Inequalities and Diversity in Higher Education

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Roadmap

I. Textbook Review

II. Student Input on Additional Issues

III. Deeper Dive on Meritocracy

IV. Deeper Dive on Affirmative Action

Textbook Review

Primary Points

I. Why HE? Why not HE?

II. Students in HE: Underrepresented v. Disadvantaged v. Vulnerable Students

III. Key Social Concepts

IV. Projects and Pathways

Why HE? Why not HE?

HE as the 'great equalizer': BUT it benefits students of color, low-income students, and women **less** than their counterparts post-graduation; ex: gender and racial/ethnic wage gap, hiring discrimination

Monetary Benefits: HE as a way to gain individual wealth via higher earnings

Monetary Costs: Affordability as a barrier to HE

Within HE:
Students and Social Concepts

Students in Higher Education

The following students are those that experience inequalities in the form of barriers to reach and succeed in HE.

Underrepresented Students

A *group* of students whose representation in the student body is lower than that of a comparable group within the same *population*. The *group* can be determined by age, gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, or other identities. The *population* can be the entire student population, a specific department, a club, etc...

Disadvantaged Students

Students who experience a temporary (ex: pregnancy), often occurring (ex: fluctuating family income), or permanent (ex: physical disability) challenge during their time in HE.

Vulnerable Students

Students who are *at risk* of becoming disadvantaged. Examples range from students who are minors and require a *loco parentis* to a student whose presence at the institution relies on their GPA.

Capital

- Pioneered by Pierre Bourdieu
- Three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural
- The forms of capital do not act independently; social position grants varying degrees of access which creates various dynamics of privilege and inequality
- **Role in higher education:** Access to higher education, type of institution one attends, job opportunities post-graduation

Equality of Access/Opportunity ↔ Equality of Outcomes

- Political concepts that shift depending on political ideologies ie those who attribute success (or lack thereof) to meritocracy vs social inequalities
- *Eq. of Access/Opportunity:* Removing barriers for disadvantaged students to access HE
- *Eq. of Outcomes*: reducing/eliminating barriers leads to equality of outcomes across different groups of students
- Sociology studies social mobility across generations
- **Examples in higher education:** Affirmative action, widening participation policies, academic support within schools

Social Mobility

- The movement of individuals between different positions of status
- Sociology studies social mobility across generations
- **Higher education:** a mechanism of social mobility; a degree as a credential that is a form of and can help gain capital

Social Stratification

- The tendency of socially (dis)advantaged children to remain (dis)advantaged; helps predict social mobility
- Vertical stratification: *quantity* of education received + level
- Horizontal stratification: *quality* of education + the type
- **Role in higher education:** Vertical and horizontal stratification creates a hierarchy of education, with some experiences 'better' than others; this helps build capital

Diversity in HE

- An international goal to make HE reflect diverse society
- Three forms: **Structural** (numerical diversity), **Informal Interactional** (frequency + quality of intergroup interactions), and **Classroom** (how the curriculum and your peers serve as resources for learning)
- Proponents argue it is a *responsibility* of HE to advance social progress by granting a post-secondary education to underrepresented students
- **Benefits**: Development of students' skills navigating a diverse society, positively influences learning outcomes in and out of the classroom
- **Drawbacks**: Numerous burdens on students, including placing the burden on them to educate peers and build their sense of belonging

Widening Participation

- A policy- primarily in Europe- created to increase diversity and help historically underrepresented students gain access to HE
- Identifies specific groups to target for initiatives; highly contested
- **Related Concepts:** Raising aspirations as a strategy, 'sacrificing' excellence for equality

Convergence of students and concepts: **Projects and Pathways**

Class Projects

Definition: Idea that students from similar class backgrounds will naturally congregate to achieve shared goals

Social Closure: Wealthy students exclusively socialize with each other; ex: Fraternities with fees, social activities requiring money. Results in connections, from professional to platonic to romantic, forming within one economic class

