

Social Class: The Inequitable Campus
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The goals in this paper are to introduce readers to the ideas of social class, socio economic status, prestige, and capital through explanation and example. These ideas will be used to illustrate the student-campus social class match and mismatch, and show how different elements of social class create risk factors for students.

There is a great deal of confusion about what to call this concept; some use social class, some use socio economic status (SES), and some use social status. There are advantages and disadvantages for each term. Social class is the more inclusive and consequently the more ambiguous term and has the advantage of focusing the discussion on issues of class. SES is a common term used because it includes the commonly measured elements of income and occupation. Hollingshead (1975) used the term social status for his measure of educational attainment and occupational prestige providing a focus on the more limiting criteria for social class akin to the SES term. One of the points of this paper is to make it clear that social class is an inclusive, and ambiguous, term.

Social class is a social construct. It is composed of what large numbers of people believe. One important underlying construct is the idea of prestige. Hollingshead (1975) and others have applied prestige to educational attainment and occupation to create measures of social class. Many writers have used the concept of prestige to discuss the differences between colleges and there are many published studies of collegiate ranking that rely on prestige as an important measure of institutional quality.

Social class is at once both simple and complex. We all have a sense of our own social class, we have a social class identity, and we all have a sense of others' social class, and yet we find it hard to be specific in defining social class. Since social class does not get discussed as often as gender or as ethnicity, it remains hidden in plain view.

As a thought experiment which social class do you associate with a martini: Upper class, Middle class or Lower class? What about Budweiser? What about each of these clothing brands: Nike, Prada, Armani, Red Wing? What about fabrics: Polyester, Silk? What about retail stores like Wal-Mart, Lands End, and Neiman Marcus? What about vacation destinations: at home vacations, Florida vacations, or European vacations?

An honest examination of your answers will indicate that you, as do we all, have a social class associated with the myriad of daily activities and products. While we are most familiar with the activities and products of our own social class, we are keenly aware of the prestige value of other activities and products. Just by looking and listening you can tell someone's gender, ethnicity, and social class.

Is social class income, or wealth, or education, or prestige, or privilege, or occupation? Most people if pressed would indicate that people in the upper social classes are well off financially, well cultured, well connected, and well educated; that they have prestige and privilege. The key concept here is that social class is more than money. It includes economic capital (income and wealth) and according to Pierre Bourdieu social class also includes cultural capital and social capital. According to Will Barratt social class on campus also includes academic capital.

Seen in this way social class is perceived prestige in educational, occupational, cultural, and social attainment. This makes social class a social construct based on what large numbers of people believe to be true. This collective belief becomes reified as social norms and takes on a reality through media representations of prestige, thus reinforcing peoples' collective beliefs. Because prestige is a values statement, high prestige is valued more than low prestige. High prestige dialect is valued more than a low prestige dialect. High prestige manners and politeness are valued more than low prestige manners and politeness. People with prestige are valued more than people without prestige.

An individual's social class is dynamic. For many students college is a middle classing experience, providing students with cultural and social capital, and giving graduates access to economic capital. This upward mobility affects students' gender and ethnic identity in addition to the complexities involved in their social class identity. Changing social class identity can have many affects on people. Rising in social class can displace students from their families of origin, and yet not make them comfortable around others from higher social classes. Faculty who were themselves first generation low social class students have complicated attitudes toward first generation students.

Social class is a part of the college selection process (Berger, 2000, Kuh & Love, 2000) as students visit colleges to find the best choice. "I want to feel comfortable on campus" is an often heard comment from pre-first year students. Comfort is an outcome of student-campus fit. As parents are a significant part of the college selection process for students the parent-campus match is also very powerful. At Indiana State where 60% of first year students are first generation both students and parents need to see campus messages reflecting their social class.

Social class is also part of student retention. If the mismatch between student and campus becomes too great, the level of challenge outweighs the level of support and the student will leave. Much like any minority student on a majority campus the students from lower social classes do not fit with the majority culture on campus.

