Course Overview

Since the early 1900's, the issue of how education should be funded in these United States has been of interest to school finance professors, legislators, and economists. However, it has been during the last two decades that parents, educators, and taxpayers have become more aware of this critical factor related to public education. Disparities in funding among school districts – often adjacent to each other – have mobilized communities and school districts to demand more equitable funding of a state's system. Does money matter? If so, how much? Or, as many claim, does throwing money at education just throw good money after bad? This course will provide students with an understanding of school finance, and the critical factors associated with it, so that they can become effective members in the decision-making process involved in funding our public schools.

The role of an educational leader today can be very difficult, but exceedingly rewarding. The UMass Lowell Graduate School of Education is committed to developing professionals who will assist in transforming the public educational system by producing graduates whom:

- Demonstrate excellent knowledge, judgment and skills in their professional fields;
- Promote equity of educational opportunity for all learners;
- Collaborate with other educators, parents and community representatives to support educational excellence;
- Use inquiry and research to address educational challenges.

Within this course, the tenets of the Graduate School of Education – excellence, equity, collaboration and inquiry – will lead us in understanding the critical role of school finance in achieving equitable, excellent education for all students, and the role educational leaders play in realizing this goal.

I. Required Texts and Readings

Two texts are required for this course:

(1) *Financing Education in a Climate of Change* by Vern Brimley, Jr. and Rulon R. Garfield (9th edition). Due to the subject material, the text is frequently updated. Should
you decide to borrow/buy an earlier edition, you are responsible for obtaining the information covered in the new edition.

(2) American Psychological Association’s Publication Manual (5th edition). All papers written for courses in the Graduate School of Education must conform to the APA style. This text is an instructional text on the APA style; it also can be found online.

In addition to the texts, there are articles or reports you will be assigned through the UMass Lowell Library that are required readings. Students will be apprised of these additional readings – when applicable – and are expected to find these articles and other research on specific topics electronically. There are also weekly class notes posted that provide an overview of the issues for each week.

II. Participation

Participation is extremely important to your success in this course and is included as a component of your grade. Your participation is needed in the following ways: (1) Completing the weekly assigned reading in the text and participating in the class discussions through group work or whole class discussions; (2) Answering questions in homework assignments on specific issues; (3) Suggesting and preparing responses to hypothetical situations presented on financial issues; and (4) Actively participating in the weekly class chats, when you experience confusion regarding the coursework; or, you wish to discuss and comment on the weekly readings. Some students – due to time zone differences - will not be able to participate in chat; chat is not mandatory, but is encouraged, particularly if you find you are having difficulty understanding the material. However, there IS NO PENALTY FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN WEEKLY CHAT.

After the first week, each of you will be assigned to a group for completing some of the class assignments. I may purposely change groups at least once during the semester, so that everyone has the opportunity to work with different members of the class. Your responsibilities as a group member are to:

1. Actively participate in gathering the information for the assignment.
2. Share what you learned in a timely fashion (not waiting until the night before the assignment is due to contact group members).
3. Volunteer to either collect, edit and post the group’s responses for class, and/or to assume responsibility for at least one section of the assignment.
4. Contribute to the group discussion on the Discussion Board by visiting frequently throughout the week and commenting on the topic at hand. This is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!
5. Communicate often with your group members. Having problems with an assignment? Let your group know. Going to be away? Let your group know. Communication is the key to great teamwork and good grades!
Please Note! Exceptions to working in groups are not allowed and class participation is graded.

If you do not enjoy working in groups, then this course is not for you.

III. Assignments

- Weekly assigned readings in the text, and online
- Participation within group or class discussions which are held on the weekly Discussion Boards
- Participation on group assignments
- Completion of questions, funding formula problems, or essays as an individual or as a group member
- Participation in School Finance Debates
- Participation on Chat or via instructor email when experiencing difficulty with course material

- Weekly Reading Assignments

Each week, selected school finance topics are discussed. The topics correspond to chapters in the text, but not necessarily in sequence. Students are expected to read the pertinent chapter(s) in the text and any online articles assigned. The reference librarians at the UMass Lowell library are there to assist you. You can contact them online when you click onto the UMass Lowell library site: http://library.uml.edu.

- Group or Class Discussions

Each week, students are required to engage in discussions about the topics for that week. This may happen within Groups or it may take place as a class discussion. Information specific to each week’s discussion will be provided that week.