Manifestation in HE: Social Closure & Class Mobility/ Reproduction via achievement

Class Mobility/Reproduction: When students view and use HE for class mobility, a form of social mobility. Class reproduction occurs when these students use HE to attain a high academic achievement which leads to *professional* and *financial* achievement

College Pathways

Definition: The trajectories for students to generally follow based upon their class projects

Party Pathway

- For students more interested in the social aspect of college than the academic/ professional benefits
- Due to these students being able to afford this pathway, it is a mechanism of social closure

Mobility Pathway

- For students interested in class mobility
- Textbook outlines it is the "most inclusive and accessible" as HE helps all students, regardless of their background, attain a form of capital

Professional Pathway

- For students interested in class mobility/ reproduction via achievement
- Helps students who did not have capital gain it and achieve class mobility (see Anthony Jack's *The Privileged Poor*) AND exacerbates inequalities by giving students who already had capital attain more

Summary of Chapter

- Why HE? Complicated answer: 'HE is the great equalizer'
- Various students experience inequality in HE
- Social concepts, like cultural capital and equality of access, affect these students
- Students from similar backgrounds and life experiences may congregate and have similar goals (class projects) which affects their paths in HE (college pathways)

Student Input on Additional Issues

Specific Communities

Challenges of inequality and diversity arise saliently in marginalized communities:

Indigenous Students
(by Ashley)

- ➔ "American colleges stood beside church and state… of a civilization built on bondage" (Wilder)
- ➔ Tribal Colleges/Universities, or TCUs, provide educational programs that are "locally and culturally based, holistic, and supportive"
- ➔ Rarity for institutions outside TCUs to make Indigenous values and history a tenet of their school curriculum or culture

LGBTQ+ and Gender Discrimination
(by Emily)

- ➔ Need for recognition and awareness of a gender spectrum within traditionally all-male or all-female schools
- ➔ Discrimination of transgender students from single-gender schools
- ➔ Patriarchal structures in schools feed into patriarchal structures in the greater society
- ➔ Respresses and pokes fun at femininity, especially harmful for Black females

Specific Communities (cont.)

Challenges of inequality and diversity arise saliently in marginalized communities:

Immigrants and Refugee Students (by Jack)

- ➔ From the 65,000 undocumented immigrants who graduate high school, only 7-13k enroll in a postsecondary institution
- ➔ Ineligible to receive federal financial aid
- ➔ Many states that provide such funding are dependent on the survival of DACA
- ➔ Fear of deportment, feelings of negative perceptions, and more contribute to increased risk for mental health issues

Income Disparities and FGLI Students (by Jeff)

- ➔ Reported obstacles to succeeding academically include:
  - ◆ Job and family responsibilities
  - ◆ Weak math, English and/or study skills
  - ◆ Stress and depression
- ➔ Imposter syndrome and the burden of "navigating unfamiliar professional and social cultures"
- ➔ Lack of financial aid support for middle class families, contributing to increased college debt

Specific Issues

Challenges of inequality and diversity can also center around underlying societal issues

Faculty Diversity + Ethnic Studies (by Timary)

- Disparity between diversity of students and faculty
  - 76% of higher ed faculty are white, while only 55% of undergraduates are white
- Younger faculty generally more diverse than their tenured counterparts
- Faculty as role models and harbingers of belonging
- "When taught by a minority teacher, performance gaps between white and minority students falls by 20 to 50%"

Tenure + Racial Discrimination (by Claudia)

- Controversial case of Prof. Lorgia García Peña denied tenure despite experience and accolades
- Upholding Eurocentric model at Harvard
- "Harvard's student body self-identifies itself as 54% people of color but tenured faculty members make up only 9% of that composition"
- Black women at historically white institutions report feelings of being "space invaders" and experiencing "invisibleness"

Specific Issues (cont.)

