



Course Description & Learning Outcomes

The “college-for-all” movement has pushed more Americans into higher education. At the same time, student loan debt is higher than ever before. In this course, we will discuss these trends and ask big questions about patterns, such as: Who benefits from a college degree, and why are these benefits not equally shared among all graduates? Should a college degree guarantee a good job after graduation? Are there other benefits we expect should come from this credential? This upper-level Sociology elective explores the role of higher education in the United States, and its implications for inequality.

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Summarize the historic role of higher education in the U.S. to contextualize how contemporary debates about education are situated within a broader timeline (*assessed by Quizzes; Reading Reflections*).
- Identify how the college experience often differs by race, class, and type of institution attended, and how these distinctions affect student success and future post-college outcomes (*assessed by Quizzes; Experiential Learning Project*).
- Describe the tensions between higher education as a tool for mobility and class reproduction and the implications of this for inequality (*assessed by Reading Reflections; Mid-term Essay*).
- Design a public policy that provides a solution to one higher education-related social problem (*assessed by White Paper Project*).

Required Texts and Materials

We will read several books in this class. They will be available at the campus bookstore, online, and may be borrowed for free through the campus library. *Please see me as soon as possible if obtaining the books for this course are a challenge for you.*



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



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



Labaree, David F. 2017. *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education*.

Additional articles will be posted on our course website: elms.umd.edu

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Class Meets
Tuesdays & Thursdays
10:00am – 11:15am
BLD #1234

Office Hours
BLD #5678
Mon & Wed 2:00-4:00pm
and by appointment

Prerequisites
Introduction to Sociology

Course Communication
I will frequently communicate with the class via our online ELMS course space; please be sure to check this regularly.

E-mail is the best way to contact me. During the week, I will make every effort to respond to your e-mail within 24-48 hours. I may not respond to e-mail over the weekend.

Please keep in mind that e-mail should be viewed as professional communication. For guidance and tips, visit ter.ps/email.

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Activities, Learning Assessments, & Expectations for Students

Final grades will be based on the following components:

- Preparation, Participation, and Engagement (10%)
- Reading Reflections (15%)
- Quizzes (15%)
- Mid-term Essay (20%)
- Experiential Learning Project (10%)
- White Paper Project (30%)

Preparation, Participation and Engagement (10%). It is your responsibility, and an expectation, that you will prepare for class, attend, and actively engage during our class time. This includes small homework assignments that allow us to apply the reading and course material. Some homework and in-class assignments will be collected and others will not, so you should always be prepared to submit these. Inappropriate use of technology or electronic devices, being disrespectful to your peers, and other disruptive behaviors will negatively affect your participation grade.

- A level participants are **consistently** prepared and knowledgeable. They have their materials handy and are able to refer to specifics in their materials during class. They contribute to the ongoing discussion by responding thoughtfully to others and/or by asking questions that help build useful group understanding. They are active leaders and listeners in small group discussion. They abide by the attendance policy. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of the discussion would diminish.
- B level participants **mostly** meet the above criteria.
- C level participants **occasionally** meet the above criteria.
- D level participants **rarely** meet the above criteria.
- F level participants **fail** to meet the above criteria.

More details about attendance and engagement are on page 3.

Reading Reflections (15%). Eight times during the semester, you will submit a reading reflection on that week's reading. You may choose which weeks to complete a reading reflection. You should focus on class readings in the reflection, but these are also "thought exercises" asking you to provide your own perspective. You are welcome to draw on your past experiences, other courses, and outside readings. These one-page (single-spaced) reflections are designed for you to think about how the reading for the week connects to broader course concepts. I find that if you do this ahead of time, you are likely to have more to contribute to the class and to get more out of the class discussion. These papers should be uploaded to ELMS by 6 pm on Mondays. No late reading reflections will be accepted. Eight reading reflections must be submitted over the course of the semester.

Quizzes (15%). Throughout the semester, there will be in-class quizzes. Some will be announced and some will be unannounced. *Quizzes cannot be made-up unless prior arrangements are made.*

Mid-term Essay (20%). *Does higher education reduce inequality?* You will explain your position using course readings, outside sources, and examples. This is due mid-semester. We will workshop a rough draft of the essays via peer feedback prior to the final due date.

