

## **SOCI 89: College, Inequality, and Society**

Department of Sociology, UNC Chapel Hill  
Fall 2022

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Classroom: Dey Hall 202

Class Meeting: T/TH 2:00-3:15

### **OVERVIEW OF COURSE**

Universities are experiencing significant change and are the focus of intense debates. Some see college as an important equalizer that helps students reach their full potential and live more rewarding lives. Others see colleges as reinforcing inequalities and favoring students who are already privileged. Meanwhile, significant changes underway include rising costs, greater competition, growing diversity, new technologies, and calls for greater accountability and oversight. We will read and reflect broadly on college and how higher education is changing, and we will conduct sociological research on three major themes. First, we will consider the *sorting process* - what factors shape who goes to college and where they go to college. Second, we will examine the *social dimension* - how the college experience shapes learning, identities, and relationships. Third, we will focus on the *institutional context* – how college is shaped by politics, the economy, the legal system, and popular culture.

### **COURSE LEARNING GOALS**

- Understand key features of higher education in the contemporary U.S. and at UNC
- Examine how higher education reproduces and mitigates inequalities in society
- Evaluate the major challenges facing higher education including their causes and impacts on student experience
- Learn to work collaboratively on class projects and presentations
- Develop your capacities to write and speak persuasively on important social issues
- Make connections between learning inside and outside the classroom

### **CLASS FORMAT AND MEETINGS**

You will take classes with different formats at UNC. This course is seminar which means we will have discussions that build on core themes throughout the semester. Your active participation is necessary for this to work and for your individual success. This includes reading course material and reflecting on them prior to class meetings for which they are assigned.

Each Friday, I will post questions on sakai to guide your reading and prepare for our class the following week. The questions ask you to reflect on important themes and questions as you do the reading. These will be the basis for weekly reading posts on sakai (details below).

## **READINGS**

Articles and book chapters will be available on sakai as PDF files or as links to resources on the internet.

## **MEETINGS AND CONTACTING ME**

I look forward to getting to know all of you this semester in class and individually. You can drop by to meet with me during office hours or by appointment other times of the week. Email is generally the best method to reach me with smaller questions. Immediately before or after class is another good time to have short discussions or set up meetings.

## **REQUIREMENTS/ASSIGNMENTS/GRADES**

Class participation	10%
Co-leading class meeting	5%
Weekly reading posts	30%
Biography and history paper	15%
Campus life paper	15%
Future of higher education paper	25%

The grading scale for this course is: A=100-94; A-=93-91; B+=90-88; B=87-84; B-=83-81; C+=80-78; C=77-74; C-=73--71; D+=70-68; D=67--61; F=60 and below.

Assignments turned in after the deadline will be penalized by deducting a half letter grade for each day it is late. For example, an A- paper becomes a B+ if turned in one day late, a B if two days late, a B- if three days late, and so on.

Participation (10%): If you read actively, you will be well prepared for discussion. If you have concerns about your performance in class discussions, please come speak to me and we'll discuss ways you can improve. Please communicate with me early about potential absences. After your second unexcused absence, I will deduct 10% from your overall participation grade for each absence.

Co-Leading Class Meeting (5%): We will have multiple guest speakers throughout the semester, and you and two or three other classmates will take responsibility for introducing the speaker and presenting a series of questions to guide the discussion. We will invite campus leaders and engage with them about core topics from the class.

Weekly Reading Posts (30%): You will post a short reflection on the reading each week of 1-2 paragraphs on sakai. This will help you prepare for class discussion. There will be approximately 15 weekly reading posts during the semester.

Biography and History Paper (15%): Your first paper will connect the themes of “biography” and “history” – how our personal lives are shaped by larger institutional forces. A detailed handout will be provided in class. This 4-page paper is due during Week 5.

Campus Life Paper (15%): Your second paper will examine a central feature of campus life (the curriculum, social life, gender norms, racial diversity, political engagement) by focusing on an earlier period in UNC’s history. We will introduce relevant materials in class that can be used to do research for this project (such as campus publications, official records, oral histories). Your paper should reflect on key areas of similarity and difference with UNC today. This 6-page paper is due during Week 11.

Future of Higher Education Paper (25%): Your final paper will examine a major challenge facing UNC and higher education. Your paper will consider different perspectives on ways to respond to this challenge, evaluate evidence favoring different strategies, and recommend what you consider to be the best path forward for universities. Your 8-page paper and a brief presentation on it is due during Final Exam period (Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> at 12pm).

### **CLASS GUIDELINES AND POLICIES**

If you have an extraordinary set of circumstances that make it impossible for you to meet a deadline, you must see me prior to the deadline. Extraordinary circumstances might include a serious illness or death in your family, but it would not include personal travel, extracurricular activities, or fulfilling the requirements of other courses.

Sakai will be used for announcements and to make copies of the syllabus, handouts, and assignments available to you. You should check sakai regularly for announcements related to course assignments and schedule.