Challenges of inequality and diversity can also center around underlying societal issues

Choosing Majors + Lack of Gender Diversity
(by Lauren)

- ➔ Early socialization, gendered occupational preferences, and cultural expectations all contribute to gender disparities in college majors
- ➔ The more gendered an institution is across the board, the more segregated their fields of study tend to be

Housing Insecurity + Caregiving Responsibilities
(by Mystery Person)

- ➔ Differences in income and housing access made especially salient during the COVID evictions
- ➔ Nonresidential students, especially in community colleges, left without stable housing
- ➔ "Impoverished mothers/caregivers, caregiving as an unpaid, unrecognized labor directly diminishes their professional mobility"

Influences of Schools and Admission

Other times, the schools themselves can contribute to a system of inequality

Graduate School Entrance Exams (by Felix)

- ➔ "High GRE test scores time and again tend to correlate with a student's socioeconomic status, race, and gender" (Clayton)
- ➔ Time-pressured nature of LSAT makes the test a worse predictor of law school success and contributes to racial performance gap
- ➔ High MCAT scores favor population groups that are already well represented in the medical field

Schools and Social Identity (by Sienna)

- ➔ Dissociation of elite university students from the school
- ➔ Vacuum of belonging leaves room for "social organizations, including pre-professional groups, cultural affinity groups, and performing arts groups" to create communities with which to further identify
- ➔ Barriers and inequalities of student-run tryouts and auditions ("comps"), rewarding certain types of capital and behavior

Through both macro- and micro-perspectives, inequality persists

Deeper Dive:
Meritocracy

Definition from the Textbook

Meritocracy

- The belief that hard work and, in more drastic conceptions, genetically-given abilities guarantee success
- **Role in higher education:** A meritocratic view believes college admissions should only consider students based off their individual achievements and not their background/capital

Origin of the word

- Coined by sociologist Michael Dunlop Young in his book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958)
  - A dystopian novel set in the UK where society is divided by elite with 'merit' and everyone else; this merit was determined by tests that determined innate talent, and this merit gave the elite their status
- The idea of using merit/'natural gifts' isn't new, but Young named it
- Young is vehemently against the adoption of a pro-meritocratic view: "I have been sadly disappointed by my 1958 book… The book was a satire intended to be a warning (which needless to say has not been heeded)" (Young 2001)

Down with the meritocracy
Michael Young (2001)

The Meritocracy: Testing, Harvard, and Inequality in Social Mobility

1905
Development of first IQ test

WWI
Harvard Prof. Robert Yerkes administers IQ test on soldiers for a eugenics study

1923
Princeton Prof. Carl Brigham says study proves white Americans are inherently smarter than other groups

1926
Brigham is hired by the College Board to create and administer the SAT

The Tyranny of Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education
Lani Guinier (2015)

The Meritocracy: Testing, Harvard, and Inequality in Social Mobility

- Charles W. Elliot (1869-1909): Changed admissions exams from Harvard-devised to those administered by the College Entrance Exam Board (later the College Board) to get more economically diverse but *intelligent* students; **one of the first to equate college-entrance exams to accurate measurements of intelligence**

- Abbott Lawrence Lowell (1909-33): Anti-Semetic; changed admissions to include interviews, photos, letters of rec, and criteria to include character, legacy, and athleticism; **creation of the 'well-rounded' applicant**

- James Conant (1933-1953): Wanted to give need-blind scholarships to 'deserving' students from middle class + immigrant families; adopted SAT as a screening for scholarship recipients; **one of the first examples of testing = merit and merit = deserving of entrance into HE**

Guinier (2015)

The Meritocracy: Testing, Harvard, and Inequality in Social Mobility

- Three goals of an education: "democratic equality", "social efficiency", and "social mobility" = making citizens, making workers, and making competitors for capital (39)
- A meritocratic education = pro social mobility; competition between students for positions in HE *especially* at elite HE institutions like Harvard

Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals
David Labaree (1997)

social stratification

"[E]ducation can only promote **social mobility** (and simultaneously **preserve the positional advantage of the privileged**) to the extent that it **prevents most students from reaching the top of the educational pyramid**." (65)

inequality of access

Labaree (1997)

IN SUMMARY

(Prejudiced) Testing → (Problematic) Admissions Practices

↓

Meritocracy

↓

Harms previously discussed student populations +
Reinforces previously discussed social concepts

Deeper Dive:
Affirmative Action & the Supreme Court

Tracing the Legal History of Affirmative Action in the U.S.

