

Expos. 20, Spring Semester 2017
M, W, 11-12, CGIS Knafel K109

CLASS AND CULTURE

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Course Overview

It is commonplace to note that in the United States a large portion of the population self-identifies as “middle class” even though our society is marked by deep, persistent, and increasing class inequality. This incongruity between identity and social structure betrays the complex and often contradictory ways in which we experience social class in our everyday lives. This course explores the subjective experience of social class in the U.S. from an ethnographic perspective, focusing on the everyday lives and cultures of ordinary Americans. We will consider questions such as the following. What is it like to be a working class person in a society heavily invested in ideals of individual achievement and meritocracy? How do educational institutions such as high schools and colleges underwrite class mobility for some and reproduce disadvantage for others? What kinds of class cultures are cultivated in elite colleges such as Harvard? In the first unit, students will consider an argument that elite educational institutions reproduce class inequality while maintaining the appearance of openness, diversity, and meritocracy. The second unit considers the identities of working class people before and after the Great Recession, examining how blue color workers imagine their place in an increasingly unequal world. For the third unit students will develop their own original research project concerning the role played by class divisions on elite college campuses. The course readings are drawn mainly from the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology.

An equally important goal of the course is to develop your ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the sort you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard. With this in mind the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your writing. During the semester you will write three essays, each of which tackles a different aspect of the experience of class and is designed to highlight different writing skills. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below.

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ESSAY I: ELITE EDUCATION AND CLASS REPRODUCTION (evaluating/critiquing an argument, 5-6 pages)

In his superb ethnography *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, sociologist Shamus Khan argues that elite educational institutions such as St. Paul's reproduce class inequality while maintaining the appearance of openness, diversity, and meritocracy. Students will write a paper that evaluates the plausibility and cogency of some aspect of Khan's argument.

Focal Writing Skills: Devising questions and arguable theses; using evidence; integrating sources.

ESSAY II: WORKING CLASS IDENTITIES AND CULTURES (comparative analysis essay, 6-7 pages)

For the second unit, we'll read two rich and evocative studies of working class identity in the U.S. — Michele Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men* and Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*. Lamont's research focuses on the identities of blue color men in New Jersey during the 1990s. Silva documents how working class people in Massachusetts and Virginia cope with declining opportunities and standards of living in the wake of the Great Recession. Students will compare these two working class groups and make an argument about what the comparison tells us about the nature of working class life in the contemporary U.S.

Focal Writing Skills: Comparative analysis; presentation of evidence and analysis; argument structure; counterargument.

ESSAY III: RESEARCH ESSAY: CLASS ON CAMPUS (multi-source research essay, 8-10 pages)

Elite educational institutions such as Harvard play a complex role in the class structure. On the one hand, many view attending such institutions as an important means of class mobility and of increasing the dynamism of the class structure. Other commentators have emphasized the role of elite educational institutions in reproducing and reinforcing class privilege. In this unit students will devise their own research project concerning the significance of class on the Harvard campus. For inspiration, students will read *Paying for the Party*, which argues that women's participation in "the party pathway" at a large public university tends to reinforce the class privilege of affluent students while leading to downward mobility for working class students.

Focal Writing Skills: Research; handling of multiple sources and different kinds of evidence; structure.

Course Readings

- The following books are available at the Coop:
 - Silva, Jennifer M. *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* 1st Edition. Oxford University Press.
 - Armstrong , Elizabeth A., Laura T. Hamilton. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Harvard University Press.
 - Khan, Shamus Rahman. 2011. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- *Course Reader*: The course readings will be posted in PDF form on the course website, here: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/9449>
- *Other resources*:
 - Models essays from *Exposé*
<http://www.jhcwp.com/>
 - *Harvard University Guide to Using Sources* website, here:
<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

How the Course Works

The main goal for the course is for you to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units of the course. Such essays are not written on the fly; they take time, continual re-working, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.

Class time will be split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. You should come to class with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion.

