

# CLASS(ISM) IN THE CO-CURRICULAR?

Investigating Low-Income and Working Class  
Students' Participation in Co-Curricular Activities

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# Flow

Definitions & Assumptions

Context & Concern

Data & Results

Implications for Practice

# Definitions & Assumptions

- Who we are shapes what we see and what we deem important.
- Class is complex - may shift over time (or not).
- Class is more than \$



The Rocky R...  
B... ..

# here comes Honey Boo Boo



TY



# Self Reflection

- What were markers of your social class growing up? While in college? Now?
- How has your class of origin influenced your choices related to education and/or career?
- What efforts have you led/observed related to increasing class consciousness?

# Context of Student Affairs

- Beyond retention/graduation towards involvement/engagement
- Emphasis often on traditional, liberal arts institutions
- Value educationally enriching, “deep” learning through
  - Living on-campus
  - Studying abroad
  - Volunteering
  - Participating in group projects
  - Conducting research with faculty
  - Joining/leading student clubs and organizations

# Concern(s)

- When students demonstrate high sense of belonging, we take credit (our “enriching” activities)
- When they do not, we may blame them for their “choices” (not participating in clubs, commuting)
- We may assume a “good” student is an engaged one, and all students have equal access to engagement opportunities.



# Working Class Students

Often cast as heroes or victims, who experience...

- Imposter syndrome
- Fear of success (moving ahead=leaving behind)
- Cultural suicide (surrender of memory)
- Stereotype threat / internalized oppression
- Code switching at school (to avoid being “outclassed”) and at home (to avoid being “uppity”)
- Status anxiety / survivor guilt



# Working Class Students

- Significant gaps in four-year degree attainment
  - 12% from the lowest quarter of the social and economic strata and 73% from higher income families (Sacks, 2007)
  - 21% of lower-class background and 84% of upper-class background (Perrucci & Wysong, 2008)
  - High income youth are more than 6 times as likely to earn a degree as low income youth, and the gap between them had doubled in the last 35 years (Engle & Tinto, 2008)

# Research Questions

- Compared with middle/upper-class students, are working-class students less involved in campus co-curricular activities, more likely to be employed, and less likely to live on or near campus?
- Compared with middle/upper-class students, are working-class students more or less likely to be involved in specific types of student clubs or organizations on campus?



# SERU Instrument

- Core questions focus on time use, evaluation of a student's major, campus climate and satisfaction, with four thematic research areas:
  - academic engagement,
  - community and civic engagement,
  - global knowledge and skills, and
  - student life and development.
- Administered to 213,160 undergraduates from nine large, Midwest public research universities
- Average institutional level response rate was 38% ( $n = 81,135$ ).

<b>Participants</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	40582	42.5%
Female	54955	57.5%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	373	.4%
African American	5135	5.4%
Hispanic	10780	11.4%
Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander	15880	16.7%
White	53412	56.3%
Other	1337	1.4%
Unknown	3258	3.4%
International	4682	4.9%
Non-First-Generation	54352	75.4%
First-Generation	17714	24.6%
Wealthy	1937	2.6%
Upper-middle or professional-middle	23207	31.5%
Middle-class	30861	41.9%
Working-class	13395	18.2%
Low-income or poor	4288	5.8%



# Social Class

- Students were asked to self-report their social class when growing up and could choose from five categories:
  - low-income/poor,
  - working-class,
  - middle-class,
  - upper-middle/professional class, and
  - wealthy.
- Majority of respondents self-identified as middle-class (41.9%) or upper-middle or professional (31.5%).
- Self-reported data was checked against family income and parental educational attainment, and self-reports were deemed reliable.

# Engagement Defined

- Hours per week in student clubs/organizations
  - Type of clubs or organizations (academic or honors, governmental/political, sports clubs/teams, recreation, religion, advocacy, Greek)
  - Nature of involvement (participant/member, officer/leader, neither)
- Hours per week in paid employment
- Where they lived
  - On- or off-campus
  - If off-campus, distance (less than a mile, 1-2 miles, etc.)



# Results re: clubs and work

- 37.7% of working-class students reported spending no time per week participating in student clubs and organizations compared with 29% of middle/upper-class students.
- Middle/upper-class students were slightly more likely to spend more time participating per week, more likely to hold leadership positions
- 57% of working-class students worked in paid employment (compared to 46.6% of middle/upper-class)
- Working-class students were more likely to work more hours per week (13.9% of working-class students reported working more than 20 hours per week compared with 8.3% of middle/upper-class students).

# Results re: home

- Working-class students were slightly less likely (24.5%) to live on-campus than their middle/upper-class peers (28%)
- Working-class students were more likely to live with their families (8% compared with 4.5% of middle/upper-class students), less likely to live in a fraternity or sorority (1.5% compared with 5.3% of middle/upper-class students), and more likely to live in off-campus in an apartment (43% compared with 39% of middle/upper-class students).



# Results re: home

- Working-class students were more likely to live farther from campus; 63.6% of middle/upper-class students lived on campus or less than one mile from campus, compared with 48.4% of working-class students.
- Working-class students were nearly twice as likely to live three to 10 miles from campus (19% compared with 11.2% of middle/upper-class students), 11 to 20 miles from campus (5.9% compared with 2.9% of middle/upper-class students), and 21 miles or more from campus (6.8% compared with 3.1% of middle/upper-class students).

# Results re: types of orgs

- While working-class students were generally less likely to participate in clubs/orgs, the differences in participation rates for various types of clubs/orgs were relatively small
  - 24.8% of working-class students participated in service or advocacy clubs compared to 27.6% of middle/upper-class students



# Results re: types of orgs

- Greater differences between working-class and middle/upper-class students are present in two specific organization types:
  - 34.1% of working-class students participated in academic/honors organizations compared with 42% of middle/upper-class students
  - 10.8% of working-class students participated in Greek organizations compared with 20.1% of middle/upper-class students

# Research Summary

- Working-class students at large, public, Midwest research institutions are:
  - overall less likely to participate in student clubs and organizations, and especially less likely to participate in Greek and academic/honors organizations,
  - more likely to be employed,
  - more likely to live off campus or with family, and
  - more likely to live a considerable distance from campus.
- Each of these factors is related to a lower sense of belonging and lower 'engagement.'



# Implications

- Class background influences behaviors related to student engagement
- Variations are a logical outcome of structural patterns rather than simply a matter of personal choices
- Institutions can do more to examine how “deep” learning practices privilege some groups and risk alienating others

# Pragmatic Changes

- Develop stronger commuter programs/services
- Provide leadership possibilities in work-study positions and/or classroom environments
- Offer paid employment for student leadership positions
- Explain internships, fellowships, networking
- Broaden understanding of what an involved student looks like (e.g., family obligations and off-campus work are forms of involvement)...and have that reflected in selection processes (for leadership positions or scholarships)
- Be conscious of the economic and cultural capital required to navigate systems (ex - deposit bridge loans)



# Questions? Feedback?

- What additional implications have you considered? Suggestions for practice others can learn from?
- Thanks for your time!
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