

Sociology 190  
Fall 2014

### **Higher Education and Inequality**

Wednesdays, 4-6 p.m.  
140 Barrows

Professor Kim Voss  
476 Barrows  
Office hours: Monday 11-12, 4-5  
<http://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/pxrtx>  
Email: kimvoss@berkeley.edu

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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup>, a memo describing your research question and why it is important will be due. For October 15<sup>th</sup> you need to prepare a memo with of your bibliographic references and evidence strategy. On November 12<sup>th</sup> you will turn in an abstract and outline of your paper. Between November 12<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup>, you will make a short presentation about your research to the class. On December 10<sup>th</sup> 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:

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

**Course Materials**

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

Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton, *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream*. Basic Books, 2014.

Ann L. Mullen, *Degrees of Inequality: Culture, Class, and Gender in American Higher Education*. Johns Hopkins Press, 2010.

Mitchell Stevens, *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

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.**

Goldin, Claudia and Lawrence F. Katz. 2008. “Mass Higher Education in the Twentieth Century,” Chapter 7 of *The Race Between Education and Technology*. Harvard University Press, pp. 247-284.

Mettler, Suzanne. 2014. *Degrees of Inequality*. Chapters 1 and 4, pp. 19-49 and 111-131.

Davies, Scott and Floyd M. Hammack, 2005. “The Channeling of Student Competition in Higher Education: Comparing Canada and the U.S.” *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 76 (1): 89-106.

#### *Recommended:*

Duncan, Greg J. and Richard Murnane (eds.), 2011. *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chance*. Russell Sage, especially chapters 5, 6 and 8.

Douglass, John Aubrey, 2007. *The Conditions for Admission; Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities*. Stanford University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 10, 11.

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

Grodsky, Eric and Erika Jackson. 2009. “Social Stratification in Higher Education,” *Teachers College Record* 111 (10): 2347-2384.

Meyer, John W. 1977. “The Effects of Education as an Institution.” *American Journal of Sociology* 83(1): 55-77.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press, pp. 484-487.

Deresiewicz, William. 2014. *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*. New York: Free Press. Pp. 77-87.

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

Stevens, Mitchell, 2007. *Creating a Class*. Introduction and Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-94.

Karabel, Jerome, 1984. "Status-Group Struggle, Organizational Interests and the Limits of Institutional Autonomy: The Transformation of Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1918-1940." *Theory and Society* 13:1-40.

*Recommended:*

Karabel, Jerome, 2005. *The Chosen: The hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

## October 1 (Week 5): The Admissions Numbers Game

Stevens, Mitchell. *Creating a Class*. Chapters 3-8, pp. 95-264.

*Recommended:*

Bound, John, Brad Hershbein, and Bridget Terry Long, 2009. "Playing the Admissions Game: Student Reactions to Increasing College Competition." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 23 (4): 119–146.

Douglass, John Aubrey, 2007. *The Conditions for Admission; Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities*. Stanford University Press.

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

Mullen, Ann L. 2010. *Degrees of Inequality: Culture, Class, and Gender in American Higher Education*. Introduction and Chapters 1-4, 7, pp. 1-117 and 205-224. (And skim chapter 5)

*Recommended:*

Radford, Alexandra Walton, 2013. *Top Student, Top School: How Social Class Shapes Where Valedictorians Go to College*. University of Chicago Press.

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

Armstrong, Elizabeth and Laura T. Hamilton, 2013. *Paying for the Party*, Harvard University Press. Preface and chapters 1-5, pp. xi-147.

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

Armstrong, Elizabeth and Laura T. Hamilton, *Paying for the Party*, Chapters 6-9, pp. 147-252.

*Recommended:*

Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum, 2012. "Life after College: The Challenging Transitions of the Academically Adrift Cohort." *Change*, July/August 2012. [http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back Issues/2012/July-August 2012/after-college-full.html](http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/2012/July-August%2012/after-college-full.html)

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

Mettler, Suzanne. 2014. *Degrees of Inequality*. Chapters 1 and 4, pp. 19-49 and 111-131.

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

Stulberg, Lisa M. and Anthony S. Chen, 2013. "The Origins of Race-conscious Affirmative Action in Undergraduate Admissions: A Comparative Analysis of Institutional Change in Higher Education." *Sociology of Education* 87(1): 36–52.

Douglass, John Aubrey. 2001. "Anatomy of Conflict: The Making and Unmaking of Affirmative Action at the University of California." Pp.118-144 in *Color Lines: Affirmative Action, Immigration, and Civil Rights Options for America* edited by John David Skrentny. University of Chicago Press.

Warikoo, Natasha and C. Fuhr, 2013. "Legitimizing Status: Perceptions of Meritocracy and Inequality among Undergraduates at an Elite British University," *British Education Research Journal* 40 (4), pp. 699–717.

### **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. 27<sup>th</sup>)**

**December 3 (Week 14): Student presentations**

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