Experiential Learning Project (10%). The discipline of Sociology involves critically examining the social world. To apply the higher education concepts we discuss in class to our campus and community, you will engage in at least 3 hours of experiential learning related to higher education as an institution and then connect this experience to course material. For example, you might participate in student organization meetings, attend co-curricular events on campus, or engage in service learning through the Center for Engagement. The project encompasses making a plan, completing the experience, and writing a reflection about how this experience relates to theoretical concepts. *See page 9 for assignment details.*

White Paper Project (30%). Working in a group, you will engage deeply with one higher education-related policy issue. Your paper will describe the problem and identify potential solutions. At the end of the semester, your group will present your policy solution to the class and other campus stakeholders. *See page 10 for assignment details.*

Note: *assignment guidelines that are typically distributed separately throughout the semester are included at the end of the syllabus for reference.*

Attendance is crucial for your success in this class. Attendance will be taken every class period. There are times when absences are unavoidable; you are permitted two absences without penalty. Note that if you're absent on the day of an unannounced in-class quiz, these cannot be made-up. After two absences and for every absence thereafter, your participation grade will be lowered by one percentage point. Special cases will be handled on a case-by-case basis. If such circumstances arise where you will miss more than two class periods, please inform me as soon as possible and provide documentation.

I suggest you find a "class buddy" and exchange contact information in order to ask for updates and notes for a missed class period. If you are absent from class, please contact a classmate first to obtain the information you missed and then contact me if you have further questions about course material.

On the first day of class, we'll make some time for introductions.

Classmate name: _____

Contact information: _____

Engagement. Please come to class prepared with notes, ideas, and questions to discuss. This class will largely be discussion based. Therefore, it is essential that we all complete the readings before class begins and you're prepared to share your ideas with your peers. We will use the Discussion Board on ELMS as an additional tool for the class to share relevant articles, news events related to the course, etc.

Classroom Community. During class discussions, we want to create a safe space in which individuals can ask questions and express ideas without fear of judgment from others. Our classroom community depends on the consistent presence and thoughtful engagement of all members. As members of this community, it is imperative that we listen empathically to one another, that we articulate our disagreements thoughtfully and respectfully, and that we remain committed to critical comprehension of all ideas and materials. An inclusive and open classroom

community is the work of all of us; please do your part to address topics with sensitivity and maturity to ensure a productive discussion within this safe space. We will establish our class ground rules for our learning community during the first week of class and they will be added as an addendum to the syllabus.

Course-Specific Policies

Technology: Laptops are welcome for the purposes of note taking, research on topics under discussion, and/or review of course material. Please refrain from accessing personal e-mail, social media, or other non-course-related items during class time. Use of cell phones, iPads, laptops, etc. during class for non-course related purposes will negatively impact your participation grade.

I expect you to make the responsible and respectful decision to refrain from using your cellphone in class. If you have critical communication to attend to, please excuse yourself and return when you are ready.

Late Work Policy: In general, late work will not be accepted. Preparation, Participation, and Engagement assignments will not be accepted late unless prior arrangements have been made. Other assignments received after the due date will be reduced a partial letter grade (i.e. B+ → B) for each day that it is late.

Assignment Submission and Formatting: Unless otherwise noted, your work will be submitted via ELMS prior to class starting. Assignments must be submitted on ELMS as a Microsoft Word document (not Pages or PDF). E-mail submissions will not be accepted.

Get Some Help!

Taking ownership for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit tutoring.umd.edu to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you. In particular, everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting ter.ps/writing and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center. You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (see go.umd.edu/assistance), and if you just need someone to talk to, visit counseling.umd.edu or [one of the many other resources on campus](#).



Most services free because you have already paid for it, and **everyone needs help**... all you have to do is ask for it.

Basic Needs Security

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live and believe this may affect your performance in this course, please visit go.umd.edu/basic-needs for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Names/Pronouns and Self Identifications

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit trans.umd.edu to learn more.

Additionally, how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about

our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Grades

Your grade is determined by your performance on the learning assessments in the course and is assigned individually (not curved). If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades (including the exams), or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet in my office.

I am happy to discuss any of your grades with you. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade.

Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same this as making the cut ($89.99 \neq 90.00$). It would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%		
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%		

Course Schedule

What is the Role of Higher Education in the United States?

Week 1

Tuesday, August 25: Introduction to the course and to one another

- Establish collective community guidelines

Thursday, August 27

Read: Labaree, chapters 1 – 3

Due: “About Me” discussion post on ELMS

Week 2

Tuesday, September 1

Read: Labaree, chapters 4 - 6

Thursday, September 3

Read: Labaree, chapters 7 - 9

Who Benefits from a College Degree?

Week 3

Tuesday, September 8

Announced Quiz #1

Read:

1. Torche, Florencia. 2011. "Is a College Degree Still the Great Equalizer? Intergenerational Mobility across Levels of Schooling in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(3):763–807.
2. Horowitz, Jonathan. 2018. "Relative Education and the Advantage of a College Degree." *American Sociological Review* 31:1–31.

