

920:422:05  
Sociology of (Higher) Education  
MW 3:55-5:15  
Hickman 202

Spring 2017  
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Overview: Towards the end of one's undergraduate career is an opportune time to assess the enterprise of higher education. Junior and senior sociology students have a wealth of experience from attending college and have the theoretical skills to critically assess the institution. Sociological researchers have also considered what happens at college studying questions such as what leads students to choose a particular major? How do students spend their free time? What helps students get a degree? Does higher education lead to mobility or reproduce inequality? How do colleges and universities accommodate different types of students? Are big-time sports a compliment to undergraduate education? This course should probably be called "Sociologists Go to College" as we'll see how sociologists attempt to answer these questions (and more) this semester.

I've selected a range of readings that reflect the diversity of four-year colleges and universities. They include public and private institutions, large schools and small schools, elite colleges, flagship state universities, and less elite liberal arts universities. The readings also highlight the range of sociological studies of higher education. The information in the studies we'll read use longitudinal data and all forms of sociological inquiry. We'll see in-depth interviews following students over their undergraduate careers, numerical analyses of student data from multiple schools, on-line and in-person surveys.

Two major threads run through our material. One is the college experience at the level of the individual student. We'll see this in how students choose a school, what they do while in college, and how they transition to the 'real world' after graduating. Another thread is structural, looking at higher education from the perspective of the institution. This will emerge as we see how colleges reproduce inequality, create structures to cater to different types of students, and try to maximize student achievements.

A word of caution: You may see yourself in our readings. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it isn't. You may not see yourself in our readings. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it isn't. The point is that just as there is no one 'type' of college or university, there isn't some ideal type of undergraduate student that will be heralded in the course material. While I certainly hope you will gain some perspective on your own undergraduate education during the semester, please don't expect to find the 'best practices' for being a college student.

Required Readings: The vast majority of readings this semester come from book-length treatments of the various topics. Two chapters have also been placed on the course Sakai site. The following books are required and should be available at the Rutgers Campus Bookstore. I've included the ISBN for each book for those wishing to purchase these texts from other sources. For those needing quick access to the course material, the first six books we'll read have been placed on reserve at the Mabel Smith Library on the Douglass campus. (The library does not own the Nixon or Sperber books.)

\*Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Laura T. Hamilton. 2015. Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-0674088023)

\*Arum, Richard and Josipa Roska, 2014, *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-0226197289)

\*Chambliss, Daniel F. and Christopher G. Takacs. 2014. *How College Works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Hardcover, ISBN: 978-0674049024)

\*Grigsby, Mary. *College Life Through the Eyes of Students*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-1438426204)

\*Mullen, Ann L. 2011. *Degrees of Inequality: Culture, Class and Gender in American Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-1421405742)

\*Nixon II, Howard L. 2014. *The Athletic Trap: How College Sports Corrupted the Academy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Hardcover, ISBN: 978-1421411958)

\*Sperber, Murray. 2001. *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-0805068115)

\*Weiss, Karen G. 2013. *Party School: Crime, Campus, and Community*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press. (Paperback, ISBN: 978-1555538194)

\* Kindle version available however the extent of savings varies considerably.

Grading: This course is a seminar and we are all expected to contribute accordingly. This means coming to class having read the material to be discussed. To facilitate our discussions you should come to EACH class with at least one reading-based question or observation that you would like to raise that day. Those questions/observations will help with your class participation which counts for 30% of the final grade. If you expect to miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website at <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An e-mail will automatically be sent to me.

Each student will be responsible for leading one class during the semester. If you prefer, you and a classmate can sign up to be responsible for two classes - that is, you can share leading two sessions with someone else. This task will be allocated during one of the early class meetings. If the opportunity presents itself a student may lead a second session for extra credit to raise his/her participation grade. I will not grade you on the quality of the discussion during the class you lead.

