration:  
Michigan Education in Comparative Perspective**

**Faculty**

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**Course Meeting Time and Location**

Fridays: 9 a.m. – 12 noon, Weill Hall Room 1230

**Overview**

The course will provide students with an opportunity to engage in education policy analysis, both as a way to utilize some of the skills they have learned in their other courses as well as to help them learn about political and practical issues involved in constructing policies. To meet these goals, students work with a “client” agency or organization in the education sector to carry out a policy-related research and/or analysis project. Students will work in groups of 2-5 on projects related to the clients needs and students individual interest and expertise.

This year, the client for this course is the Citizens Research Council of Michigan (CRC). Their website is <http://www.crcmich.org/>. CRC is a non-partisan, policy research organization that “provides factual, unbiased independent information on significant issues concerning state and local government organization and finance.” CRC has received funding to conduct a thorough analysis of future directions for education in Michigan, with a focus on reforms to school finance, governance, and program reforms at the K-12 level.

The main goal for students will be to gather relevant and timely information about topics in the CRC study and to prepare reports for CRC use on these topics. The specific topics are described below.

**Prerequisites**

Knowledge of introductory economics and statistics at the level of the first year Ford School courses.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Class Participation (including small periodic assignments) (15%)  
Peer Evaluations by your group members (15%)  
Final Report (50%)  
Presentation of final report (20%)

**Course Materials**

The course involves active research by students. Instructors will provide background readings for work groups and students will conduct literature and database searches. Most searching will be done through the University of Michigan library system.

**Class Schedule**

Class	Date	Faculty	Agenda		Due
			First Half	Second Half	
1	Fri., Sept. 11	BJ & BR	Overview of class	BJ lecture on high school reform in the US and Michigan	
2	Fri., Sept. 18	BR	BR lecture on Michigan Education in Comparative Perspective	Discussion with the client – staff from CRC	Submit project preferences – returned by Monday
3	Fri., Sept. 25	BJ & BR	BJ lecture on value-added models	Discuss preliminary bibliographies and research designs	Submit preliminary bibliography and research design by 9am
4	Fri., Oct. 2	BJ & BR	Guest Speakers		Submit final bibliography at research design by 9am
5	Fri., Oct. 9	BR	Guest Speakers		
6	Fri., Oct. 16	BJ & BR	Jamey Fitzpatrick, President, Michigan Virtual University		
7	Fri., Oct. 23	BR & BJ	William Miller, Superintendent, Washtenaw Intermediate School District; Paul Bielawski Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, Michigan Department of Education		Submit draft report – feedback within 1 week
8	Fri., Oct. 30	BJ & BR	Guest Speakers		
9	Fri., Nov. 6	NO CLASS – individual group meetings scheduled for this week			
10	Fri., Nov. 13	BJ & BR	Individual group meetings		
11	Fri., Nov 20	BJ	Group Presentations	Group Presentations	
12	Fri., Nov. 27	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING			
13	Fri., Dec 4	BJ & BR	Group Presentations	Group Presentations	
14	Fri., Dec 11	NO CLASS – Students will attend a conference on the Five-Year Anniversary of the Cherry Commission, hosted by Professor Jacob			
	Fri., Dec 18	Paper copies of reports due to Professors Jacob and Rowan by 12noon. Each group should submit a separate copy of their report to each professor.			

## **The Promises and Challenges of Distance Learning In Michigan**

### Background

Distance learning is growing exponentially in the U.S. as states and districts seek to reduce or limit costs while continuing to offer quality education. The Michigan Virtual High School was created by the Michigan legislature in July 2000 as a not-for-profit private corporation. It works with bricks-and-mortar schools across the state to provide students with access to extra classes. These classes are taken online but are taught by certified teachers, and serve students from public as well as private schools along with home-schooled students. The scope of the MVHS grew substantially with the passage of the Michigan Merit Curriculum that requires all public school students in the state to complete an “online learning experience” to graduate high school.

### Project Objectives

The main goal of this project is to objectively assess the costs and benefits of MVHS, and offer policymakers recommendations for improving distance learning in Michigan. This will require students to not only investigate the MVHS, but also explore similar organizations in other states (or nations) as well as other forms of distance learning. As part of the data collection process, students will be expected to speak with teachers and administrators at the MVHS, talk with teachers and administrators in other Michigan districts (who are the “clients” of MVHS), and gather background information on usage, costs, and organizational structure of the MVHS.

