

## SOED-GE 2163 SOCIOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

spring 2022, Thursdays 4:55-6:35 pm

instructor: nadirah farah foley

email: [redacted]<sup>1</sup>

office hours<sup>2</sup>: by appointment [calendly]

### **course description**

What we call “higher education” in the United States is a complex web of institutions — nearly 3,000 4-year colleges, 1,500 2-year colleges, and still more postsecondary institutions that grant a variety of credentials. It is a system through which tens of millions of students pass each year; over the last few decades, the importance of earning a postsecondary credential has increased markedly. As such, higher education is deserving of rigorous scrutiny and careful interrogation. But in studying “higher education,” we are in fact attending to a multitude of things — among other things, varied institutional types with different resources and different imperatives, experiences of accessing and navigating higher education that are widely divergent along axes of inequality, and institutional processes that play out on campus but have resonance beyond the university gates.

In this course, which will be conducted as a discussion-based seminar, we will engage with texts examining the enterprise of higher education from varied vantage points, but always through a sociological lens. We’ll discuss why and how higher education came to be so important and loom so large in contemporary life, the stark differences between different sectors of the higher education landscape, and how stratification occurs between and within institutions. We’ll talk at length about how higher education is a microcosm of many of the inequalities we see in the broader society, looking at issues of race, class, gender, and politics on campus. By taking a sociological lens to studying higher education, we’ll learn a language and facility for rooting discussion of issues in higher education in theoretical grounding and empirical evidence. In so doing, students will develop the capacity to more critically assess research and public discourses on higher education, as well as their own work and experiences in the sector.

### **course goals**

I expect that through this class, you will:

- Gain an understanding of major issues in U.S. higher education
- Be able to articulate how higher education shapes and is shaped by processes of inequality
- Build comfort analyzing and engaging with scholarly literature and popular conversations about higher education
- Learn to apply sociological theories relevant to higher education

### **course expectations**

My goal as an instructor is to create a community of learners, of which I am one. I aim to foster a space conducive to learning and growth, to facilitate generative conversations, and to support you in

---

<sup>1</sup> Email is the best way to reach me. I aim to respond to emails within 48 hours, excepting weekends. As a note: I do not respond to emails outside of normal working hours, nor do I expect students to read or respond to email on evenings or weekends.

<sup>2</sup> “Office hours” are a time instructors block off for meetings with students to discuss a range of topics, including but not limited to course assignments, readings, and development as a scholar and professional. I welcome these meetings as an opportunity for us to chat one-on-one and for me to learn more about you and your goals.

furthering your academic goals. We will talk about topics that have the potential to be sensitive, with which we may have divergent experiences, and about which we may have differing points of view. I hope we will all challenge and push each other's thinking, while being sensitive to the fact that the classroom does not exist in isolation from, but in dialogue with the wider world.

## **assignments**

### *grade breakdown*

- 30% class participation (including discussion board posts)
- 10% discussion leadership
- 25% midterm paper
- 35% final paper

### *class participation*

tldr: seminar participation + 5 weekly response memos (200-400 words)

As this course is conducted as a seminar, consistent active engagement and contribution will in large part determine how successful we are in achieving our individual and shared learning goals for the semester. Good class participation is evaluated not in terms of how *often* one speaks — I encourage a practice of monitoring one's own airtime — but in the quality of contributions one makes: how one builds on, extends, challenges, and elevates the other voices in the room and the discourse in progress. Speaking up in class is one important way of participating, but so too are the weekly response memos that are a requirement for this course, beginning in the second week. Weekly responses of 200-400 words will be posted to the course discussion board. These memos should not be a summary, but rather an opportunity for you to think about and respond to the reading, highlighting a central insight, drawing out tensions, reactions, and lingering questions, or raising issues you'd like us to take up in the whole-class discussion. As only 5 response memos are required, most weeks during the semester you need not post a response. On weeks when you do not post, however, you are strongly encouraged to read and respond to your group members' posts; these responses are an important part of your participation grade. **Memos are due by 5pm on Wednesdays.**

### *discussion leadership*

Each student will be responsible for — in collaboration with another student in the course — facilitating discussion for one week of the course. Students should email me by Wednesday at noon with a brief outline of their plans.

### *midterm paper*

For the midterm paper (**due 13 March 2022**), you have two options.

