

MERIT, PRIVILEGE AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION (EDLF 8500-3/SOC3370)

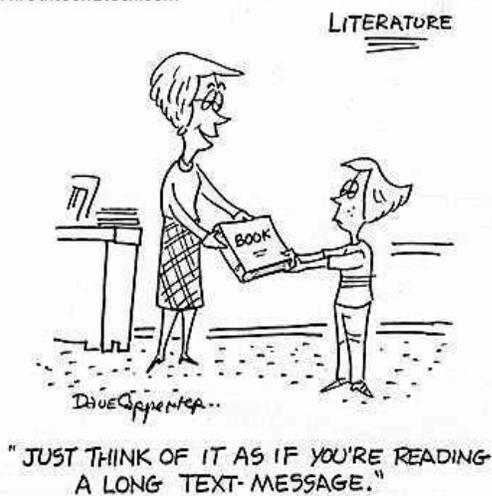
How equitable is American higher education? How do we know? Why should we care? These questions will guide our discussion as we embark on a journey through American higher education. We will explore a range of different issues, from how students gain access to higher education and how colleges select them, to what students and faculty do with their time. Through readings, discussions, and exercises, you will learn to examine higher education through a sociological lens and think critically about a range of pressing issues in higher education. This course is a journey through the land we all inhabit, and perhaps take for granted, and an invitation to pause and think about where we are and where we are going.

The core mission of this course is to provide you with the tools necessary to make informed decisions and engage competently in contemporary debates about higher education. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Understand key sociological concepts and theories in higher education
- Build compelling, evidence-based arguments about higher education issues
- Analyze higher education policies and practices and develop persuasive proposals for addressing important challenges
- Appreciate the complexity of contemporary debates in higher education
- Develop a habit of an “inquisitive mind,” continually asking questions of yourself and others
- Recognize that our individual and collective decisions have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences

Course Materials (available at the UVa Bookstore):

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- All of the course readings listed on the syllabus will be available on the course website. They will be posted at least a week before class.
- Given the emphasis on building and evaluating arguments in this course, please purchase the following reference book (available at the UVA Bookstore):

Anthony Weston. 2009. *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 4th edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. (Please purchase this specific edition, as we will be referring to the book in class and this edition is substantially revised from the previous versions).

Assessment

Active Engagement with the Course (30%): Learning how to make informed decisions and engage competently in contemporary debates in higher education requires not only familiarity with the material but an active engagement with it. Coming to class, being prepared to discuss the readings, and participating in class discussions and activities is thus crucial for the success of this course. Please bring assigned course readings to class – to facilitate active engagement with the material and your peers, please bring hard copies, no computers will be allowed in the classroom. In preparation for some of the classes, you will be asked to engage in short out-of-class activities, such as finding an article or conducting short interviews. Your participation will be assessed based on class attendance, professor evaluation of your participation in discussion, and careful attention to out-of-class activities.

Leading a Class (10%): We tend to learn the material deeply when we teach it to others. Moreover, an important aspect of engaging social issues is an ability to distill an argument and understand its essence. In small teams, you will lead one half of one class (approximately 1 hour) of your choice (signup sheet will be passed around during the second class period). Your task will be to design an activity (as creative as you'd like) that helps others understand the material, offers them an opportunity to apply it and otherwise engages with its essence. You will also write a short (1 single-spaced page) commentary as a team that describes the activity and explains why you expect that the chosen activity will be an effective way for engaging the material and capturing its essence. The commentary is due in class the day of the presentation.

Essay (20%): Thoughtful discussion of complex social issues requires many skills, including ability to analyze arguments, thinking about appropriate evidence (i.e., evidence matching the question), evaluating evidence, and thinking about counter-arguments. To practice these skills, which will be necessary for a successful completion of the portfolio, you will complete a short (5-6 double spaced pages) paper wrestling with a specific policy/practice. This essay will be based on course readings and discussion.

