

HIGHER EDUCATION

Soc 595 Section 1

Fall 2021

Tu 11:30am-2:30pm, 3207 LSA

Professor: Elizabeth Popp Berman

Email: epberman@umich.edu

Office hours: Tu 3-5pm (809 Weiser Hall or by Zoom), or email for appointment

Sign up at: <https://calendly.com/epberman/office-hours>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sociologists have cared about higher education for a long time. Colleges and universities are important sites for both reproducing inequality and creating mobility, as well as for producing and certifying knowledge. Although research in the sociology of higher education spans a number of different approaches, this class will emphasize two that I see as particularly generative right now: a longstanding framework that focuses on colleges as organizations, and a more recent one that approaches higher education (including private institutions) as a state-dependent sector that can be studied through a political economy lens. Inequalities—racial, economic, and inter-institutional—will also be a persistent theme throughout the class.

The course is organized into three main sections. First, we will spend some time introducing broad lenses for thinking about higher education: as made up of organizations operating in a larger field, as part of what Suzanne Mettler calls the “submerged state,” and as a source of social stratification and mobility. Next, we’ll move onto several weeks that focus on different types of higher ed organizations: the for-profit sector, “new universities” that serve large numbers of minoritized students, large research universities, and (more briefly) elite private institutions. Finally, we’ll look at some major changes in higher education in recent decades, including the political struggle over affirmative action, the rise of enrollment management, and the spread of rankings.

The course will be run as a seminar. I will do a modest amount of lecturing, but most of our time will be spent discussing the works we are reading. This means that keeping up with the reading and being prepared to contribute are critical not only to your personal success in the class, but to the success of the class as a whole. To this end, you will turn in a reading response before most weeks of class to help you reflect on the readings and articulate your reactions.

There is a ton of excellent work on higher education that I have left out, including some of my favorites. You will only get a small taste of the large body of work on higher education and social stratification. We are spending a single week on the knowledge-production side of the university, although this is a major topic. The class is entirely focused on the U.S. And I have downplayed the large body of research on elite institutions, which receive disproportionate attention in the literature. If these are your areas of interest, I am happy to recommend more readings and you can explore them in your final paper.

Finally, I recognize that the pandemic is not over and many if not most of us are still dealing with related challenges. I understand that students may need more flexibility now than during “normal” times, and expect to extend that if and when it turns out to be needed. In return, I hope that you will be similarly understanding if circumstances arise that cause bumps in the road this semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

We will be reading the following books, all of which are available in electronic form from the library, or can be purchased from your favorite bookseller. The exception is *Bankers in the Ivory Tower*, which is not yet published, and which will be shared electronically. All other readings will be posted to Canvas.

Eaton, Charlie. In press. *Bankers in the Ivory Tower: The Troubling Rise of Financiers in U.S. Higher Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hamilton, Laura T., and Kelly Nielsen. 2021. *Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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

Okechukwu, Amaka. 2019. *To Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle Over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Owen-Smith, Jason. 2018. *Research Universities and the Public Good: Discovery for an Uncertain Future*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Stevens, Mitchell. 2009. *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Grades will be based on a combination of reading responses, class participation, and a final paper.

Participation (25% of grade). A successful seminar requires active and informed participation by its members. You should come to class each week prepared to engage with the readings and with one another. I am much less concerned with the brilliance of what you say than with your active and honest attempt to grapple with the course material.

Ten reading responses (25% of grade). Most weeks, you will write a reflection memo on the week's readings. These memos (typically about two double-spaced pages, or 750 words) should be posted to Canvas by 9pm Monday night. The format here is fairly flexible, but should not rely heavily on summarizing. Instead, you may want to consider what you think important takeaways of the readings are, how they relate to one another or to other class readings, what questions they raise for you, what you found interesting, challenging, or problematic about them, and/or what issues you think merit discussion in class. We have 13 weeks of class; since you cannot submit a memo the first week, this means you can take two weeks off from response-writing.

Research paper or proposal (50% of grade). Your main assignment will be a 15-20 pp. research paper on a relevant topic of your choice. This can be a research proposal, a substantive analysis of a question that interests you, or, if you already have some data you want to analyze, an empirical paper. A short (2-3 pp.) paper proposal will be due Friday, October 15 (just before fall break). The final paper will be due Tuesday, December 14 (a week after the last day of class).