- 1) A reflective personal essay (approx. 1500 words), putting your own journey to/through higher education in conversation with the readings.
- 2) An op-ed (750-1000 words) on a topic of your choosing, related to higher education. In addition, please include an annotated bibliography of sources drawn on.

### *final paper*

For the final paper (**due 10 May 2022**), you have three options. Final papers should be in the range of 10-15 pages (double-spaced).

- 1) critical book review

For the book review, choose two texts, ideally from different weeks of the syllabus, and read

them in their entirety. Your review should offer a synthesis of the major arguments of each book, but should also go beyond synthesis to offer an analysis of each book and to put the two texts in conversation with one another. Where do their arguments converge and diverge? What does one illuminate that another leaves obscured? Does one offer a more compelling vision? Why and how?

2) literature review

The literature review is one of the trickiest but most important types of academic writing to master. While it is a review, it is not simply a summary of all that is known about a topic; it is a synthesis, an attempt to put bodies of literature into conversation with one another, in the service of illuminating what is known and what is left to be uncovered. For the literature review option for this course's final assignment, you would need to pick a topic that is of interest to you and read broadly to gain a deeper understanding of the extant literature on this topic. The goal of this assignment would be to position you well to write future proposals on that topic and review books or articles on that topic.

3) research proposal

The research proposal is an ideal assignment for an early-stage doctoral student homing in on their interests. For the research proposal, you will first identify a research question related to higher education. You will address, drawing on extant literature, what is known about the topic and why further research is needed. The research proposal will then suggest a project that will address your research question, explaining your proposed methodology and expected implications/contributions.

### **additional information**

#### *covid considerations*

Although this course meets in person, I acknowledge that we are still very much in the midst of a pandemic. Per NYU guidelines, we will be masked during class; for your own protection and that of the rest of the class, I strongly encourage the use of higher-quality masks, such as N95/KN95/KF94s. I encourage anyone feeling under the weather to stay home and notify me if they would like to participate in class virtually, knowing that they will experience no negative repercussions for not being in-person.

#### *deadlines*

Given the exigencies of the current moment, deadlines for assignments are suggestions, and I will not be penalizing work submitted late. Submitting assignments by the appointed time allows your peers to respond to your memos and me to offer feedback in a timely fashion. I am sensitive to the fact that life happens; if you are unable to make the deadline for an assignment, please be in touch as soon as possible to communicate when you intend to submit the assignment. There is no need to go into great detail about what is going on, unless you are so inclined to share and only insofar as knowing your circumstances allows me to create a more supportive learning environment.

#### *accommodations*

New York University is committed to ensuring equal educational opportunity and accommodations for all students. Students should contact the [Moses Center for Student Accessibility](#) at (212) 998-4980. The Center will work with students to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations that support equal access. I am also committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment for students; please be in touch with questions or concerns.

#### *academic integrity*

As you write assignments, please bear in mind the importance of acknowledging the sources from which you draw ideas — whether that be course texts, classmates, or class discussions. It is not plagiarism to borrow ideas, language, or knowledge from others — with proper citation/attribution. Failing to clearly and specifically acknowledge such borrowing, however, is to be avoided. For more on this, please refer to the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity, which is available [here](#). Please use whatever citation system — ASA, APA, Chicago, MLA — you are most comfortable with, and be consistent. (N.B. If you haven't already, I cannot recommend highly enough using a citation manager of some sort; I use Zotero, which is free and makes managing citations much easier, in my experience.)

*additional resources*

- Bobst Library [Ask a Librarian](#) to email or chat
- [Education Research Guides](#), NYU Libraries
- [NYU Writing Center](#): schedule an appointment [here](#)
- [Steinhardt Writing Center](#)

and if you made it this far — email me a photo/video/meme of a cute animal!

readings, by week. in weeks where we're reading multiple chapters of a book, I sometimes indicate that we'll jigsaw the chapters by last name.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 27 Jan 2022: thinking sociologically about higher ed

First, read this [blog post](#) by Dr. Jessica Calarco on how to read academic work for meaning

Then:

- Grubb, W. Norton, and Marvin Lazerson. 2007. *The Education Gospel: The Economic Power of Schooling*. Harvard University Press. Ch. 1. [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Labaree, David F. 2017. *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education*. Chicago, IL, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1: [available through NYU libraries](#).
- Stevens, M. L., Armstrong, E. A., & Arum, R. (2008). Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub: Empirical and Theoretical Advances in the Sociology of Higher Education. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34 (1), 127-151.