Writing and Revising

- *Response Papers*: Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you'll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills that are important for the relevant essay type. Check the unit assignment packet for specific instructions and due dates, etc.

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- *Drafts:* You will submit a draft of each of the three essays. On each draft you'll receive detailed comments from the instructor (in writing and in conferences).
- *Draft Cover Letters:* Every time you hand in a draft, you'll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I'll give you more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters over the course of the semester.
- *Draft Workshops:* Immediately after each draft is due we'll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by the instructor) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I will email you the essays I have chosen before each workshop. You will be expected to provide written comments (in the form of a letter) on each draft that we workshop together. I'll hand out more guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester.
- *Conferences:* After I've carefully read your draft, we'll meet for a 15-20 minute conference in which we'll work together on strategies for revising the essay. You should also plan on taking notes during the conference. Missed conferences may not be rescheduled.
- *Essay Revisions:* You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it for a grade. I will provide written comments on essay revisions. Essay revisions must be submitted over email (not as hard copies), and I will also provide my comments in electronic form.

Other Policies

- *Grading:* I will grade only the revisions (that is, the last version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers (although I may suggest, as an aid to interpreting my evaluations, what sort of grade a draft *would* receive if I were to grade it). Course grades will be determined as follows:

Revision of Essay 1	25%
Revision of Essay 2	32%
Revision of Essay 3	38%
Participation and exercises	5%

Grading will become more stringent as the semester progresses since I expect you develop as a thinker and writer. Please be advised that final grades (that is, grades on revised essays) are indeed final. I will not read or grade a further revision of a revision.

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- *Attendance:* The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is as follows: If you miss more than one class without the excuse of a religious holiday or illness, you will receive a formal warning letter, copied to your Freshman Dean. If you then miss another class without a legitimate excuse, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. Please note that absences to participate in athletic or other extracurricular activities are not excusable. If you have to be absent for a religious holiday or other important event, please speak to me *before* the date you will be away.
- *Deadlines:* We are on a very tight schedule, so it is imperative that you submit work on time. I will only accept late work if the student contacts me to request an extension *in advance* of the deadline and has a compelling reason. Otherwise late work will receive a significant grade penalty.
- *Completion of Work:* The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is as follows: You must complete all three of the required courses essays (including drafts) in order to pass the course. All work must be completed by the relevant deadline unless you have made *prior* arrangements with me for an extension. If you then miss the extended deadline, you may be excluded from the course.
- *Collaboration Among Students:* The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden
- *Academic Honesty:* All work submitted for this course must be your own work. Any outside sources you use must be cited properly. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will be referred to the college’s Administrative Board for further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, consult the relevant sections of *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* and/or speak with the instructor.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Unit 1: Elite Education and Class Reproduction

Monday, Jan. 30

Topic: Course introduction; the concept of class

Writing focus: Argument and analytical writing

To Do:

Hand out: Unit 1 assignment packet, student questionnaire

Read: “Elements of the Academic Essay”

Wednesday, Feb. 1

Topic: What is social class?

Writing focus: Questions and problems

To Do:

Read:

- Wright and Rogers, “Class” [on course site]
- Fussell, “A Touchy Subject” and “An Anatomy of the Classes” [on course site]

***Due:* student questionnaire**

Monday, Feb. 6

Topic: Elite education and class reproduction

Writing focus: Claims (theses)

To Do:

Read:

- Kahn, *Privilege*, introduction and chapter 1
-

Wednesday, Feb. 8

Topic: Elite education and class reproduction continued

Writing focus: Presenting and analyzing evidence

To Do:

Read:

- Kahn, *Privilege*, chapter 2 and 3
-

Monday, Feb. 13

Topic: Elite education and class reproduction continued

Writing focus: Fundamentals of using sources; using textual evidence; plagiarism

To Do:

Read:

- Kahn, *Privilege*, chapters 4, 5, and conclusion
 - The following sections on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website (usingsources.fas.harvard.edu):
 - "Introduction"
 - "Why Use Sources?"
 - "Integrating Sources"
-

Wednesday, Feb. 15

Writing focus: Introductions

To Do:

Read:

- Sample essay introductions from *Exposé* (to be provided)

***Due:* First response paper**

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Monday, Feb. 20

NO CLASS – PRESIDENTS' DAY

Tuesday, Feb. 21

Due by midnight: Essay 1 draft via email.