Policy/Practice Portfolio (40%): You will choose a higher education issue that you are truly curious about and build a portfolio on it over the course of the semester. The portfolio will include a number of different components, some of which will be graded while others will provide building blocks for your final accomplishments. You will have multiple opportunities in class to discuss your project and receive feedback from both your peers and the instructor. The purpose of the portfolio is two-fold: first, to get you to explore in some depth a topic in higher education you are passionate about and to think about it as a social scientist, and second, to reflect on your own learning process. The culmination of your efforts will be an 8-10 double-spaced page policy/practice brief and a 2-3 double-spaced page reflection. You will receive detailed instructions for each component of the portfolio later in the semester.

Honor Code: We are privileged to live in a community that abides by the honor code. You are expected to honor your commitment to neither cheat nor tolerate cheating by others. Cheating is defined as giving or receiving assistance on any of the assignments designed to be completed individually. In addition, plagiarism is an honor code violation. Plagiarism is a practice of claiming authorship or incorporating material from someone else's written work without adequate acknowledgment. This includes downloading papers, paragraphs, or taking ideas from sources available on line.

Course Schedule

(Subject to change – check course website regularly for updates)

8/28 Introduction to Contemporary Issues in Higher Education



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9/4 How Do Students Choose Colleges?

Hossler and Gallagher, *Studying Student College Choice*
Grotsky and Reigle-Crumb, *Those Who Choose and Those Who Don't*
McDonough, *Choosing Colleges* excerpt
Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, excerpt

"I want to go out of town so that I can become a fully independent person, but near enough so that I can bring my laundry home."

9/11 How Do Colleges Choose Students?

Stevens, *Creating a Class*, excerpt
Tuchman, *Wannabe U*, excerpt
Confessore, *What Makes a College Good?*
Fallows, *The New College Chaos*

9/18 How Much Social Inequality Do These Choices Produce?

Carnevale, *Racial, Ethnic and Socioeconomic Stratification*
Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line*, excerpt
Roksa et al., *Changes in Higher Education and Social Stratification*
Roderick, *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*

Due: Defining Policy/Practice (Portfolio)

9/25 What Are Common Strategies for Addressing Inequality?

Wathington, *Summer Bridge Programs*
Stephan and Rosenbaum, *Beyond Blaming Students*
Bowen and Bok, *Shape of the River*, excerpt
Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line*, excerpt

10/2 Meritocracy: Illusion or Reality?

Lemann, *The Big Test*, excerpt
Grotsky, *Meritocracy in Higher Education*
Kingston, *How Meritocratic is the United States*
Stevens, *Creating a Class*, excerpt

Due: Essay

10/9 Reading Day (no class)

10/16 College for All?

Rosenbaum, *Beyond College for All*
Attewell and Lavin, *Mass Higher Education and Its Critics*

Due: Policy/Practice Position Paper (Portfolio)

10/23 Policy/Practice Position Paper Discussion

Due: Comments on the Policy/Practice Position Paper (Portfolio)

10/30 What Do Students Do in College?

Nathan, *My Freshman Year*, excerpt
Grigsby, *College Life through the Eyes of Students*, excerpt
Stuber, *Inside the College Gates*, excerpt
Suskind, *Hope in the Unseen*, excerpt

11/6 What Do College/University Faculty Do?

Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, excerpt
Bell, *Support Your Local Teacher: On the Care and Feeding of Professors*
Grafton, *The Nutty Professors*
Ayers, *What Does a Professor Do All Day, Anyway?*



11/13 What, if Anything, Are Students Learning?

Arum and Roksa, *Academically Adrift*, excerpt
Blaich, *Wabash National Study*, excerpt
Lumina Foundation, *Degree Qualifications Profile*
Keeling and Hersh, *We Are Losing Our Minds*, excerpt

11/20 How Did We Get Here?

Loss, *Between Citizens and the State*, excerpt
Labaree, *Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals*
Edmundson, *On the Uses of a Liberal Education*

Due: Policy/Practice Brief (Portfolio)

11/27 What Lies Ahead?

Lumina Foundation, Goal 2025

National Governors Association, Degrees for What Jobs?

Center for American Progress, Rethinking Higher Education Business Models

American Enterprise Institute, Rebooting Higher Education

Sullivan, Productivity in Higher Education

12/4 What Have We Learned?

Due: Policy/Practice Portfolio