### 3 Feb 2022: college, credentials, and culture

*Required:*

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.
- Collins, Randall. 2019. *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. Columbia University Press. Students with last names A-L: read Ch. 1. Last names M-Z: Ch. 5: The Rise of the Credential system [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Hout, Michael. 2012. "Social and Economic Returns to College Education in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(1):379–400. doi: [10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102503](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102503).

- Julie R. Posselt & Eric Grodsky. 2017. Graduate Education and Social Stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*; 43, 353–78

#### *Additional Reading*

- Delbanco, Andrew. 2014. *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be - Updated Edition*. Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1
- Meyer, John W. 1977. “The Effects of Education as an Institution.” *American Journal of Sociology* 83(1):55–77.
- Urciuoli, Bonnie. 2014. “The Semiotic Production of the Good Student: A Peircean Look at the Commodification of Liberal Arts Education.” *Signs and Society* 2(1):56–83. doi: [10.1086/675537](https://doi.org/10.1086/675537).

## II. DIFFERENTIATION

### 10 Feb 2022: public universities

#### *Required*

- Brint, Steven, and Jerome Karabel. 1989. *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. NY: Oxford University Press. Read Ch. 1: Community Colleges and the American Social Order
- Hamilton, Laura T., and Kelly Nielsen. 2021. *Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities*. University of Chicago Press. Ch. 1: Introduction and Ch. 4: Austerity Administration
- Lee, Robert & Tristan Ahtone. 2020. “Land-grab Universities.” <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>

#### *Additional Reading*

- Schudde, L. & Goldrick-Rab, Sara. 2015. “On Second Chances and Stratification: How Sociologists Think About Community Colleges.” *Community College Review* 43,1, 27-45

### 17 Feb 2022: minority-serving institutions

#### *Required:*

- Allen, Walter Recharde, and Joseph O. Jewell. 2002. “A Backward Glance Forward: Past, Present and Future Perspectives on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.” *The Review of Higher Education* 25(3):241–61. doi: [10.1353/rhe.2002.0007](https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2002.0007).
- Harris, Adam O. and Natasha Warikoo. Discussion of *The State Must Provide*. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?514444-1/the-state-provide>
- Núñez, Anne-Marie, Gloria Crisp, and Diane Elizondo. 2016. “Mapping Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A Typology of Institutional Diversity.” *The Journal of Higher Education* 87(1):55–83. doi: [10.1353/jhe.2016.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2016.0001).

#### *Additional Reading*

- Anderson, James D. 1988. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Univ of North Carolina Press.

### 24 Feb 2022: for-profits

- Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2017. *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*. The New Press. Read Intro, Ch 1, Ch 6, and one other chapter of your choice. [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Gelbgiser, Dafna. 2018. “College for All, Degrees for Few: For-Profit Colleges and Socioeconomic Differences in Degree Attainment.” *Social Forces* 96(4):1785–1824. doi: [10.1093/sf/soy022](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy022).
- Bannon, Lisa and Andrea Fuller. “USC Pushed a \$115,000 Online Degree. Graduates Got Low Salaries, Huge Debts.” <https://www.wsj.com/articles/usc-online-social-work-masters-11636435900?page=1>

### III. INSTITUTIONAL STRATIFICATION

#### 3 Mar 2022: rankings, merit, and “real” colleges

- 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.
- Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. 2007. “Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds.” *American Journal of Sociology* 113:1-40.
- Posecznick, A. (2017). *Selling Hope and College: Merit, Markets, and Recruitment in an Unranked School*. Cornell University Press. (ch. 4: “Being a Real College in America”) [[available through NYU libraries](#)]

#### 10 Mar 2022: the cost of college

- 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.
- Goldrick-Rab, Sara. 2016. *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*. Chicago, IL, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press. Read Ch. 2: The Cost and Price of a College Education and Ch. 4: Making Ends Meet [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Hedrick, David W., Charles S. Wassell, and Steven E. Henson. 2009. “Administrative Costs in Higher Education: How Fast Are They Really Growing?” *Education Economics* 17(1):123–37. doi: [10.1080/09645290701523184](https://doi.org/10.1080/09645290701523184).
- Seamster, Louise and Tressie McMillan Cottom. “The Life Altering Differences Between White and Black Debt.” Listen [here](#).

