

HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Sociology 449W

Spring 2017

Tu/Th 1:15-2:35pm, Humanities 039

Professor: Elizabeth Popp Berman

Office: Arts & Sciences 346

Email: epberman@albany.edu

Phone: (518) 442-4675

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3-5pm, Thursdays 3-4pm, and by appointment

Sign up at <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/exdpy> (they frequently fill up)

Teaching Assistant: Ke-Han (Kenneth) Chen

Email: kchen7@albany.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Higher education in the U.S. is going through a period of rapid change. State support is shrinking, student debt is increasing, enrollment in for-profit institutions has increased, and learning outcomes are difficult to measure, at best. This class will try to make sense of some of these changes. Among other questions, it will ask whether higher education is a source of social mobility or a means of class reproduction; how the college experience differs by race, class, and type of college attended; how the economics of higher education have led to more expensive colleges and more student loans; and how we might make college better.

As a this is a writing- and oral-discourse-intensive class, students will engage with these questions primarily by writing and talking about them. Writing will focus on the development of two papers that will be revised as part of the class. The oral discourse component will take the form of structured in-class debates, where students will present arguments for or against a position, and will involve small group collaboration. There will be no exams, but because assigned readings are critical to class participation, there will be (almost) weekly quizzes on the readings.

REQUIRED BOOKS

We will be using the following four books in this class, all of which are required. They will be available at the campus bookstore as well as online. Please note that *Lower Ed* will not be published until late February.

Chambliss, Daniel, and Christopher G. Takacs. 2014. *How College Works*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goldrick-Rab, Sara. 2016. *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2017. *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*. New York: The New Press.

Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. 2014. *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Other readings will be posted to Blackboard (<https://blackboard.albany.edu/>). It is possible I may assign additional short readings (e.g. news articles) to reflect current events.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your grade will be based on five components.

Quizzes (15% of grade). On most Tuesdays, there will be a short quiz (two or three open-ended questions) on the week's readings. These are intended to be easy **if** you have done the reading. You get to **drop two quizzes** with no penalty. Quizzes can only be made up with a documented absence. The dropped quizzes are meant to give you leeway for things like minor illnesses.

Essays (40% of grade). You will write and revise two papers of 8-10 pages each on topics to be discussed in class. Learning to rewrite and revise is essential to good writing, so 50% of your grade will be on a first draft and 50% on the revision. The revision grade will be based primarily on how well you addressed feedback on your paper. That means that you could get an A on your initial draft but a C (or worse) on your revision if you make only minor changes. I have not yet seen the paper that did not have room for improvement. On the plus side, it also means that work on a paper that was less-than-stellar the first time around will be rewarded.

Short assignments (15% of grade). Before writing each paper, you will turn in an annotated bibliography and a thesis paragraph. I may also occasionally give other brief assignments (e.g. a reflection on the reading or one's personal experience), either in class or to take home.

Debates (15% of grade). To meet the oral discourse component of the class, on six Thursdays we will spend part of the class having structured debates. Small groups of students will be assigned a position to defend on an issue in higher education, then will develop arguments, collect evidence, and present and defend their position. Your essays will be on the same topic as your debates, although you do not have to take the same position in both. The debates will be evaluated partly by me and partly by your peers. Each student will be an active participant in two debates during the semester.

Participation (15% of grade). This is not a lecture class, and it will not succeed without your active participation. Attendance is important, but so is showing knowledge of the readings, asking meaningful questions, engaging in productive discussion, and demonstrating engagement in class activities. I expect every person to contribute verbally in class. Please feel free to ask at any point during the semester about how you are doing in terms of participation grade.

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

- Students are expected to arrive on time to class and to remain for the entire class. Please organize your time so that you will not disrupt class by arriving late, stepping out in the middle, or leaving early. If you have extenuating circumstances, please keep disruption to a minimum.
- Except with an excused absence, **late work will be docked one-third letter grade per day late.** "Excused absence" means either talking to me in advance about a planned absence or providing documentation of a major event or emergency (illness, death in the family, sporting event, flat tire).