1978	2003	2016	2021
Regents of UC v. Bakke	*Gratz & Grutter*	*Fisher v.. University of Texas*	*Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*

Regents of UC v. Bakke

DETAILS and DECISIONS:

- Allan Bakke (white, male) failed to gain admittance to UC Davis Med, arguing that his application was superior to any of the students who gained entry through sixteen "qualified minority" spots
- Narrow 5-4 court decision
  - The majority found that no university could institute a racial quota for applications, as it violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act
  - The remaining four justices contended that race could be used as a factor, among other criteria

Grutter v. Bollinger & Gratz v. Bollinger

DETAILS and DECISIONS:

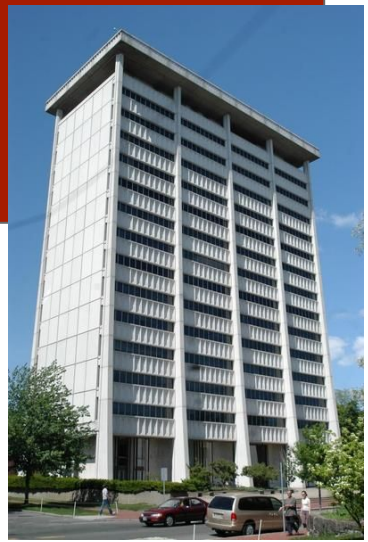
- Jennifer Gratz denied admission to UMichigan undergraduate, which awards admission "points" to applicants from "underrepresented minorities"
    - Supreme Court 6-3 majority held that such a system, especially rewarding with race, was not sufficiently tailored to pass scrutiny
- On the same day, the Court decided the case of Barbara Grutter, a Michigan Law applicant
    - This time, the 5-4 majority found that the admissions process was *individualized* and advanced a "compelling interest of diversity"

Fisher v. U of Texas

DETAILS and DECISIONS:

- The University of Texas system implements a “Top Ten Percent Plan,” which offers automatic admission to Texas high school students in the top 10% of their class. After those spots are filled, race is a consideration for the rest of the class.
- Supreme Court 4-3 majority found that the use of race was admissible, since it was a part of a “holistic process” that “serve a compelling state interest” of diversity

Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard



DETAILS and DECISIONS:

- Currently on its (slow) way to the Supreme Court, likely to be heard in 2022!
- Plaintiffs argue that Harvard's admissions system discriminates against Asian American applicants through lower "personal scores"
- District and appellate courts both sided with Harvard, saying that there exists no quota, and the process is sufficiently holistic despite purposeful actions for racial diversity
- Based on prior rulings, where do you think this one will fall?

TAKEAWAY #1:
Just as societal leanings change, so too does American law (... eventually)

TAKEAWAY #2:
Even Supreme Court "decisions" are made on a slim margin. The future of Affirmative Action is undecided

"Those who, by dint of effort and talent, prevail in a competitive meritocracy are indebted in ways the competition obscures… In this way, even a fair meritocracy induces a mistaken impression – that we have made it on our own. **The years of strenuous effort demanded of applicants to elite universities almost forces them to believe that their success is their own doing**, **and that if they fall short, they have no one to blame but themselves.**"

- Michael Sandel, *Tyranny of Merit*

Questions / Comments?

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THE STUDENTS OF SOCIOL 1104 :)!