Laptops, tablets, and other devices will not be used in class for taking notes. Although some students are able to use these devices effectively, my experience and research on learning indicates that laptops in the classroom are a distraction more often than not.

### **HONOR CODE**

Your participation in this course is covered by the UNC Honor Code (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu/students>). If you have questions about any forms of academic dishonesty please see me, and I will be happy to clarify. You should be especially attentive to plagiarism. The UNC Writing Center has a handout that describes what plagiarism is, why it should be avoided, and how to avoid it. Link: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/>

## **SCHEDULE**

(\*\* note that we may modify the schedule as needed depending on the pace of the class; any changes will be announced in class and on sakai at early as possible)

### **College from a Sociological Perspective**

#### Week 1 – Introduction

August 16 and 18

C. Wright Mills, “The Promise”, Excerpt from *The Sociological Imagination*

[Profile of UNC Students](#)

#### Week 2 – Reflections on Biography and History

August 23 and 25

Tressie McMillan Cottom, “Education Gospel” and “Jesus is My Backup Plan” from *Lower Ed*  
Selected oral histories on student life at UNC from UNC’s Southern Oral History Project

#### Week 3 - Debates about the Purpose of Higher Education

August 30 and Sept 1

Andrew Delbanco, “What is College For?”

UNC College, [Ideas in Action Curriculum](#)

### **Sorting: Who Goes to College**

#### Week 4 – Parenting, Socialization and Pathways to College

Sept 6 (Wellness day) and 8

Annette Lareau, Selection from *Unequal Childhoods*

#### Week 5 – How do Colleges Make Admissions Decisions

Sept 13 and 15

Mitchell L. Stevens, “Decisions” from *Creating a class: College admissions and the education of elites*.

#### Week 6 – Going to College, Completing College, and Stratification

Sept 20 and 22

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

#### Week 7 – Affirmative Action, Diversity, and Meritocracy

Sept 27 and 29

Lisa M. Stulberg and Anthony S. Chen, 2013. “The Origins of Race-conscious Affirmative Action in Undergraduate Admissions”

Natasha Warikoo, [“The Easiest Reform for College Admissions”](#)

## **Social Dimension: How Does College Shape Who We Are**

### Week 8 – Academics and Learning at College

Oct 4 and 6

Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa. “College Cultures and Student Learning” *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*

Daniel F. Chambliss and Christopher G. Takacs. “Learning” in *How College Works*

### Week 9 – Social Life

Oct 11 and 13

Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton. Introduction and Chs. 1-2 in *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*

### Week 10 – Gender and Sexuality

Oct 18 and 20 (Fall break)

Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan, 2020. “[Researchers Found What Consent Looks Like Isn't Always Straightforward on College Campuses](#)” [ See also, *Sexual citizens: A landmark study of sex, power, and assault on campus*. Norton.]

Derek Thompson. “[Colleges Have a Guy Problem](#)”

Women in UNC History - <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/womenatunc/introduction>

### Week 11 – Race, Ethnicity and Class

Oct 25 and 27

Anthony Abraham Jack. 2019. Selection from *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges are Failing Disadvantaged Students*

### Week 12 – Activism and Politics on Campus

Nov 1 and 3

Amy J. Binder and Jeremy L. Kidder. Selection from *The Channels of Student Activism*

“I Raised My Hand to Volunteer” - <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/protest>

## **Institutional Context: How Are Colleges and Universities Changing**

### Week 13 – Costs, Tuition, and University Funding

Nov 8 and 10

Sara Goldrick-Rab. “[How Financial Aid Betrays the Modern Family](#)”

Louise Seamster and Tressie McMillan Cottom on [Student Debt](#)

Doug Webber. “[Fancy Dorms Aren't The Main Reason Tuition Is Skyrocketing](#)”

### Week 14 – Politics of Public Higher Education

Nov 15 and 17

Suzanne Mettler. “From Pioneer to Slacker: The Rise and Decline of American Public Higher Education”

Week 15 – Governance, Leadership, and Administration in the University

Nov 22

Ginsberg, Benjamin. 2011. "The Growth of Administration," in *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters*.

Week 16 – The Future of Higher Education and the Future of UNC

Nov 29

David Larabee. "A Perfect Mess"

Exam Period – Final Presentations, Reflection and Celebration

Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> at 12pm

## UNIVERSITY RESOURCES AND POLICIES

### Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email [ars@unc.edu](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

### Counseling and Psychological Services

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance. (source: *Student Safety and Wellness Proposal for EPC, Sep 2018*)

### Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

### Policy on non-discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

#### Learning Center

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

#### Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. This could be a wonderful resource to help with your writing assignments in this course (and any assignments in your other courses). You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.

#### Grade Appeal Process

If you feel you have been awarded an incorrect grade, please discuss with me. If we cannot resolve the issue, you may talk to our departmental director of undergraduate studies or appeal the grade through a formal university process based on arithmetic/clerical error, arbitrariness, discrimination, harassment, or personal malice. To learn more, go to the [Academic Advising Program](https://academicadvising.unc.edu/) website.