

Spring 2016 Conference: The Right to a Quality Public College Education

Location: The Silversmith Hotel
10 S Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60603
(312) 372-7696

Our discussions will take place in the Rhodium Room on the Mezzanine Level

Tentative Schedule, Questions, and Readings

Friday

Noon-1:00: Lunch in the hotel dining room.

Our meeting will start at 1:15 p.m. in the Rhodium Room on the Mezzanine Level

Session 1 Introductions

1:15-1:45 p.m.

We want to learn how to talk and work together and that requires knowing who each of us is and how we think about and approach the topics that will be the focus of our joint attention, as well as each of us being reflective about what we have to contribute to our work together. **Please prepare some remarks of about (and not much more than) 3 minutes in length to introduce yourself to the group.** We are less interested in a recitation of CV lines here than an attempt to describe how you approach these questions, what you think you bring to the table as we discuss them, and what you hope to learn. How do you see the contribution of your discipline or outlook to a multi-disciplinary conversation like this one?

Session 2 Aims of Public Higher Education

1:45-3:15 p.m.

Framing Statement: Our discussion begins around a cluster of questions about what constitutes a quality public higher education. Behind them is the question of what the aims should be of a public higher education. One trend is the proportional increase in pre-professional majors (e.g. engineering; but, more spectacularly, business) which, in addition to being narrowly oriented toward professions, have fewer breadth requirements beyond the major than a standard liberal arts education. Another is for public officials to press for colleges to provide value for money in economic terms for the state and/or the student. Should higher education be aimed at economic usefulness? Employability? Social mobility? Democratic citizenship? Enabling students to reflect on and (if appropriate) revise their identities? Some combination of these? How do the aims we (society, the state, administrators, instructors) should have for the students relate to the aims that the students and their parents have (and what aims should they have)? To what extent is it legitimate for institutions to divert students from the aims they have for themselves (eg, having fun, or entering

lucrative but socially valueless careers) toward the institution's aims? And, to what extent is it possible? To the extent that elite institutions are attempting to forge elites, what should we think about the ways in which they socialize students who do not emanate from elites, whose presence is supposed to diversify the elites, but who are enculturated into the elites which they are being induced to join?

Can answering these questions (if we can) help us to comment usefully on: the kinds of curricular requirements institutions should demand, what the role of service learning and internships should be, what kind of professional development should be secured for instructors (and what kinds of people should be hired as instructors), how much exposure students should have to different disciplines, what career and other kinds of student support services should be available, and how faculty should interact with (and how administrators should seek to influence) the non-academic side of a college education.

Readings to guide this discussion:

Bok, D. (2008). *Our underachieving colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Capelli, P. (2015). Chapter 1 of *Will college pay off?: A guide to the most important financial decision you will ever make*. United States: Public Affairs.

Gutmann, A. (2015). What makes a university education worthwhile?. In H. Brighouse and M. McPherson (Eds.), *The aims of higher education: Problems of morality and justice* (pp. 7-25). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Please also read this post by Stanley Fish (2008), "Professor, Do Your Job": <http://www.hoover.org/research/professor-do-your-job>

Break

Session 3: Challenges Facing American Higher Education

3:30-4:45 p.m.

In this session, Mike McPherson will give a short presentation on his book, co-authored with Bill Bowen, to be released this spring, *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in American Higher Education* (Princeton University Press). Discussion to follow.

About the book:

American higher education faces some serious problems—but they are not the ones most people think. In this brief and accessible book, two leading experts show that many so-called crises—from the idea that typical students are drowning in debt to the belief that tuition increases are being driven by administrative bloat—are exaggerated or simply false. At the same time, many real problems—from the high dropout rate to inefficient faculty staffing—have received far too little attention. In response, William G. Bowen and Michael S. McPherson provide a frank assessment of the biggest challenges confronting higher education and propose a bold agenda for reengineering essential elements of the system to meet them. The result promises to help shape the debate about higher education for years to come.

Lesson Plan shows that, for all of its accomplishments, higher education today is falling short when it comes to vital national needs. Too many undergraduates are dropping out or taking too long to graduate; minorities and the poor fare worse than their peers, reinforcing inequality; and college is unaffordable for too many. But these problems could be greatly reduced by making significant changes, including targeting federal and state funding more efficiently; allocating less money for “merit aid” and more to match financial need; creating a respected “teaching corps” that would include nontenure faculty; improving basic courses in fields such as math by combining adaptive learning and face-to-face teaching; strengthening leadership; and encouraging more risk taking. It won’t be easy for faculty, administrators, trustees, and legislators to make such sweeping changes, but only by doing so will they make it possible for our colleges and universities to meet the nation’s demands tomorrow and into the future.

Break before dinner

7:00 Dinner

South Branch Tavern and Grill
100 S Wacker Dr, Chicago, IL 60606

This is a 15-minute walk from the hotel. Meet at 6:40 in the lobby to walk over together. You are also welcome to share cabs and submit the charge for reimbursement.

Saturday

Breakfast available in the Palladium Room at 8:30 a.m.

Our meeting will start at 9:00 a.m. in the Rhodium Room.

Session 4: Institutional and Social Barriers, Part I

9:00-10:30 a.m.

Framing Statement: Underlying questions about funding and financing are (among other things) questions about how higher education should be distributed. The default in the US is that higher education (and the subsidies accompanying it, and the benefits it brings) is reserved for students who have graduated high school. But among high school graduates distribution is uneven; children from higher income groups are better qualified, and better funded, for more elite institutions, which support them better, and they graduate college faster and at a much higher rate than lower income students. Institutions can interrupt this pattern to some extent, through enrollment management policies and implementation. But each institution is diverse in itself: *Paying for the Party* illustrates nicely the multiple pathways that a single institution creates for diverse students, and alerts us to the dangers for the student of getting caught in the pathway that is wrong for her, as well as the potential social cost of suboptimal human capital development facilitated by some of these pathways (even when the students in them suffer no loss, and face little risk).