There are several methods for communicating with group members. Two of the most important are the group “Chat” and the group “Discussion Board”. Group discussions/chat greatly assists in making certain that all students fully understand the course material. Everyone is expected to participate in group discussions/chat when assigned. If a student is unable to find the time to participate in group discussions/chat for two or more weeks, then he/she must drop the course – you are not a member of a group unless you really are a member.

Participation in a group means posting your draft of a particular response to the week’s assignment; checking back within a day to see what comments other group members have regarding your draft or other drafts; and checking back again after a final draft of the group’s response to indicate whether or not you think the response is ready for posting.
If there are problems within a group regarding lack of input and work on the part of a particular group member, I expect the other group members to resolve it in a civil manner and/or bring it to my attention. Frequently, poor work behavior is apparent to me when I check the group discussion boards and a group member has not posted any comments or work...

Additionally, all students should be aware that, as the instructor of the course, I am automatically copied on emails sent to all group members. This is a function of the program used by the University and is not initiated by the instructor. Emails that you send to other team members individually or to students via the class email are not copied to me. Only emails sent to all class members or all group members are copied to me. This function has never been a problem; however, I just wanted to let you know how the email function works if you email all group members.

- **Group Assignments**

As explained above, after the first week, students will be divided into groups and, for some assignments, students are required to work together to complete a weekly assignment when assigned work as a group. These assignments take the form of responses to questions, problems related to school finance funding formulas, or essays on a particular topic. For Group assignments, all members of the Group receive the same grade, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as, 1 student clearly is not participating, etc.

- **School Finance Debate**

The School Finance Debate is an opportunity for exploring a specific issue affecting the funding of our schools. The topics selected (by the instructor) are ones which should interest you, but about which you may understand little or only one side of the argument. This is an opportunity to learn a great deal more about controversial topics in school finance, and to also peck away at already instilled belief systems, opening one up to viewing different issues from other perspectives. The School Finance Debate assignment is the culminating class experience and occurs during the last several weeks of the course. Additional information about the school finance debates will be provided later on during the semester.

- **Class Chat**

Class chat occurs most weeks throughout the semester. Chat is scheduled for Monday evening from 8-9 p.m., EST. There will be no chat during the weeks of February and April school vacations, or during the University’s March Spring Break. If there are other times when chat will not occur, I will let you know ahead of time. Attendance at Chat is voluntary.
IV. **Class Organization**

Class begins each week on Monday, beginning with Monday, January 26th. New lecture material and assignments are posted, at the latest, by Monday afternoon, unless otherwise specified by the instructor. All student assignments must be posted by the following Sunday, noon, unless otherwise instructed. At times, I will ask you to respond individually by using the discussion board or emailing me. Whatever the case may be, each weekly assignment must be sent or posted by Sunday, noon.

In this class, it is critical that you complete each week’s work. Late assignments are marked down if one day late, and no credit is given for assignments more than a day late unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as illness, death in a family, etc. If a student becomes seriously ill while taking this course, a doctor’s note must be mailed to me on the doctor’s letterhead and signed by the doctor. Without a doctor’s note, a student will receive zero points for all assignments missed. Regrettably, this policy must be enforced due to past abuses on the part of students.

V. **Communication with the Instructor**

There are **three ways of communicating** with me: (1) using our scheduled chat session, (2) emailing any questions or concerns you might have directly to me, and (3) posting questions/responses on the class discussion board. The most immediate way of communicating with me is by emailing me. **Please remember! All course email is within Blackboard! Check your email often to ensure that you receive all class messages.**

- **Emailing the instructor:** There will be times when you will have questions or concerns that you need me to address individually. Please do not hesitate to email me. I most often will return your email that very day, but not on Fridays and Saturdays. Since I work on this class on Sundays, I take Fridays and Saturdays “off” from emails. If I am away from my email (out-of-town, etc.), I will let you all know in advance.

- **Posting Questions on Discussion Board:** You can also post on the Class Discussion Board information you find that is relevant to a week’s topic that you wish to share with your classmates and me. If we are holding a discussion on the Board, please feel free to post questions when needing clarification about aspects of a particular topic.

VI. **Vacations/Absences**

You are taking this course during the Spring Semester. Many of you are employees of school districts that have two vacations: February Break and April Vacation. The University of Massachusetts Lowell holds **Spring Break beginning March 15th**, resuming classes on Monday, March 23rd. There will be no class during the University’s Spring Break week. **There will be class during the February and**
Spring vacation weeks; however, the assignments will be individual and lighter than usual.

