

# Contemporary Social Issues: Higher Education (SOC 1020.04)

109 Calhoun Hall • MWF 10:10a-11:00a • <http://majorsmatter.net/college>

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Office Hrs: 11:00-01:00 Monday

*“Not a dream, but a mighty reality – a glimpse of the higher life, the broader possibilities of humanity, which is granted to the man who, amid the rush and roar of living, pauses four short years to learn what living means.” W.E.B. DuBois*

*“You have four years to be irresponsible here, relax. Work is for people with jobs. You’ll never remember class time, but you’ll remember the time you wasted hanging out with your friends. So stay out late. Spend money you don’t have. The work never ends, but college does.” Tom Petty*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** This course is designed to introduce students to basic sociological concepts and methods as they apply to colleges and college life. The course, which consists of lectures, readings, class discussions, weekly writing assignments, guest visits, and a final exam focuses on the question of how colleges are organized and how variation within and between colleges affects individuals and society. Ultimately, we want to explore a number of questions you might ask about higher education: What’s its purpose? Who is it for? Is it capable of living up to its “promises”? What do we teach and how does the way we teach achieve our goals? How do we control access to college? What’s next?

**TEXTS.** Most of the assigned readings in this course will be articles, all of which are available on the course website. You will need Adobe Acrobat to read/print the articles. There are also three book-length manuscripts you’ll be expected to read. They are Astin’s *What Matters In College*, Steinberg’s *The Gatekeepers*, and Arum and Roksa’s *Academically Adrift*. The books are available in the bookstore.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING.** Other than the final examination, your grade in this class will be based on your completion of assignments, not “mastery” of material. As I will say in class, in order to learn the material we will cover in this class, I need you to complete all of the assignments. Each journal and article memo will be marked as “done” or “not done”, not “correct” or “incorrect”. These assignments are opportunities to explore, engage with, and challenge ideas raised in the class. Complete them. Each of you starts with an "A" (500 points) and you move down from there. The buffer for each letter grade is 50 points (10%). Pluses and minuses are earned in the 25 point margins at the top/bottom of the letter grade range. **You will receive an A- at 470 points.** Once you go below the threshold for any given grade, there is NO way to go up. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be single-spaced, 1" margins, in Times or Times New Roman font, and have no more than a one line header with your name, the date, and the assignment. On the journals, do not use paragraph breaks (like I do in this syllabus); indent to start new paragraphs.

	<b>B+</b> = 435-449 points (87%)	<b>C+</b> = 385-399 points (77%)	<b>D+</b> = 335-349 points (67%)
<b>A</b> = 470-500 points (94%)	<b>B</b> = 416-434 points (83%)	<b>C</b> = 366-384 points (73%)	<b>D</b> = 316-334 points (63%)
<b>A-</b> = 450-469 points (90%)	<b>B-</b> = 400-415 points (80%)	<b>C-</b> = 350-365 points (70%)	<b>D-</b> = 300-315 points (60%)

**A) Encounter The Material:** As much of the learning taking place in this class will happen during the two and a half hours we have together each week, I take attendance very seriously. We will, therefore, take roll in each class session within the first five minutes of class. Each of you is allowed two (2) absences this semester. No other absences—whatever the reason, excuse, or emergency—will be accepted. If you miss class beyond those two absences, your grade in the class will drop 25 points automatically for each additional absence.

**B) Explain The Material (25 article memos at 10 pts each = 250 points):** In addition to the three texts, there are 30 articles assigned in this class. You will be required to outline 25 of those articles; at least one article must be outlined each week. These are due at the beginning of the class the reading is assigned for. Each memo for each reading should be no more than one page in length. They **must** follow the model supplied at the end of this syllabus, including each of the sections included in that model. Reviews and theoretical articles may not have data/findings sections. Still include the label with “N/A” after the colon on the same line. You will not have to outline the readings from the texts, but the exam (see below) will include at least 20 questions drawn exclusively from those texts. Finally, some of the 30 articles ARE NOT Optional. They will be marked with a subscript “R” for “required”.

**C) Engage The Material (15 journal entries at 10 pts each=150 points):** Every week you will be expected to write a one page single-spaced journal entry on the issues covered in class that week. We will give you a question to answer on the last day of class each week; two will be assigned on November 22. The journal entry will be turned in (in class) the following Wednesday. Your *ideas* will not be graded as "correct" or "incorrect" -- rather this is an opportunity to explore, engage with, and challenge ideas raised in the course.

