EDUC 355x Higher Education and Society  
Fall 2013 / Stanford Graduate School of Education  
Professor Mitchell L. Stevens

**meeting time/place:** Tuesdays 5.15 – 8.05 pm / Cummings #04 (ART4)  
**office/hours:** Littlefield 246 / meetings by appointment  
**e-mail:** mitchell.stevens@stanford.edu

**Overview**

This course provides an overview of the political economy of US higher education. It is premised on the notion that US higher education is a distinctive organizational phenomenon: linked to K-12 education but not coextensive with it, globally peculiar, and changing rapidly. The perspective of the course is essentially sociological. It depicts how higher education formally certifies legitimate knowledge, capacities and persons, structures much of the modern life course, coalesces and segments social networks, and ceremonially integrates a secular cosmology. Implications of the inherited character of US higher education for its current turbulence are a central theme of the course.

EDUC 355x is offered as a cognate of Education's Digital Future (edf.stanford.edu). Each and every class session is open to the general public.

**Required Readings**

There is one required book for this course, which I encourage you to purchase. It is available in the Stanford bookstore and also is easily available online:


All other readings are available on the edf website, edf.stanford.edu, and/or via SIPX. Citations to specific readings for each course session are below.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- appreciate the varied social functions of higher education in modern societies;
- conceive of higher education as a complex, epochal organizational system;
- understand the fundamental organizational, financial, and political challenges facing US higher education at the present moment;
- participate responsibly in the national conversation about the future of US higher education.
General Expectations

Come on time, attend every class, complete all readings, participate in the presentation of particular readings, make every Piazza post on time, and participate actively throughout the seminar.

Assignments

Weekly written work: In preparation for each session, seminar participants will complete a written assignment on Piazza, piazza.com, in advance of each weekly course meeting: typically at NOON on the day of our scheduled meeting.

On some occasions these assignments will be directed; on other occasions they will be open-ended; some assignments may be a mix of directed and open. These instruments are designed to ensure that participants receive credit for careful reading, to provide me with feedback on participants’ questions, insights, and to create a community of discourse in the class. Weekly assignments will not be accepted late.

In advance of some of our sessions I will assign particular students to briefly summarize, critique, and integrate course readings. Details of this work will be discussed the first day of seminar.

Evaluation and Grading

Grades will be based on your thorough completion of weekly readings and assignments and seminar participation.

weekly Piazza posts 50%
final write-up 20%
attendance, participation 30%

Each student is allowed one missed Piazza post and one missed class without penalty. After that, scores will be reduced proportional to the number of classes and assignments missed.

Final write-ups are 4-5 page reflective documents that develop a theme from the course that was of particular interest to the student.

In addition, every enrolled student is required to make two brief appointments with me: the first during the initial three weeks of the quarter, and the second near or soon after the end of the quarter. Please contact Ashley Buckner (abuckner@stanford.edu) to schedule the first appointment asap.
Schedule

24 September   Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub

This session provides a broad conceptual overview of the course and its substantive content. Colleges and universities are considerably more complex than many observers, academic personnel, and students understand. This complexity is both a signal asset and a constitutive problem of US higher education.


Assignment 1: Due on Piazza by NOON on 24 September: In 500 words or less, provide a narrative of (a) what led you to graduate school (b) what program you are in, and why (c) your professional goals for the near and middle term.

1 October   Sieve I: Higher education and social differentiation

Higher education mediates multiple dimensions of inequality in the United States and worldwide. Just how college does this mediating work and with what consequences is of central importance to social scientists and public policy.


8 October   Sieve II: Educational assortative mating

One of the most important ways in which higher education intervenes in social and class reproduction is through the segmentation of erotic and marital markets. Whether, where, and when one attends college does much to shape the pools of people with whom one considers as appropriate partners for sex, intimate relationships, and marriage. This in turn has consequences for individual life chances and the socioeconomic stratification of households.


**MONDAY 14 October:**  Author/critics event for *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality* (Harvard, 2013)

Sociologists Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton spent five years tracking a cohort of college women at a large Midwestern public university from freshman year though graduation and into the labor force. Their book is a vivid portrait of how the structure and culture of universities variably shapes the character of women’s academic and social experiences.

- **author:** Elizabeth A. Armstrong, University of Michigan
- **critics:** Michelle Jackson, Corrie Potter and Myra Strober
- **time:** 3 – 4.30 pm with reception to follow
- **place:** CERAS Learning Hall, lobby level, 520 Galvez Mall

**15 October:**  Public Forum -- Is Higher Education a Business?

The number and variety of parties providing higher education services have exploded in recent years. With a wide array of new and often online options, college seekers need no longer assume that they will enroll on an ivy-trimmed physical campus. Nor can they assume that their private college is a tax-exempt organization. This panel will explore what this newly entrepreneurial higher education means for students, parents, academic professionals, and the legacy of higher education as a public good.

- **speakers:** Jonathan Feiber, General Partner, Mohr Davidow Ventures
  David Palumbo-Liu, Louise Hewlett Nixon Professor of Comparative Literature, Stanford University
  Amin Saberi, Founder, NovoED
  Linda Thor, Chancellor, Foothill/De Anza Community College District
- **time:** reception 5 – 6 pm; forum 6 – 7.30 pm
- **place:** CERAS Learning Hall, 520 Galvez Mall, lobby level
22 October  

Temple: Higher education and the sacralization of secular knowledge

An essential function of higher education worldwide is to codify and categorize what counts as official knowledge in modern societies. This session will investigate this peculiarly religious function of higher education, note its relationship with higher education’s other purposes, and consider how universities are implicated in knowledge production more generally.


29 October  

Hub I: The cold war university

Between 1945 and 1990 the United States created the largest and arguably most productive higher education system in world history. Just why the nation pursued this massive feat of social engineering has only recently come into scholarly view. This session provides a synthetic overview of the cold war university and considers how Americans understand the value of higher education in a post-cold war era.

Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, Chapters 1-5


5 November  

Hub II: Universities as chaotic organizations

The scale, multiple purposes, and distributed governance structure of US universities make them singularly complex organizations. Whether this complexity is for good or ill as an open question. Some observers view it as coextensive with the very purpose of higher education, while others bemoan the inefficiencies of the
organizational model and call for a more focused attention accountability and transparency.


12 November Hub III: Higher education in transformation

US higher education has been undergoing steady change since the end of the cold war, yet the pace and depth of dynamism has dramatically expanded in the last few years. This session considers the current turbulence in light of longer organizational change and considers whether informed prediction about the near future is warranted.

Kerr, The Uses of the University, chapters 6-9

19 November Public Forum -- The Art and Science of Online Learning Environments

There has been a great deal of discussion about the promise and problems of online learning – less about the subtlety of building online learning environment that are scientifically sound, productive of learning, and pleasurable to experience. This panel brings two international leaders in this field into a dialogue about the technical and creative skills required to craft meaningful learning environments online.

speakers: Greg Niemeyer, Director and Co-Founder of the Berkeley Center for New Media
Candace Thille, Assistant Professor, Stanford GSE and Founder of the Open Learning Initiative
time: reception 5 – 6 pm; forum 6 – 7.30 pm  
place: CERAS Learning Hall, 520 Galvez Mall, lobby level

26 November   Thanksgiving break / no class / schedule final appointments
3 December    dead week / no class / schedule final appointments

Final write-ups due at NOON today via e-mail  
to Ashley Buckner (abuckner@stanford.edu)