Wednesday, Feb. 22

Paper 1 Draft Workshop

To Do:

Sign up for a draft conference slot on website

Due in class: 2 copies of your reader letters

Unit 2: Working Class Identities

Monday, Feb. 27

Topic: Working class identities before the Great Recession

To Do:

Read:

- Lamont, selections from *The Dignity of Working Men* [on course site]
-

Wednesday, March 1

Topic: Working class identities after the Great Recession

Writing focus: Argument structure

To Do:

Read:

- New York Times, “Death Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White Americans, Study Finds” [on course website]
 - Silva, *Coming up Short*, chapters 1-3
-

Sunday, March 5

Due by midnight: Essay 1 revision via email.

Monday, March 6

Topic: Working class identities after the Great Recession, continued

Writing focus: Comparing sources

To Do:

Read:

- Silva, *Coming Up Short*, chapters 4-5
-

Wednesday, March 8

Topic: Trumpism and the white working class

Writing focus: Counterargument

To Do:

Read:

- “‘White Nationalism,’ Explained” [web]
 - Williams, “What So Many People Don’t Get About the U.S. Working Class” [web]
 - Hochschild, “I Spent 5 Years With Some of Trump’s Biggest Fans. Here’s What They Won’t Tell You.”
 - Model counterarguments (to be emailed)
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SPRING BREAK, MARCH 11-19

Monday, March 20

Writing focus: Paragraphing

To Do:

No assignment

Wednesday, March 22

Topic: Prelude to Unit 3

To Do:

Sign up for a draft conference slot on website

Friday, March 22

Due by midnight: Essay 2 draft via email.

Monday, March 27

Paper 2 Draft Workshop

To Do:

Due in class: 2 copies of your reader letters

Unit 3: Research Project: Class on Campus

Wednesday, March 29

Topic: College and class trajectories

Writing focus: Developing research questions

To Do:

Read:

- Armstrong et al, *Paying for the Party*, chapters 1-3
-

Monday, April 3

Writing focus: Locating and evaluating secondary sources

To Do:

Read:

- Armstrong et al, *Paying for the Party*, chapters 4-6
 - The following sections on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website:
 - “Locating Sources ”
 - “Evaluating Sources”
-

Wednesday, April 5

Writing focus: Disciplinary differences in argumentative strategies

To Do:

Read:

- Armstrong et al, *Paying for the Party*, chapters 7-9
-

Sunday, April 9

***Due by midnight:* Essay 2 revision via email.**

Monday, April 10

Writing focus: Research process; data collection

To Do:

Work on research proposal

Tuesday, April 11

***Due by midnight:* Essay 3 research proposal**

Wednesday, April 12

Research Proposal Workshop

To Do:

Revise research proposal

Monday, April 17

Research Proposal Workshop continued

To Do:

Revise research proposal

Wednesday, April 19

Writing focus: Integrating sources; primary versus secondary sources

To Do:

Read:

- The following sections on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website:
 - “Integrating Sources ”
 - Harvey, excerpt from “Sources of What?”
-

Monday, April 24

Writing focus: Citation; plagiarism

To Do:

Read:

- The following section on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website:
 - “Avoiding Plagiarism ”
 - “Citing Sources”

Due in class: Citation exercise

Wednesday, April 26

Course Evaluation Day

To Do:

No assignment

Monday, May 1

Paper 3 Draft Workshop

To Do:

Due in class: 2 copies of your reader letters

Paper 3 due date TBD