Week 8: Student Agency, Influence, & Activism

By Emily Rios and Timary Sessions

Student Agency

Agency is the undetermined nature of human action.

3 Types of Agency

1. Individual Agency
   - When an individual acts on their own behalf
2. Proxy Agency
   - Influencing others who have the resources
3. Collective Agency
   - When people act together

Early Conceptions of Agency

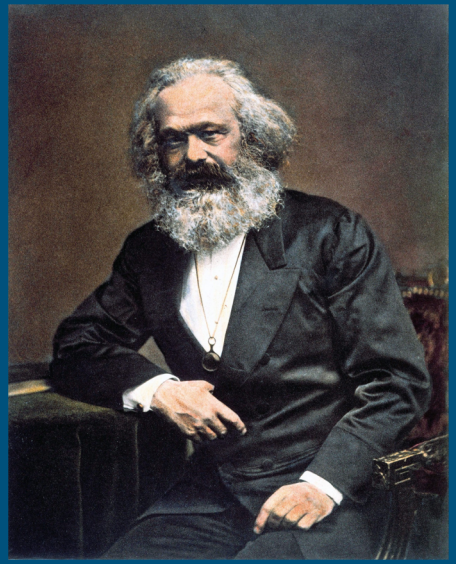
1. Ancient Romans 2 Types of Agency:
   a. War and Politics (vita activa)
   b. Philosopher (vita completiva)

2. Machiavelli (1520) - fortune controls one half, we are in control of other half

3. Marx (1860) - collective groups pursuit in social revolution
(Leninists, Maoists, Third Worldists)

4. Intentionality? Postmodernism → unstable and shifting (rationality suppresses creativity)

5. Giddens (1984)- structure and agency are parts of a whole, structure are not totalities



Student Agency in Higher Education

- No comprehensive theory of student agency in HE
- For student, agency corresponds with a more intentional form of action
- In Klemenčič's definition, empowerment of individuals with citizenship within the institution to act
- Agency is a force of self formation and self actualization
- Students as institutional entrepreneurs

Student Activism

Student activism refers to any political engagements of students to bring about political and social change.

- Collective vs. Individual Action
- One off acts vs. organized or durable engagement
- Violent vs. Non-Violent

Rise of student protest from 1960s and 70s around the world

Modes of Student Impact

Representation

Political institutions within HE, change through formal structures and proxy

Examples: Student governments, associations

Activism

Collective/individual action to bring political/social change, one-off or durable events

Examples: 1960s (SNCC, Berkeley, etc), Apartheid, Occupy Wall Street

Service

Autonomous, serve students

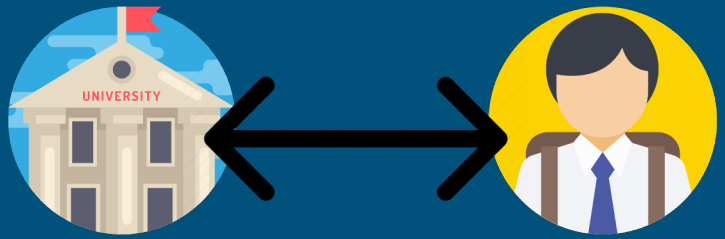
Examples: affinity, religious, athletics, newspaper, cultural groups