Measuring Social Class

Measuring social class can be done if the limitations of the measurement are kept in mind. As there is not classic definition of social class assessments needs to rely on indirect measurements. This is to say that economic capital does not make one higher class. Economic capital provides experiences and opportunities that enhance cultural, social, and academic capital.

The Hollingshead

August Hollingshead created the Four Factor Index of Social Status that measures individual Occupation, Education, Marital Status, and Work Status. Individuals were asked their educational level and occupation and these were hand coded using a list of occupations ranked by prestige. Occupation was weighted by five and education was weighted by three. Generational shifts in social status were not taken into account. One difficulty with the Hollingshead Index of Social Status today, even in paper and pencil form, is that the list of prestige ranked occupations is over 25 years old.

Simple Measure of Social Status (Barratt, 2005)

The Simple Measure of Social Status is based on the Hollingshead Index of Social Status and updated to reflect contemporary concepts of occupational prestige using a 1989 study of

occupational prestige (Davis et al., 1991) and updated to reflect generational shifts in social status by weighting individual scores as 2 in combination with parents' scores.

Simple Measure of Social Status – © Will Barratt, 2005

| | |
|--|----|
| Occupation (Students: average for 2 parents) | |
| Day laborer, janitor, house cleaner, farm worker, food counter sales, food preparation worker, busboy. | 5 |
| Garbage collector, short-order cook, cab driver, shoe sales, assembly line workers, masons, baggage porter. | 10 |
| Painter, skilled construction trade, sales clerk, truck driver, cook, sales counter or general office clerk. | 15 |
| Automobile mechanic, typist, locksmith, farmer, carpenter, receptionist, construction laborer, hairdresser | 20 |
| Machinist, musician, bookkeeper, secretary, insurance sales, cabinet maker, personnel specialist, welder. | 25 |
| Supervisor, librarian, aircraft mechanic, artist and artisan, electrician, administrator, military enlisted personnel, buyer, chief law enforcement officer. | 30 |
| Nurse, skilled technician, medical technician, counselor, manager, police and fire personnel, financial manager, physical, occupational, speech therapist. | 35 |
| Mechanical, nuclear, and electrical engineer, educational administrator, veterinarian, military officer, elementary, high school and special education teacher | 40 |
| Physician, attorney, professor, chemical and aerospace engineer, judge, CEO, senior manager, public official, psychologist, pharmacist, accountant. | 45 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Education (Students: average for 2 parents) | |
| Less than 7th grade | 3 |
| Junior high (9th grade) | 6 |
| Partial high school (10th or 11th) | 9 |
| High school graduate | 12 |
| Partial college (at least one year) | 15 |
| College education | 18 |
| Graduate degree | 21 |

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{(Your score x 2)} \\
 + \quad \text{(Your parents score)} \\
 \hline
 \text{()} / 3 = \text{Your score}
 \end{array}$$

The Inequitable Campus

The top 9%, by educational attainment, set the rules for everyone on campus. 8.9% of the US population has a graduate or professional degree, and 50% of the US population has no experience in college at all. Social class is everywhere. It is in our language, in our dress, in our manners, and yet it is uncommon to hear or read anything about social class. Campus is not a level playing field! We act as though students are equal and give awards and honors based on

achievement and yet some students have a head start. In *2004 College Bound Seniors: A profile of SAT program test takers*, the ETS writes:

Keep in mind, however, that: relationships between test scores and other factors such as educational background, gender, racial/ethnic background, parental education, and household income are complex and interdependent. These factors do not directly affect test performance; rather, they are associated with educational experiences both on tests such as the SAT I and in school work.

Economic capital can provide students with experiences unavailable to those without economic capital. Students from homes with sufficient economic capital can transform that economic capital into cultural capital, social capital, and academic capital. These students come to campus with a head start.

An Expanded View of Social Class

Pierre Bourdieu (1997) expanded the idea of capital beyond money to include cultural and social capital. Here I am proposing the idea of academic capital as well.