- Any student who engages in academic dishonesty (cheating on a quiz, borrowing text from the internet, copying assignments from a friend, etc.) will automatically receive a failing grade on the assignment and, if I judge the infraction to be significant enough, will be referred to the University Judicial System, which can administer more serious punishment, including suspension or expulsion. We will talk in class about what constitutes plagiarism.

- If you are struggling for personal or academic reasons, please talk to me sooner rather than later! While everyone has to complete the work to pass the class, I am not totally inflexible with students who are communicating with me and making a serious effort. But I can't do much if you come to talk to me during finals week about the reason you missed half the assignments.

Major due dates:

Tu 2/16, Annotated bibliography due

Tu 2/23, Thesis paragraph due

Th 3/9, Paper draft due

Th 3/30, Revised paper due

Th 4/13, Annotated bibliography due

Th 4/20, Thesis paragraph due

Tu 5/2, Paper draft due

Th 5/18, Revised paper due

Debate schedule:

Th 2/23, Th 3/2, Th 3/23, Th 4/20, Th 4/27, Th 5/4

HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Week 1

Introduction to the course

Tu 1/24

First class

Th 1/26

Read Goldin & Katz, "Mass Higher Education in the Twentieth Century," Ch. 7 in *The Race Between Education and Technology*, 2008 (on Blackboard)

Week 2

The college experience

Tu 1/31

Read Chambliss & Takacs, *How College Works*, Chs. 1-2 (on Blackboard)
Quiz #1

Th 2/2

Week 3

Pathways through college

Tu 2/7

Read Chambliss & Takacs, *How College Works*, Chs. 3-5 plus Appendix
Quiz #2 (the appendix is important and will be on the quiz!)

Th 2/9

Week 4

What is college for?

Tu 2/14 Read Chambliss & Takacs, *How College Works*, Chs. 6-8
Quiz #3

Tu 2/16 Annotated bibliography due

Week 5

Financing college

Tu 2/21 Read Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price*, Intro, Chs. 1-3, Appendices
Quiz #4

Th 2/23 Debate #1
Thesis paragraph due

Week 6

Class struggles

Tu 2/28 Read Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price*, Chs. 4-6
Quiz #5

Th 3/2 Debate #2

Week 7

Are there solutions?

Tu 3/7 Read Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price*, Chs. 7-10
Quiz #6

Th 3/9 Paper draft due

SPRING BREAK WEEK

Week 8

Tu 3/21 Individual paper meetings
(No reading this week)

Th 3/23 Debate #3

Week 9

For-profit higher ed

Tu 3/28 Read Cottom, *Lower Ed*, Introduction, Chs. 1-3, and Methodological Notes
Quiz #7

Th 3/30 Paper revision due

<u>Week 10</u>	Social inequality and social mobility
Tu 4/4	Read Cottom, <i>Lower Ed</i> , Chs. 4-6 and Epilogue Quiz #8
Th 4/6	No class—Professor Berman out of town
<u>Week 11</u>	Internationalization
Tu 4/11	No class—university holiday (Passover)
Th 4/13	Reading TBA Annotated bibliography due
<u>Week 12</u>	Transitions out of college
Tu 4/18	Read Arum & Roksa, Chs. 1-3 Quiz #9
Th 4/20	Debate #4 Thesis paragraph due
<u>Week 13</u>	Beyond college
Tu 4/25	Read Arum & Roksa, Chs. 4-5 Quiz #10
Th 4/27	Debate #5
<u>Week 14</u>	What now?
Tu 5/2	Paper draft due (No reading this week)
Th 5/4	Debate #6 (last regular meeting)
<u>Week 15</u>	
Tu 5/9	Individual paper meetings
<u>Finals week</u>	
Th 5/18	Final paper revision due (No final exam)