Thursday, September 10

Read:

1. Hout, Michael. 2012. "Social and Economic Returns to College Education in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 3:379–400.
2. Domina, Thurston, Andrew Penner, and Emily Penner. 2017. "Categorical Inequality: Schools As Sorting Machines." *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(1):311–30.

The College Experience

Week 4

Tuesday, September 15

Read: Armstrong, chapters 1-4

Thursday, September 17

Read: Armstrong, chapters 5-9

Due: Experiential Learning Project Plan

The College Experience Continued: Race, Class, and Student Loan Debt

Week 5

Tuesday, September 22

Read: 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.

Thursday, September 24

Read: Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Robert Kelchen, and Jason Houle. 2014. *The Color of Student Debt: Implications of Federal Loan Program Reforms for Black Students and Historically Black Colleges and Universities*.

For-Profit Higher Ed

Week 6

Tuesday, September 29

Announced Quiz #2

Read: Cottom, chapters 1-2

Thursday, October 1

Read: Cottom, chapters 3-4

Week 7

Tuesday, October 6

Read: Cottom, chapters 5, 6, and epilogue

Thursday, October 8: Peer Review Workshop

Due: Rough Draft of Mid-Term Paper. Bring 2 printed copies to class

The College-to-Career Transition

Week 8

Tuesday, October 13

Read: Chapter 1 “The Sprinters, Wanderers, and Stragglers” in Selingo, Jeffrey J. 2016. *There Is Life After College: What Parents and Students Should Know About Navigating School to Prepare for the Jobs of Tomorrow.*

Thursday, October 15

Due: Mid-term Paper

Inequality in the College-to-Career Transition: The Role of Elites

Week 9

Tuesday, October 20

Read: Chapter 1 “Entering the Elite” and Chapter 3 “The Pitch” in Rivera, Lauren A. 2015. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs.* Princeton University Press.

Thursday, October 22

Read: Chapter 10 “Social Reconstruction” and Chapter 11 “Conclusion” in Rivera, Lauren A. 2015. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs.* Princeton University Press.

College Career Centers and Internships

Week 10

Tuesday, October 27

Read: Damaske, Sarah. 2009. “Brown Suits Need Not Apply: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class in Institutional Network Building.” *Sociological Forum* 24(2):402–24.

Thursday, October 29

Announced Quiz #3

Read: Chapter 1 “The Happiest Interns in the World” and Chapter 11 “Nothing to Lose But Your Cubicles” in Perlin, Ross. 2011. *Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy.* Verso.

Co-Designed by Class

Week 11: TBD based on Class Interest

Tuesday, November 3

Read: TBA

Thursday, November 5

Read: TBA

Due: White Paper Topic & Outline

Week 12: TBD based on Class Interest

Tuesday, November 10

Read: TBA

Thursday, November 12

Read: TBA

The Future of Higher Education

Week 13

Tuesday, November 17

Quiz #4

Read: Excerpts from Aoun, Joseph E. 2017. *Robot-Proof: Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.

Thursday, November 19

Read: Chamorro-Premuzic, Tomas and Becky Frankiewicz. January 2019. "[Does Higher Education Still Prepare People for Jobs?](#)" *Harvard Business Review*.

Week 14

Tuesday, November 24: Group Work Time

Due: Experiential Learning Project Reflection

Thursday, November 26: *No Class - Thanksgiving*

Week 15

Tuesday, December 1: Group Presentations

Due: White Paper

Thursday, December 3: Group Presentations

Finals Week

Exam Period: Remaining Group Presentations & End-of-Semester Reflection

Due: Group Self & Peer Assessments

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Experiential Learning Project Guidelines

STEP 1: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PLAN

You are required to complete at least **three hours of experiential learning** related to higher education. These 3 hours could include attending student organization meetings, co-curricular events on campus, or engaging in service learning through the Center for Engagement. These experiences should be outside of your normal interactions and routines. For example, if you're already a member of Students for Squirrels, attending a Students for Squirrels meeting does not meet the requirements for this project. Please ask me if you have any questions about whether a particular event/opportunity would meet the requirements.

Submit a description of how you plan to complete your hours of experiential learning. This should include the specific details of the engagement opportunities you intend to participate in (i.e. which co-curricular events you plan to attend or your intended plan for service learning). For each event/service learning opportunity you plan to attend, include the title of the event/opportunity, date, time, and location. This will likely be about 2 pages long.