#### 17 Mar 2022 — NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK

### IV. INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

#### 24 Mar 2022: admissions

- Stevens, Mitchell L. 2007. *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Harvard University Press. Read Ch. 6: Decisions and Ch. 8: The Aristocracy of Merit [[available through NYU libraries](#)]

- Warikoo, Natasha K. 2016. *The Diversity Bargain: And Other Dilemmas of Race, Admissions, and Meritocracy at Elite Universities*. University of Chicago Press. Read. Ch 4: Merit and the Diversity Bargain [[available through NYU libraries](#)]

#### *Additional Reading*

- Karabel, Jerome. 2005. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Posselt, Julie R. 2016. *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping*. Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press.

### **31 Mar 2022: affirmative action**

- kehal, prabhdeep singh, Hirschman, Daniel, and Ellen Berrey. 2021. When Affirmative Action Disappears: Unexpected Patterns in Student Enrollments at Selective U.S. Institutions, 1990-2016. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*.
- Okechukwu, Amaka. 2019. *To Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle Over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions*. New York, UNITED STATES: Columbia University Press. Read Ch. 2, 3, and 4 [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Stulberg, Lisa and Anthony S. Chen. 2014. 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.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040713514063>

## **V. AXES OF INEQUALITY**

### **7 Apr 2022: from race to diversity**

#### *Required*

- Ahmed, Sarah. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press. Read Ch. 5: Speaking about Racism [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Ray, Victor. 2019. “A Theory of Racialized Organizations.” *American Sociological Review* 84(1):26–53. doi: [10.1177/0003122418822335](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335).
- Warikoo, Natasha K. 2016. *The Diversity Bargain: And Other Dilemmas of Race, Admissions, and Meritocracy at Elite Universities*. University of Chicago Press. Read. Ch 2: Making Sense of Race and Ch. 5: The Moral Imperatives of Diversity [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- 

#### *Additional Reading*

- Byrd, W. Carson. 2021. *Behind the Diversity Numbers: Achieving Racial Equity on Campus*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

### **14 Apr 2022: cisheteropatriarchy on campus**

- Nicolazzo, Z. 2016. *Trans\* in College: Transgender Students’ Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion*. Herndon, UNITED STATES: Stylus Publishing, LLC. Read Ch. 2: A Review of Trans\*-Related Research and Ch. 5: Resilience as a Verb [[available through NYU libraries](#)]



- Hirsch, Jennifer S., and Shamus Khan. 2020. *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus*. W. W. Norton & Company. Read Intro and Ch. 4
- Wade, Lisa, and Caroline Heldman. 2012. "Hooking Up and Opting Out." Pp. 128–45 in *Sex for Life*, edited by L. Carpenter and J. DeLamater. NYU Press. [[available through NYU libraries](#)]

## 21 Apr 2022: class

### *Required*

- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Laura T. Hamilton. 2013. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press. Read Intro: Everyone. Last names A-H read Ch. 5; I-P read Ch. 6; Q-Z read Ch. 7. [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2016. "(No) Harm in Asking: Class, Acquired Cultural Capital, and Academic Engagement at an Elite University." *Sociology of Education* 89(1):1–19.
- Stuber, Jenny M. 2006. "Talk of Class: The Discursive Repertoires of White Working- and Upper-Middle-Class College Students." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(3):285–318. doi: [10.1177/0891241605283569](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605283569).

### *Additional Reading*

- Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2019. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press.
- Lee, Elizabeth. 2016. *Class and Campus Life: Managing and Experiencing Inequality at an Elite College*. Ithaca, UNITED STATES: Cornell University Press.
- Rivera, Lauren A. 2015. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press.

## 28 Apr 2022: political polarization and mobilization on campus

- Binder, Amy J., and Kate Wood. 2013. *Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives*. Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press. Read Ch. 2 & Ch. 3 [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Morgan, Demetri L., and Charles H. F. Davis III. 2019. *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*. Milton, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group. Read Ch. 3 "Understanding American Conservatism and Its Role in Higher Education" and Ch. 11 "Student and Administrative Responses to Student Collective Action on Campus" [[available through NYU libraries](#)]
- Pettit, Emma. 2021. "It Just Felt Wrong: U. of Florida Faculty Say Political Fears Stalled an Initiative on Race." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 10, 2021 (<http://www.chronicle.com/article/it-just-felt-wrong-u-of-florida-faculty-say-political-fears-stalled-an-initiative-on-race>).

## 5 May 2022: TBD [open day, topic to be set collaboratively]