I expect that some of you will be away from the course at some point due to professional obligations or serious family obligations. While a little of this is understandable, please remember that you have made a commitment to take this course, to being a Group member, and contributing to weekly discussions as part of this course. Therefore, the following rules are in effect:

- **Do not be absent from the course for long periods of time, or frequently.** Having said that, situations do occur that are out of our control, e.g., a death in a family, etc. Notify me immediately of any situation that occurs so that we can work out a solution, which may include dropping the course or taking an incomplete.

- **Inform both your Group members and me as to when you are planning to be away.**

- **Offer to take the lead on the Group assignment for a future week when you are present.**

- **You will be working as an individual while gone. Email me your assignment after you return to class. You will be graded individually for that week.**

- **Do not ask me to email you the assignment prior to your vacation – it places a large burden on me to email all the posted materials weeks ahead. In short, be responsible for your own time and do not let your Group down...!**

Additionally:

**Examine your course load!** Some students mistakenly believe that they can take 3-4 courses a semester and then find themselves unable to perform well in any of the courses. So! A word to the wise: **Do not over commit! Even 2 courses may be too much at one time, along with a full-time career and personal life.**

**VII. Online Etiquette**

Email is a way of life for all of us. We use it in both our professional lives as well as our personal. In this course, email is critical for communicating with one another. One of the tenets of this course is that everyone must treat each other with respect. There may be times when you feel impatient or frustrated. Please remember not to take your frustration out upon another member of the class – or me. The most frequent source of inappropriate emails is when a Group member becomes a “slacker” and does not participate in Group activities or does so in an untimely fashion. If this should happen, please report immediately to me so that I can contact that student and remind him/her of the personal responsibility involved in taking this course. Please report any problems to do with email/discussion board etiquette to me so that I can follow up.
Please Note!! Any Group problems are handled on a Group basis; meaning that I will contact/cc all Group members should there be a problem with only 1 student. This is not meant to embarrass anyone, but rather to be transparent in dealing with group issues. So, be aware that I am not being “disrespectful”, just merely getting the issues “out in the open”.

VIII. Grading

First, let me say, that my experience with online students has been one in which most students work very hard. I have had excellent work handed into me. Several of you in this class were some of those students with that excellent work! I have found that there are many students who will truly rise to the occasion and throw themselves into assignments - the outcome of which has been terrific. Grading is based upon 3 different areas of work: (1) completion of weekly assignments, (2) class and group participation, and (3) your individual research paper for the School Finance Debates.

The breakdown of points for the assignments for this course is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Assignments*</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper for School Finance Debates</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Points awarded for each weekly assignment will be given in the directions for each assignment.*

The following table provides the Graduate School of Education’s grading system, which is used in this course as the final grading system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Point Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>99-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>96-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>90-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>86-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>80-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Graduate Standard:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>76-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>70-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>65-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Below 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please Note: in order for work to be considered for “A-” or above points, all assignments must be handed in on time.*
** There is no “redo” of assignments. My expectation is that you will email me prior to completing any assignment should you have questions or are not clear on some aspect of a particular topic.

IX. Academic Misconduct

Due to findings of plagiarism on campuses throughout the U.S., including UMass Lowell, all students should read the University of Massachusetts Lowell’s description of cheating and plagiarism which can be found on the University website and in the University catalog. As a student attending the University of Massachusetts Lowell, you are responsible for reading and being aware of this policy.

UNIVERSITY DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Academic Misconduct

Allegations of academic misconduct are handled within the department and college by the Process of Notification and Adjudication described in the Undergraduate Catalog. The informal and formal procedures stated therein apply to both undergraduate and graduate students. Described below are some examples of violations which constitute academic misconduct.

DEFINITIONS OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PROHIBITED ACADEMIC PRACTICE AND BEHAVIOR

The following definitions are provided for the information of all students and constitute official notice of prohibited academic practice and behavior.

Cheating is defined as:

1. Misrepresenting academic work which has been done by another as one's own efforts - whether such misrepresentation has been accomplished with or without the permission of the other individual;
2. Utilization of prohibited assistance (whether in the nature of a person or a resource) in the performance of assignments and examinations;
3. Copying of another person's work or the giving or receiving of information or answers by any means of communication during an examination;
4. Utilization of the services of a commercial term paper company;
5. The unauthorized or fraudulent acquisition and or use of another's academic property.

Plagiarism is defined as:
1. Direct quotation or word-for-word copying of all or part of the work of another without identification or acknowledgment of the quoted work; 
2. Extensive use of acknowledged quotation from the work of others which is joined together by a few words or lines of one's own text; An unacknowledged abbreviated restatement of someone else's analysis or conclusion, however skillfully paraphrased.

Please Note: A software system, “Turnitin” is used in all classes to check for plagiarism.