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1, August 31

Introduction to the class

No class on September 7 (Rosh Hashanah)

If we were having class this week, it would be on the history of higher education in the U.S. I recommend David Labaree's *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education* (2017), for a very readable overview, although I find it too complacent about the status quo. For a useful counterpoint, try Adam Harris's new book, *The State Must Provide: Why America's Colleges Have Always Been Unequal—and How to Set Them Right* (2021), which covers the history of higher education for Black Americans.

FRAMING WEEKS

Week 2, September 14

The University as an Organization, Higher Ed as an Organizational Field

Taylor, Barrett J., and Brendan Cantwell. 2019. *Unequal Higher Education: Wealth, Status, and Student Opportunity*. Introduction and Chs. 1-2.

Eaton, Charlie, and Mitchell Stevens. 2020. "Universities as Peculiar Organizations." *Sociology Compass* 14.

Musselin, Christine. 2021. "University Governance in Meso and Macro Perspectives." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47:305-325.

Week 3, September 21

The Political Economy of Higher Education

Mettler, Suzanne. 2014. *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream*. New York: Basic Books. Introduction and Ch. 1.

Stevens, Mitchell, and Ben Gebre-Medhin. 2016. "Association, Service, Market: Higher Education in American Political Development." *Annual Review of Sociology* 42:121-142.

Schultze-Cleven, Tobias. 2020. "Organizing Competition: Regulatory Welfare States in Higher Education." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 276-294.

Week 4, September 28

Higher Education and Social Mobility/Social Stratification

Stevens, Mitchell L., Elizabeth A. Armstrong, and Richard Arum. 2008. "Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub: Empirical and Theoretical Advances in the Sociology of Higher Education." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:127-151. **Read pp. 129-131 (on "sieves") only.**

Hout, Michael. 2012. "Social and Economic Returns to College Education in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:379-400.

Bloome, Deirdre, Shauna Dyer, and Xiang Zhou. 2018. "Educational Inequality, Educational Expansion, and Intergenerational Income Persistence in the United States." *American Sociological Review* 83:1215-1253.

Ciocca Eller, Christina, and Thomas A. DiPrete. 2018. "The Paradox of Persistence: Explaining the Black-White Gap in Bachelor's Degree Completion." *American Sociological Review* 83:1171-1214.

ROAMING ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Week 5, October 5

The For-Profit Sector

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

Week 6, October 12

"New Universities"

Hamilton, Laura T., and Kelly Nielsen. 2021. *Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

No class on October 19 (Fall Break)

Week 7, October 26

Research Universities

Owen-Smith, Jason. 2018. *Research Universities and the Public Good: Discovery for an Uncertain Future*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Week 8, November 2

A Comparative Analysis

Eaton, Charlie. In press. *Bankers in the Ivory Tower: The Troubling Rise of Financiers in U.S. Higher Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Week 9, November 9

The Political Struggle over Affirmative Action

Okechukwu, Amaka. 2019. *To Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle Over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Week 10, November 16

From Admissions to Enrollment Management, Part 1

Stevens, Mitchell. 2009. *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Week 11, November 23

From Admissions to Enrollment Management, Part 2

Burd, Stephen. 2020. "Crisis Point: How Enrollment Management and the Merit-Aid Arms Race Are Derailing Public Higher Education." New America Foundation report.

Kraatz, Matthew S., Marc J. Ventresca, and Lina Deng. 2010. "Precarious Values and Mundane Innovations: Enrollment Management in American Liberal Arts Colleges." *Academy of Management Journal* 53:1521-1545.

Berman, Elizabeth Popp, and Abby Stivers. 2016. "Student Loans as a Pressure on U.S. Higher Education." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 46:129-160.

Salazar, Karina G., Ozan Jaquette, and Crystal Han. 2021. "Coming Soon to a Neighborhood Near You? Off-Campus Recruiting by Public Research Universities." *American Educational Research Journal*. Online first.

Week 12, November 30

The Rise of Rankings

Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. 2007. "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds." *American Journal of Sociology* 113:1-40.

Bowman, Nicholas A., and Michael N. Bastedo. 2009. "Getting on the Front Page: Organizational Reputation, Status Signals, and the Impact of *U.S. News and World Report* on Student Decisions." *Research in Higher Education* 50:415-436.

Chu, James. 2021. "Cameras of Merit or Engines of Inequality? College Ranking Systems and the Enrollment of Disadvantaged Students." *American Journal of Sociology* 126:1307-1346.

Week 13, December 7

Flex week

I am leaving this week unscheduled in case of COVID contingencies. The plan, however, is not to leave it completely open but to choose reading(s) for this final day in consultation with the class.