In addition to these details, answer the following questions:

- Why have you chosen these particular events/service learning opportunities?
- What are you hoping to learn?
- What questions do you have about the topics?
- Which topics listed on the syllabus do you think may connect to your events/experiential learning opportunities? Cite at least 2 topics and/or specific readings from the syllabus that you anticipate may relate to your events and/or service learning.

Your plan will be assessed based on the following:

Schedule for completion is clear and achievable	_____/10
Answers key questions	_____/20
Step 1 Total _____/30	

STEP 2: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING REFLECTION

Your **reflection** should clearly address how you completed your hours, what you learned, and how this is connected to course material. While there is no minimum page number requirement, it will probably be 3-4 pages long. Read and/or re-read assigned readings to assist in your reflection and in making connections to course material.

Include the following information in your response:

- What did you do to complete your 3 hours of experiential learning? Include specific details such as the name of the event(s), date(s), location(s), and/or organization(s) in which you participated in service learning.
- Discuss the ways your identities shaped your participation in and response to these experiences. You might consider your age, race, class, gender, faith, orientation and ability status. Think about the ways our identities sometimes limit our perspectives and experiences, as well as about the possibilities for building coalition and understanding with those who are different from us in some way.
- What new questions, issues, or ideas did these experiences raised for you?
- What new knowledge have you gained, and what impact does that knowledge have on your perspective on issues of higher education in the United States?
- What connections do you see between these experiences and the course material? Were there any contradictions? You must include at least 3 specific references to course readings (and properly cite them) in your analysis.

Your reflection will be assessed based on the following:

Number of hours completed	_____/20
Answers key questions	_____/30
Connection to course materials and readings	_____/20
Step 2 Total _____/70	

Writing Policy White Papers

Most policy papers are written in the form of a white paper, which offer authoritative perspective on or solutions to a problem. White papers are common not only to policy and politics, but also in business and technical fields. In the world of policy, white papers guide decision makers with expert opinions, recommendations, and analytical research.

Policy papers may also take the form of a briefing paper, which typically provides a decision maker with an overview of an issue or problem, targeted analysis, and, often, actionable recommendations. Briefing books and white papers often accompany an oral briefing that targets key findings or recommendations. The decision maker then refers to the extended paper for the deep analysis that supports the core findings and/or recommendations.

You will be working in small groups to produce a policy white paper that defines a policy problem within American higher education and identifies a potential solution to that problem. Most policy white papers are between 6-8 pages long, and your papers should aim for this range, with 6 pages as an absolute minimum, and 10 pages as an absolute maximum.

Core Components of a White Paper:

Although the policy paper relies on your authority over the deep research that you have conducted on the issue or problem, you should also pay close attention to audience, the professional expectations and jargon of your targeted decision makers, and the structure and flow of your argument. Here are some general attributes that structure the analysis and argument for most policy papers:

- **Define the problem or issue.** Highlight the urgency and state significant findings for the problem based on the data. Objectivity is your priority, so resist the urge to overstate.
- **Analyze—do not merely present—the data.** Show how you arrived at the findings or recommendations through analysis of qualitative or quantitative data. Draw careful conclusions that make sense of the data and do not misrepresent it. Your data should be replicable, meaning someone else should be able to find the same result with the same data, and ideally the same result with different but comparable data.
- **Summarize your findings or state recommendations.** Provide specific recommendations or findings in response to specific problems and avoid generalizations.
- **Generate criteria for evaluating evidence.** Explain the key assumptions and methodology underlying your analysis and prioritize the criteria you rely on to assess evidence.
- **If you are producing recommendations, analyze the options and tradeoffs according to your methodology and assess their feasibility.** What are the pros and cons? What is feasible? What are the predictable outcomes? Develop a logic model to gird your analysis and support your assertions with relevant data.
- **Address—and when appropriate rebut—counterarguments, caveats, alternative interpretations, and reservations to your findings or recommendations.** Your credibility as a policy analyst relies on your ability to locate and account for counterargument. You should be especially sensitive to the likely counterarguments that a decision-maker would face in implementing or acting on your recommendations or findings.
- **Suggest next steps and the implications of the findings or recommendations.** You may briefly address the feasibility of next steps or explore the implications of your analysis.
- **Distill the conclusions succinctly in a concluding section and remind the decision-maker of the big picture, the overall goal, the necessity of the investigation, or of the urgency for action.** This answers the “Who cares?” question that reminds the reader of the value of the research and recommendations. If you are targeting a decision maker, you should reflect the decision-maker’s primary concerns.