We'll use weekly reaction papers to help to both learn the course material and to facilitate group discussion. At the last class discussing each book, a two-page review of the reading must be turned in. You can expand on your comments about the readings to identify and react to the main (or controversial) points from the readings if you want. Alternatively, feel free to point out where the author(s) made particularly strong/weak arguments. These reaction papers count for 30% of your grade. Reaction papers over one week late will not be accepted.

The rest of the course grade comes from your final paper. Expect to write a 15-20 page paper that focuses on some aspect of the material we cover during our readings. The specific details for this paper will emerge as the semester progresses. For now, figure on the paper counting for 30% of the final grade. The remaining 10% of your course grade comes from the oral presentation of the basics of your paper to the rest of the class. These presentations are scheduled for the last week of the term.

Classroom Etiquette: As we'll see, students can experience college in multiple ways and with multiple goals. This diversity should be encouraged and appreciated. Courteous expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted. Remember that a little respect shown to your fellow students goes a long way.

Texting is particularly disruptive and disrespectful of discussions during a seminar. I ask that you do not text during the 80 minute class period. If I see you texting during class, I will ask you to leave for the day. Emergencies requiring texting can be dealt with in the hallway. If you cannot abide by these restrictions, please find another course to take.

Office Hours: My office hours this semester will be Monday mornings from 10:00 to 12:00 in Davison 037. Appointments may also be made for other times and I can always be reached via e-mail at drasmith@rutgers.edu.

Learning Goals: Our learning goals are ambitious as this is preferable to the alternative. While this course is not part of the School of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, there are similarities between my goals and those of that curriculum. These include:

- Apply concepts of human and social behavior to higher education
- Formulate, evaluate, and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative and qualitative information about higher education

I would also add:

- Gain insights into, and a greater appreciation of, your time here at Rutgers

Course Outline: Below is a tentative schedule of topics to be covered this semester. This schedule is somewhat flexible and I reserve the right to alter it if the need arises.

Jan. 18: Introduction and course overview

Jan. 23: A history of higher education.

Read: Bowen, William G., Martin A. Kurzweil, and Eugene M. Tobin, 2005, "Framework and Roadmap" and "An Equity and Excellence Time Line," Chapters One and Two, pages 1-38, in *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. (UNDER RESOURCES ON THE COURSE SAKAI SITE)

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION

Jan. 25: Chambliss and Takacs, pages 1-66

Jan. 30: Chambliss and Takacs, pages 67-103

Feb. 1: Chambliss and Takacs, pages 104-174

INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Feb. 6: Mullen, pages 1-71

Feb. 8: Mullen, pages 72-155

Feb. 13: Mullen, pages 156-223

COLLEGE AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Feb. 15: Arum and Roska, pages 1-52

Feb. 20: Arum and Roska, pages 53-98

Feb. 22: Arum and Roska, pages 98-136

TOWN-GOWN RELATIONS AND (TOO MUCH?) PARTYING

Feb. 27: Weiss, pages xiii-53

Mar. 1: Weiss, pages 54-98

Mar. 6: Weiss, pages 99-147

STUDENT CULTURES AND STUDENT TYPES

Mar. 8: Grigsby, pages 1-52

Mar. 20: Grigsby, pages 53-119

Mar. 22: Grigsby, pages 119-174

HOW SCHOOLS RESPOND TO STUDENT CULTURES AND TYPES

Mar. 27: Armstrong and Hamilton, pages 1-93

Mar. 29: Armstrong and Hamilton, pages 94-179

Apr. 3: Armstrong and Hamilton, pages 180-252

SPORTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Apr. 5: Nixon, pages 1-56

Apr. 10: Nixon, pages 56-113

Apr. 12: Nixon, pages 113-169

Apr. 17: Sperber, pages ix-68

Apr. 19: Sperber, pages 71-167

Apr. 24: Sperber, pages 168-275

Apr. 26: Student Presentations

May 1: Student Presentations