Economic capital

US Family Income - US Census data 2000

5% of US Families make more than \$164,104

20% of US Families make more than \$94,150

40% of US Families make more than \$62,500

60% of US Families make more than \$41,127

80% of US Families make more than \$24,000

From a purely economic, and thus very limited, perspective each of these 20% groupings can be viewed as the Lower Class, the Working Class, the Lower Middle Class, the Middle-Middle Class, and the Upper Middle Class. The upper class can be considered those with wealth, those families with more than USD \$10,000,000 in assets.

Ethnicity is generally seen as a key element in student performance and risk; however an examination of the following tables indicates the relationship between ethnicity and social class factors in the United States. Several research articles indicate that social class is a better indicator of academic performance than ethnicity or gender.

Ethnicity and SAT Score

| | Verbal | Math | Total |
|--|--------|------|-------|
| Asian, Asian Amer., or Pac. Islander | 507 | 577 | 1084 |
| European American | 528 | 531 | 1060 |
| Other Hispanic or Latino | 461 | 465 | 926 |
| African American or Black | 430 | 427 | 857 |
| College Board, <i>College-Board Seniors Nat'l. Report</i> , 2004 | | | |

Ethnicity and Median Family Income

| | | |
|---|----------|------------|
| Asian, Pacific Islander Families | \$61,511 | Table F-7C |
| Non-Hispanic White Families | \$56,442 | Table F-7E |
| Hispanic Origin Families | \$35,054 | Table F-7D |
| Black Families | \$34,192 | Table F-7B |
| http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/incfamdetx1.html | | |

Cultural Capital - Pierre Bourdieu

Cultural capital reflects “Upper Middle Class European-American Prestige”. Cultural capital can be accumulated, invested, and spent on campus, if you know how and where!

Embodied Cultural Capital. This is a personal knowledge base and skill set, the learned elements, attitudes, and behaviors of the prestige culture and can be increased by investing in self-improvement and learning.

Objectified Cultural Capital. This is cultural artifacts, the ‘stuff’ we have reflecting the prestige culture, the paintings, objects, and cultural goods. Increased by transforming economic capital into cultural objects, but requires an appreciation of the objects.

Institutionalized Cultural Capital. This includes academic qualifications and credentials, certificates of cultural competence, framed diplomas, framed achievement awards, class rings, the use of titles and honorifics like Doctor, Professor, and Dean. Institutionalized cultural capital is formal recognition of social class attainment. These all require time and economic capital to accumulate.

US Educational Attainment, Chronicle Almanac 2003-2004 Census data for adults over 25 in 2000

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Graduate or professional degree | 8.9% | 24.4% |
| Bachelor’s degree | 15.5% | |
| Associate degree | 6.3% | |
| Some college, no degree | 21% | |
| High-school diploma (including GED) | 28.6% | 48.2% |
| Some high school, no diploma | 12.1% | |
| 8th grade or less | 7.5% | |

Social Capital – Pierre Bourdieu

The key concept here is a durable network of mutual relationships which take time and skill to build and time and skill to maintain. Bourdieu writes “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition.” (Bourdieu (1997, p. 248). Michael Woolcock of Harvard and the World Bank describes social capital as “The norms and networks enabling people to share resources and work together” and “Assets in relationships”. Classically the often quoted “It’s who you know, not what you know” is an example of social capital. This is put better by Michael Cuyjet Student Affairs Faculty at the University of Louisville: “Its not who you know. It’s who knows you!”

Accumulating and maintaining Social Capital involves two kinds of relationships: Bonding relationships, which involve formal groups with fixed membership and boundaries, and bridging relationships, which involve informal groups with flexible membership and boundaries. Do first generation students have the time and skill to create and maintain networks of durable relationships with prestige people on campus?

Academic capital – Will Barratt

Academic capital leads to academic attainment. Accumulating academic capital and academic skills starts at home. Second generation students have a head start. Second generation students come to college with accumulated academic capital and quickly use it to accumulate

more through memberships in academic clubs and organizations, attaining excellent grades, test scores, honors and awards.