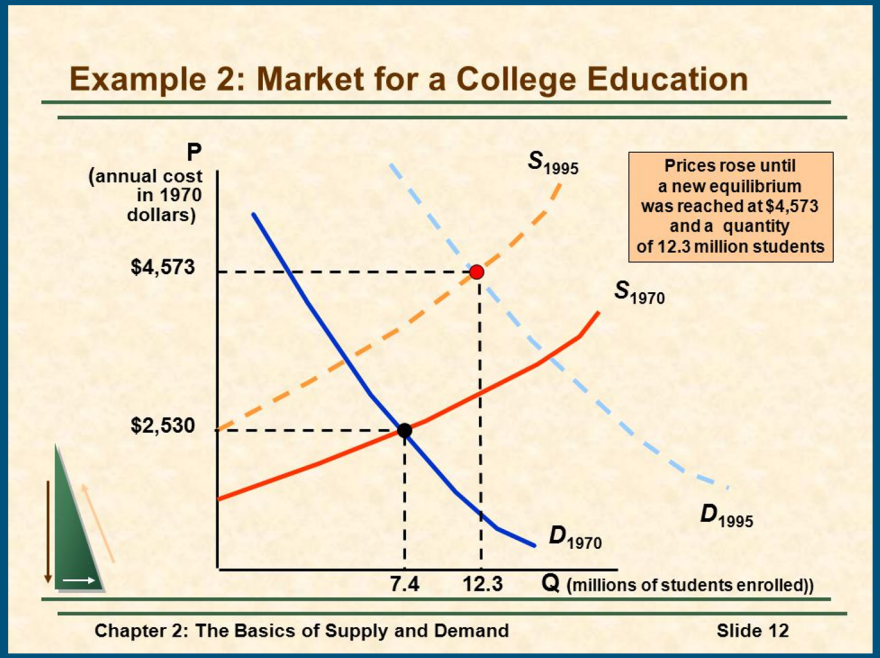
Workers

Student campus employment, ? impact due to reduced costs of students vs full-time personnel

Examples: Research, TFs, library assistants, baristas, interns

Students as Consumers





Students impact HE as consumers "by signalling their consumer preferences, by evoking their consumer rights in making demands in educational processes or by using complain mechanisms."

Neoliberal marketization of HE -> students as consumers and customers

Students make significant personal financial contributions toward HE

- Impact on student-professor relationships
- "Unrealistic expectations" for HE

Guest Speaker: Rakesh Khurana

- Dean of Harvard College
  - Is an advocate/voice for undergraduate students
- Student Activism
  - Dodged questions
  - “Making friends” with administration for change
- Exclusion in Universities
  - Emphasized student role in exclusion (ie Final Clubs), ignoring institutional role (no Ethnic Studies department, little social space, etc).
- Embracing Discomfort

New Perspectives - Student Discussion Posts

Lourdes

- Undermining of professor's roles in the university
- Students being unable retain professor's skill and knowledge
- Reasonable for students to self-sabotage their learning to earn their degree

Ashley

- Harvard hiring course assistants to reduce the burdens of hiring new staff
- Avoidance of administrative cost and time of the hiring process

Timary

- Discussion of student activism in non-democratic/authoritarian regimes
- 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in China
- Student wide movement that had political impact

Lauren

- Efficacy of the Undergraduate Council
- Activities fee to be turned into freedom dividends
- Abolish UC campaign received the most votes in an election

New Perspectives - Student Discussion Posts

Jeffery

- The role of the UC, whether they're in a position to make change
- Can a student government be an agent of change in a university that disagrees with such a matter?

John

- Harvard graduate student strike
- How graduate students exercising their agency is also exercising citizenship and civic engagement

Felix

- How often do Harvard students go out of their way to make an impactful organization?
- No new emergence of improv groups

Sienna

- Interested in getting more perspective on activist movements throughout higher education

New Perspectives - Student Discussion Posts

Emma

- Students as consumers
- Privileged vs. underprivileged students, who takes on more agency?

Abel

- Is student advocacy and agency mainly organized and led by students from marginalized backgrounds?
- Are these burdens moral and/or ethical, and/or are they fair?

Kathryn

- What does it mean for individuals who don’t attend higher educational institutions?
- What is the historical context of universities in the effort to develop democratic societies?

Vera

- Not thinking of yourself as an adult at Harvard
- Treating students as adults who are voluntarily pursuing an education better promotes student agency and democratic processes

New Perspectives - Student Discussion Posts

Marcos

- Future of student agency
- Influence of social media in contemporary activism

Claudia

- Individual, proxy, and collective activism in Harvard
- Proxy through UC
- Individual through Q guide
- Collective through student unions & activist groups

Emily

- Global contexts of student activism
- Framing of student activism by the government
- Massacre in Mexico, violence ensued by the government, named student activists the villains

Remi

- How higher education institutions rely heavily on student unpaid labor and how this places an unfair burden on students
- Institutions not providing support to people experiencing homelessness

Thank You!

Any Questions?

TEMPLATE SLIDES BELOW

Above are actual presentation slides

Summary

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About

Title:
Book Title

Author:
Wendy Writer

Publisher:
Publisher Name

Copyright Date:
20XX

Setting

Where did it happen?

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How about when??

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Main Characters

Wendy Writer

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Ronny Reader

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Abby Author

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Berry Books

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Conflict

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Solution

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What’s the book’s main message? Use this slide to concisely state it.

Review

Would you recommend this book?
Write your review here.