**D) Exhibit Erudition (100 question exam at 1 pt each = 100 points):** I would like for you to master the material in this class at the following levels of understanding: (1) basic knowledge, (2) comprehension and understanding, (3) application, and (4) analysis and comparison. With that in mind, there will be a cumulative in-class exam composed of 100 multiple choice questions. This exam will cover course lectures/discussions, conversations with guest speakers, and all of the readings, whether we discussed them in class or not. That exam will take place on December 11<sup>th</sup> at 9am.

### OTHER IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

**Academic Excuses:** With the astonishing incidence of sickness and death that invariably occurs just around due dates, my policy is to let you know in advance that anything turned in late will lose 20% of the points available for every day it is late. The first points are lost when the assignment is due. I **will not respond** to emails requesting extensions. It would be a mistake for you to wait until the day before an assignment is due to begin working on it. In my experience, ANYTHING can and often does go wrong. Part of my job as an educator is to teach a hidden curriculum (see lecture on August 28) that encourages some discipline on your part. This policy is a function of that curriculum.

**Academic Etiquette:** As a sign of respect to your fellow classmates, please avoid walking in late or leaving early. Please turn off cell phones before class. You can only use a laptop if sitting on the last row of the classroom. Respect the views and opinions of others. Avoid talking when others are making a point. You will have your chance. Try to avoid destructive criticism. However, constructive criticism is welcomed. Don't read the paper, talk to your friends, etc. during class. Do not leave class until class has ended. Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to your classmates and me, but they also limit your ability to understand the material.

**Academic Integrity:** Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course. Any Honor Code violation will be taken up with the Honor Council and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the provisions of the Code. If you have any doubts about applications of the Honor Code, please ask me and/or consult the Honor Council's web page. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation. Plagiarism is easily detected and WILL NOT be tolerated. If I suspect that plagiarism has taken place, you will receive no credit for the assignment.

## Course Schedule

**August 23: Course Introduction**

- NO READINGS TODAY

**August 25: Getting On The Same Page**

- NO READINGS TODAY

**August 26: Functionalism Theory**

- Stevens, Mitchell, Elizabeth Armstrong and Richard Arum. 2008. "Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub: Empirical and Theoretical Advances in the Sociology of Higher Education." *The Annual Review of Sociology* 34:127-51.

**August 28: Conflict Theory**

- Gamoran, Adam. 2001. "American Schooling and Educational Inequality: A Forecast for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." *Sociology of Education* 74:135-153.

**August 30: Symbolic Interaction Theory**

- Reitzes, Donald and Peter Burke. 1980. "College Student Identity: Measurement and Implications." *The Pacific Sociological Review* 23:45-66.

**September 02: Sociology of Education Methods**

- <sup>R</sup>Arum, Richard and Josipa Roksa – Pages 1-32

**September 04: History of Higher Education**

- <sup>R</sup>Arum, Richard and Josipa Roksa – Pages 33-68

**September 06: NO CLASS TODAY**

- NO READINGS TODAY

**September 09: Status Attainment and Social Mobility**

- Pitt, Richard and Lin Zhu. 2018. "The Relationship between College Major Prestige/Status and Post-Baccalaureate Outcomes." *Sociological Perspectives* 62:325-45.
- Walpole, Marybeth. 2003. "Socioeconomic Status and College: How SES Affects College Experiences and Outcomes." *The Review of Higher Education* 27:45-73.

**September 11: Status Attainment and Social Mobility**

- Martin, Nathan and Kenneth Spenner. 2009. "Capital Conversion and Accumulation: A Social Portrait of Legacies at an Elite University." *Research in Higher Education* 50:623-48.

**September 13: Status Attainment and Social Mobility**

- NO READINGS TODAY

**September 16: Species of Capital: Human Capital**

- <sup>R</sup>Arum, Richard and Josipa Roksa – Pages 69-84, 91-120

**September 18: Species of Capital: Social Capital**

- Martin, Nathan. 2009. "Social Capital, Academic Achievement, and Postgraduation Plans at an Elite, Private University." *Sociological Perspectives* 52:185-210.

**September 20: Species of Capital: Cultural Capital**

- Collier, Peter, and David Morgan. 2008. "‘Is That Paper Really Due Today?’: Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students’ Understandings of Faculty Expectations." *Higher Education* 55:425-446.