## **Implementation of the Michigan Merit Curriculum**

### Background

While the past two decades of education reform in the U.S. have produced some notable gains at the elementary level, there has been little, if any, improvement in academic achievement among high school students. Recognizing this situation, states and districts across the country have increasingly focused reform efforts at the high school level. In particular, states have once again begun to standardize high school curricula and raise high school graduation requirements, and are increasingly providing increased financial assistance for postsecondary education. Since 2004, 18 states plus the District of Columbia report having raised graduation requirements to meet the American Diploma Project's college and work- career-ready curriculum, which includes 4 years of challenging math and English, and an additional 12 states plan to do so in the next few years (Achieve, 2008). Michigan is among the set of states leading the way in these reforms.

In spring 2006, Michigan adopted one of the most comprehensive sets of high school graduation requirements in the country, known as the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Michigan stands out for the rigor and specificity of courses required under the new policy, including Algebra 1, geometry, Algebra 2, Biology 1, chemistry or physics, and at least two years of foreign language. The new requirements are meant to ensure that students have knowledge and skills to succeed in college and the workplace.

This legislation gives districts considerable latitude in implementing the MMC and the state has provided relatively little oversight or technical assistance. This has raised concerns among some that the policy will be enacted unevenly in ways that disadvantage the groups most in need of assistance. At the same time, other critics have complained of unintended consequences such as increased dropout among at-risk students and shortage of teachers in high-needs areas such as math and science.

### Project Objectives:

The goal of this project is to assess the initial implementation of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Specifically, students will (a) examine how different schools and districts have implemented various aspects of the MMC, (b) describe the most common and most difficult challenges schools/districts have encountered thus far, (c) identify particularly promising approaches/programs schools or districts have utilized, and (d) develop recommendations for ways in which the program could be improved for the current and future cohorts of Michigan students. To do so, students will interview teachers and administrators in select districts and examine quantitative data provided by the Michigan Department of Education.

## **Identifying Successful Schools in Michigan**

### Background

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation ushered in a new era of school accountability in the United States. Under NCLB, states and districts spend considerable resources testing students and evaluating schools on a particular metric of performance known as Adequate Yearly Progress. States are also charged with providing technical assistance to schools and districts. As the standards of AYP become increasingly difficult for schools to meet, the task of identifying successful educational practices and helping schools integrate these strategies into their own context will become increasingly important.

### Project Objectives

The main goal of this project is to identify a set of “successful schools” in Michigan. The first task will be to identify schools that appear to be doing particularly well on some type of standardized metric of student achievement. To do so, students will use publicly available data to calculate “value-added” measures of school performance that account for the social, economic and educationally challenges facing each school. Students will combine the results from this value-added analysis with other sources of qualitative data on school performance, including interviews with teachers, administrators and state officials in order to come up with a set of successful schools. With this in hand, students will next conduct case studies of several of these schools, which will include site visits and interviews with teachers and administrators in the schools. Students will then write a report that (a) lists highly successful schools in Michigan and (b) uses data from the case studies to describe what educational practices seem to be associated with success.

## **Michigan Educational Outcomes in Comparative Perspective**

### Background

Since publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, more and more attention has been given in both scholarly research and popular press accounts to levels of education funding, student achievement, and student attainment across education systems, both cross-nationally and across U.S. states. In cross-national comparisons, the U.S. education system is typically found to be a high cost producer of education, achievement outcomes are typically found to be at or below “international” averages, and ethnic and income disparities in academic achievement are found to be higher than those found in many other nations. In inter-state comparisons within the United States, Michigan often ranks in the middle on these indicators of education quality.

### Project Objectives

The main goal of this project is to provide CRC with an objective review of existing data comparing educational costs, achievement and attainment outcomes, and social disparities in achievement and attainment outcomes in Michigan to educational costs, achievement and attainment outcomes, and disparities: (a) in other U.S. states; and (b) in other nations across the world. To meet this goal, students will review existing research on these issues, review and/or work with existing data from international comparisons, and review and/or work with existing data on the U.S. education system. Using these sources, students will prepare a report that graphically summarizes and provides interpretations of these data.

**Performance Management and Steering of Education Systems:  
Cross-National Perspectives**

Background

All over the world, education policy makers are working to manage and improve the performance of the education systems they manage. The U.S. model of performance management, which features standards and test-based accountability, is becoming more and more common, not only in the English speaking countries of the world, but in other nations as well. However, a close look at cross-national data shows that education systems around the world have developed many different systems for steering education systems, managing school performance, and working with schools in need of improvement. These include various systems of testing and accountability, different models of inspection, and different approaches to school improvement.

Project Objectives

This project will have three goals. First, students will investigate different approaches that nations across the world use to steer education systems and manage system performance. Second, students will investigate and report on Michigan's approach to this problem. Third, students will provide a brief report to CRC on these issues, with recommendations for Michigan. Among the key questions to be addressed are: (1) Does Michigan have "world class" education standards? (2) How does the MDE currently manage system performance? (3) What other models of system performance management should MDE consider? How would such a system be organized? What evidence is there such a system would work to improve education?