We’d like to pay some attention to internal barriers (within an institution) to getting a college degree. Let’s artificially divide them into 2: *general barriers*, such as complicated requirements, poor instruction (from faculty and/or TAs), gatekeeping courses, poor advising, inadequate funding; and *barriers that affect specific groups*, such as inadequate support for minority, non-traditional, first generation or disabled students, lack of critical mass of such students at an institution, the experience of micro-aggressions, etc. Related are questions about which institutions students should be encouraged to attend. *Crossing the Finish Line* finds that, on average, students are better served by the most selective

institutions they are able to attend. But the discussions in *Paying for the Party* complicate matters: maybe some students are better served by staying closer to their families and communities, and maybe those students are identifiable in advance or, sometimes, once they are already at the more selective institutions.

Readings to guide this discussion:

Armstrong, A. and Hamilton, L. (2013). Intro and Chapter 9 from *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kniffin, K. (2007). Accessibility to the PhD and professoriate for first-generation college graduates: Review and implications for students, faculty, and campus policies. *American Academic*, 3, 49-56. Note: The pdf is longer, but you can stop after at page 56.

Massy, W., Wegner, G., and Zemsky, R. (2005). "Lattice and Ratchet" in *Remaking the American university: Market-smart and mission-centered*. Rutgers University Press: Piscataway, NJ.

Morton, J. Can education undermine representation? (Unpublished article). City College of New York: New York City, NY.

Thelin, J. (2004). Chapter 9 in *A history of American higher education* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.

Format: In this session, Laura Hamilton (co-author of *Paying for the Party*) will give a give a short presentation about her findings in her book to be released this spring, *Parenting to a Degree: How Family Matters for College and Beyond* (University of Chicago Press). Discussion to follow.

About the book:

In this book, Hamilton vividly captures the parenting approaches of mothers and fathers as their daughters move through Midwest U and into the workforce. Contrary to negative media portrayals of helicopter parents, Hamilton finds that successfully navigating a school like MU without involved parents is near impossible. Universities actually seek to recruit, rather than evade, parents to whom they can outsource a wide array of tasks, pulling them into the form and function of postsecondary education. Unfortunately, very few parents can play this role. Even they do so at a high personal cost, and with unintended side effects. *Parenting to a Degree* offers an incisive look into a new—and profoundly problematic—relationship between universities and parents.

Break

Session 4: Institutional and Social Barriers, Part 2

10:45-noon

Our discussion of barriers will continue with a short presentation by Matt Wolfram, who will discuss a recent qualitative study, "Constructing Affordability: How Institutional and Relational Contexts Affect Retention of Undergraduates from Low-Income Families." Discussion to follow.

Description of Study

What do undergraduates from low- and middle-income families consider an “affordable” college education, and why? This study examines how institutional and relational contexts affect students' conceptions of affordability, how these conceptions evolve as students experience their first year of college, and how these experiences and conceptions influence students; decisions about continued enrollment and the sense they make of their college experiences. Using multiple methods and sites, this comparative study focuses on 60 students from low- and middle-income families during their second and third semesters of college. We document how affordability is constructed at the four public universities that they attend, analyze if and how struggles with college finances manifest themselves in the settings and relationships of students' daily lives, and examine if and how students' narratives of whether and why college is affordable for them changes over time.

Principal Investigators: Nancy Kendall and Sara Goldrick-Rab
Senior Research Associate: Matt Wolfgram

Lunch

Session 5: Financing Higher Education

1:15-2:45 p.m.

Next, we turn to a cluster of questions around funding and financing of higher education. Public higher education has experienced a 40 year long decline in state financial support, and selective institutions have partly compensated by increasing the proportions of places allocated to non-resident (including international) students, who pay rates that are closer to market levels than state residents typically pay. But they have also increased the price of tuition for residents, and typically have limited discounting of price for students from lower income backgrounds. Two corollaries, the first of which is causal: 1) a rise in student debt (which, notice, is undischageable); intensified competition for resident places. Institutions have traditionally differentiated price between resident and non-resident students, but have not varied price according to cost of providing the major, or the likely economic return to the student, or the social value of the skills acquired, or (with the exception of a few scholarships) the social background of the student. 2) A possible increase in the numbers of students who, though qualified for, say, a flagship public college, are deterred from applying (or going) because of aversion to taking on debt when the outcomes are uncertain.

Readings to guide this discussion:

The Ad Hoc Tuition Policy Faculty Committee. (2014). *Report of the Ad Hoc Tuition Policy Faculty Committee*. University of Wisconsin-Madison: Madison, WI.

Bowen, W., Chingos, M., and McPherson, M. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.

Brighouse, H. (2004). Paying for higher education: Are top-up fees fair?. *Ethics and Economics*, 2(1), 1-11.

Mettler, S. (2014). Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Degrees of inequality: How the politics of higher education sabotaged the American dream*. Basic Books: New York City, NY.

Session 6: Working groups

3:00-4:30 p.m.

We will be dividing our group into four working groups each focused on a different question. More details will be given when we meet.

Conclusion: Reporting back and next steps

End: 5:00 p.m.

Break

7:00 Dinner

Howell's and Hood

435 N Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60611

This is a 15-minute walk from the hotel. Meet at 6:40 in the lobby to walk over together. You are also welcome to share cabs and submit the charge for reimbursement.