**September 23: College Students and College Life**

- Kuh, George, Ty Cruce and Rick Shoup. 2008. "Unmasking the Effects of Student Engagement on First-Year College Grades and Persistence." *The Journal of Higher Education* 79:540-63.
- Saunders, Daniel. 2015. "They Do Not Buy It: Exploring the Extent to Which Entering First-Year Students View Themselves as Customers." *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 25:5-28.

**September 25: College Students and College Life**

GUESTS: *Kristin Torrey*, Director of Greek Life and *Danny Coradazzi*, Area Coordinator Alumni Lawn and Ingram College

**September 27: College Students and College Life**

- <sup>R</sup>Martin, Georgianna, Gene Parker, Ernest Pascarella and Sally Blechschmidt. 2015. "Do Fraternities and Sororities Inhibit Intercultural Competence?" *Journal of College Student Development* 56:66-72.

**September 30: College Missions and Outcomes**

- Astin Text – Chapters 4 and 5

**October 02: College Missions and Outcomes**

GUESTS: *Carolyn Floyd*, Director of the Office of Immersion Resources and her staff

**October 04: College Missions and Outcomes**

- Astin Text – Chapters 10 and 11

**October 07: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

- <sup>R</sup>Goyette, Kimberly and Ann Mullen. 2006. "Who Studies the Arts and Sciences? Social Background and the Choice and Consequences of Undergraduate Field of Study." *The Journal of Higher Education* 77:497-538.
- Pitt, Richard, Whitney Pirtle and Ashley Metzger. 2017. "Academic Specialization, Double Majoring, and the Threat to Breadth in Academic Knowledge." *Journal of General Education* 66:166-91.

**October 09: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

GUESTS: *Professors Alissa Hare* and *Tara Todd*, Chemistry; *Professor Catherine McTamoney*, Teaching & Learning; and *Professor Leslie Smith*, Psychological Sciences

**October 11: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

- Rojstaczer, Stuart and Christopher Healy. 2012. "Where A Is Ordinary: The Evolution of American College and University Grading, 1940-2009." *Teachers College Record* 114:1-23.

**October 14: Colleges As Organizations**

- <sup>R</sup>Meredith, Marc. 2004. "Why Do Universities Compete in the Ratings Game? An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of the Us News and World Report College Rankings." *Research in Higher Education* 45:443-61.
- Harley, Matthew and Christopher Morphew. 2008. "What's Being Sold and to What End? A Content Analysis of College Viewbooks." *The Journal of Higher Education* 79:671-91.

**October 16: Colleges As Organizations**

GUESTS: *Dr. William Robinson*, Interim Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives and *Gail Williams*, Associate Director of Office of Community Engagement

**October 18: Colleges As Organizations**

- Barker, Derek. 2004. "The Scholarship of Engagement: A Taxonomy of Five Emerging Practices." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 9:123-37.

**October 21: Non-Traditional Colleges**

- Dougherty, Kevin. 1992. "Community Colleges and Baccalaureate Attainment." *Journal of Higher Education* 63:188-214.
- Kinzie, Jillian, Auden Thomas, Megan Palmer, Paul Umbach and George Kuh. 2007. "Women Students at Coeducational and Women's Colleges: How Do Their Experiences Compare?" *Journal of College Student Development* 48:145-65.
- Allen, Walter 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* 25:241-261.

**October 23: Non-Traditional Colleges**

GUESTS: *Keith Chandler*, Former Director of Admissions at Fisk University and *Dr. Patricia Armstrong*, Dean of Humanities at Nashville State Community College

**October 23: NO CLASS: Fall Break**

**October 28: College Admissions and Financial Aid**

- <sup>R</sup>Steinberg Text Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 9

**October 30: College Admissions and Financial Aid**

- Hurwitz, Michael. 2011. "The Impact of Legacy Status on Undergraduate Admissions at Elite Colleges and Universities." *Economics of Education Review* 30:480-92.

**November 01: College Admissions and Financial Aid**

GUESTS: Undergraduate Admissions Tour Of Campus

**November 04: Equity and Inclusion**

- Elliott, Diane, Meghan Brenneman, Lauren Carney and Steve Robbins. 2015. "Social Networks and Minority Male College Access: The "Tip of the Iceberg" Phenomena." *Urban Education* 53:1210-37.
- <sup>R</sup>Pitt, Richard and Josh Packard. 2012. "Activating Diversity: The Impact of Student Race on Contributions to Course Discussions." *The Sociological Quarterly* 53:295-320.