The “good student” image is the stereotype of upper middle class prestige culture.

- Can afford supplemental school material.
- Knows something about the world.
- Has good social skills to develop and maintain relationships with faculty, staff and students.
- Has good study, critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Social Class Risk Factors

A moment’s thought will illustrate that a student who has insufficient economic capital is at risk on campus. Further thought will identify that the student cannot afford supplementary instructional materials, technology, learning experiences, social experiences, and cultural experiences. The student may also be occupied at work accumulating sufficient economic capital to continue at college. This is transformational thinking about economic capital because the idea that one kind of capital can be transformed into another becomes clearer.

What are the risk factors for a student with insufficient cultural capital, with insufficient social capital, with insufficient academic capital? Accumulated capital takes time to accumulate. Some students have a head start at home and come to campus with accumulated cultural, social, and academic capital.

Campus – Student Mismatch

There are many ways in which a student can match or mismatch a campus. Using these four kinds of capital as lenses to view this match or mismatch we can then examine sources of student risk based on Financial mismatch, Cultural mismatch, Social mismatch, or Academic mismatch. There are two views of the student-campus mismatch problem: “Adjust the student to the campus” or “Adjust the campus to the student”. These are assimilation, and accommodation. Low Social Class students are expected to assimilate, to “fit in” with the upper middle-class European-American prestige campus culture.

The consequence of a campus - student mismatch; of a poor “fit” is well known. Similarly, since college is a middle classing experience the college experience for low social class students results in a student home mismatch. This results in a poor student – home match; of a poor “fit” directly resulting from their college experiences.

Social Class Privilege

“I don’t need to worry about learning the social customs of others.”

“I can deny social class privilege by asserting that all social classes are essentially the same.”

| <i>Higher Social Class</i> | <i>Lower Social Class</i> |
|---|---|
| Sees world in terms of international or national view. | Sees world in terms of personal experiences and local setting. |
| Prestige dialect / language common. Stigmatized language excluded in all formal situations and most informal situations. | Prestige dialect / language uncommon. Stigmatized language accepted in all situations. Barratt, Leslie (2003) |
| Polite and reserved. Deference to prestige is important. | Warm and friendly with a sense of belongingness. Individuals are suspicious of people from different groups. |
| Parties are for standing, eating, and mixing. Networking is important. | Parties are for sitting, eating, and talking with a few friends. |
| “I’ll take this class because it’s interesting.” | “I don’t need this class because I’m never going to use this stuff.” |

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Discussion Questions: Social class and your campus

1. What are the symbolic features that are common on your campus that reflect the social class of your students; like phones, dress, cars?
2. Are these different than the faculty's phones, dress, cars, etc.
3. Who dresses like students and why?
4. How do you expect someone from a lower social class to behave on campus or in class?
5. What social class is reflected in student affairs values and practices, for example; the rules of organizations, the rules of politeness, 'Formal' dress occasions, and the skills taught in leadership programs?
6. What are your campus resources to increase students' economic, cultural, social, and academic capital?

Discussion Questions: Social class and you

1. How do you feel about your current social class, about the behaviors, attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge expected of you because of your social class?
2. How do you relate to those who are in your social class of origin? How is this different than how you relate to those in your own social class?
3. Do you affirm your social class membership(s) by engaging in activities and behaviors like appropriate dress that are expected of you?
4. Many people have changed their social class through education and higher prestige occupations. Has changing your social class affected your life?
 - a. How have these changing expectations shaped who you now?
 - b. How has this affected how you feel about yourself?
 - c. What affect has changing your social class membership had on you?
 - d. How does it shape how others see you?
 - e. How does it shape how you present yourself in the world?
 - f. How much do you study or practice prestige things to make sure you fit in with your current social class?
5. Are there personal, interpersonal, or social things about my current social class that you still have issues with?

(The second set of questions are inspired by those of Leo Wilton, SUNY Binghamton, and taken from his class web site.)