American higher education has often been characterized as the great equalizer and, thus, as one of the foundational pillars of the American Dream. This seminar will explore the extent to which this characterization still applies today, at a time when higher education is going through a period of multiple crises and rapid change, both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Focusing on recently published research, we will consider several different points of view on the current state of U.S. higher education: that of the students who apply to and attend college, that of colleges and universities, and that of society at large. We will also put U.S. higher education in its historical and comparative context. Throughout we will ponder what policies might best fulfill the promise of higher education in the U.S.

Requirements:

Seminar Participation This course is a capstone Sociology 190 seminar, designed to provide sociology majors with a relatively small class where you can read cutting edge material on a significant topic and write a substantial research paper. Unlike lecture courses, seminars involve discussion-based learning. Their success depends upon informed discussion and debate by all students in the class. I will set the context for the readings and I will facilitate and elaborate the discussions but I will rarely lecture. Everyone is expected to participate in every class discussion, even those who are shy.

Reading Reflections/Responses To help promote an informed and engaged discussion, I will require that you write 4 reading reflections between the 2nd and 10th weeks of the semester. These reading reflections should be 1-2 pages long and they should 1) summarize the reading and 2) either put the week’s reading into dialog with other course readings or draw out implications for your own research paper. These reading reflections should be posted on b-Space by 10 a.m. on Wednesday mornings. (A good, short set of guidelines for critical reading can be found on the Department’s web page:
http://sociology.berkeley.edu/undergraduate-writing-resources)

On the weeks that you do not post a reading reflection, I will ask you to post a shorter reading response that includes at least a sentence or two about something that surprised
you in the reading as well as at least one question you would like to pursue in the discussion. This question should show engagement with the week’s reading. These reading responses should be posted on b-Space by the beginning of class, so they can help guide class discussions. It is your choice which weeks you post a reading reflection and which weeks you post a reading response.

I encourage everyone to read each other’s reading reflections before our class meeting.

**Research paper.** The most significant requirement of the class is a research paper on a topic of interest to you related to the issue of higher education and inequality. The goal is for you to write a 12-15 page (double-spaced) paper that poses a research question, brings the relevant literature to bear, assesses empirical data, and draws a conclusion that answers your question. For data, you can either gather some original data (interviews, documents, etc.) or you can gather and assess the relevant scholarly debate on the topic in which you are interested.

This paper will be broken down into mini-assignments. On September 24th, a memo describing your research question and why it is important will be due. For October 15th you need to prepare a memo with of your bibliographic references and evidence strategy. On November 12th you will turn in an abstract and outline of your paper. Between November 12th and December 3rd, you will make a short presentation about your research to the class. On December 10th your final paper will be due.

We will talk further about the paper in class and I will provide handouts detailing each assignment. I am also available in my office hours (or by appointment if you can’t make them) for help with any aspect of the paper. So that I can get to know you, I require that all students come to my office hours at least once in the course of the semester, and I encourage you to come earlier rather than later.

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in class discussion</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Entire semester!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 reading reflection memos</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Between Sept. 10th and Nov. 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 reading responses</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Between Sept. 10th and Nov. 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>DUE: September 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review/data memo</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>DUE: October 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract and outline of your final paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>DUE: November 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final seminar paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>DUE: December 10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Course Materials**
The following books have been ordered at The Student Store, 2470/2480 Bancroft Way:


All other course materials will be available on bSpace. Important announcements will also be sent via bSpace to the email address that the university has on file for you. Please be sure to check your email multiple times per week.
Readings and Seminar Schedule

September 3 (Week 1): Introduction

September 10 (Week 2): The expansion—and stagnation—of mass higher education in the U. S.


Recommended:


September 17 (Week 3): What’s College For? Mobility vs. Reproduction vs. a Meaningful life


September 24 (Week 4): Organizational Interests and College Admissions at Elite Universities


**Recommended:**


October 1 (Week 5): The Admissions Numbers Game


**Recommended:**


October 8 (Week 6): Social Class and Students’ College Choices


**Recommended:**

October 15 (Week 7): How Pathways Through College Can Reproduce Inequality


October 22 (Week 8): College Pathways and Post-College Prospects


Recommended:


October 29 (Week 9): Public Policy and Higher Education


November 5 (Week 10): Toward the Future: Thinking about Institutional Change by Tracing the Beginning –and Partial End—of Affirmative Action in College Admissions


November 12 (Week 11): Student presentations or Extended office hours

November 19 (Week 12): Student presentations
November 26 (Week 13): NO CLASS (Thanksgiving is on Nov. 27th)

December 3 (Week 14): Student presentations

December 10: Final Paper Due, 3:00 p.m.