**November 06: Equity and Inclusion**

GUESTS: *Dr. Rosevelt Noble*, Bishop Johnson Black Cultural Center; *Chris Donald*, Office of Religious Life; *Roberta Nelson*, KC Potter LBQTI Center; *Brianna Nesbitt*, Cuninggim Women's Center; and *Annette Burris*, International Student Services Office

**November 08: Equity and Inclusion**

- Longerbeam, Susan, Karen Inkelas, Dawn Johnson and Zakiya Lee. 2007. "Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Experiences: An Exploratory Study." *Journal of College Student Development* 48:215-30.

**November 11: School-To-Work Transitions**

- Brint, Steven, Mark Riddle, Lori Turk-Bicakci and Charles Levy. 2005. "From the Liberal to the Practical Arts in American Colleges and Universities: Organizational Analysis and Curricular Change." *The Journal of Higher Education* 76:151-80.
- Roksa, Josipa, and Richard Arum. 2012. "Life after College: The Challenging Transitions of the Academically Adrift Cohort." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 44:8-14.

**November 13: School-To-Work Transitions**

GUESTS: *Dr. Kate Brooks*, Executive Director Vanderbilt Career Center and her staff

**November 15: School-To-Work Transitions**

- Witteveen, Dirk and Paul Attewell. 2017. "The Earnings Payoff from Attending a Selective College." *Social Science Research* 66:154-169.

**November 18: Beyond The Baccalaureate**

- <sup>R</sup>Posselt, Julie and Eric Grodsky. 2017. "Graduate Education and Social Stratification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 43:353-78.
- Zhang, Liang. 2005. "Advance to Graduate Education: The Effect of College Quality and Undergraduate Majors." *The Review of Higher Education* 28:313-38.

**November 20: Beyond The Baccalaureate**

GUESTS: *Dr. Michelle Grundy*, Director of Office of Pre-Med Advising and *Dr. Carrie Russell*, Director of Office of Pre-Law Advising

**November 22: Beyond The Baccalaureate**

- Conrad, Peter. 1988. "Learning to Doctor: Reflections on Recent Accounts of the Medical School Years." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 29:323-332.

**November 25-29 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break**

**December 02: What's Next For Higher Education?**

- <sup>R</sup>Arum, Richard and Josipa Roksa – Pages 121-144

**December 04: Course Wrap-Up and Review**

- NO READINGS TODAY

**December 11: FINAL EXAMINATION AT 9:00 am**

**YOUR NAME**

**TODAY'S DATE**

Arum, Richard and Roksa, Josipa. 2011. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

**Primary Argument:**

Although the US higher-education system's reputation is highly regarded across the world, there has been limited learning happening on undergraduate campuses where students are not academically growing as much as they should be. With so many more students graduating college, this is a problem. Reforms should be made to student preparation, the curriculum and instruction, and encouraging learning, not just persistence.

**Important Defined Concepts (2):**

- *Limited Learning*: limited learning is a phenomena occurring across college campuses nationwide where students are spending less time studying, reading, writing and engaging with professors in favor of spending more time on extra-curricular activities, working, or socializing.
- *Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)*: a test administered by Arum and Roska to undergraduate students to measure how much students have academically grown in terms of higher-order cognitive skills. At least 45% of the students they tested did not demonstrate significant growth in their CLA scores after two years of college.

**Primary Findings (3):**

- A reform to curriculum and instruction needs to be made where professors demand students engage more in academically rigorous endeavors, like spending more time studying, taking more courses with reasonable amounts of reading and writing, and interacting more with faculty. Academic challenge leads to growth in higher-order cognitive skills.
- More emphasis and pressure should be placed on faculty to make them see their occupation as more than just focused on individual research; Professors need to reflect on the scholarship of teaching to become better teachers.
- There should be more of an obligation and a demand for higher education institutions to take accountability of student learning outcomes and make sure students not meeting those standards are helped.

**Meaningful Quote (1):**

“While the US higher-education system still enjoys the competitive advantage of a sterling international reputation, in recent decades it has been increasingly surpassed in terms of quantity (i.e., the percentage of young adults it graduates), and its quality is coming under increasing scrutiny” (124)

**Question for Discussion (1):**

Classes requiring lots of reading and writing lend themselves more to developing one's critical thinking abilities and higher-order cognitive skills, but how does reading different types of information affect how much students develop? Does a STEM major reading a biology textbook improve their critical thinking as much as philosophy major reading the same amount of a philosophy book?