

ED398: American Higher Education**Instructor: Lee Burdette Williams, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students****Office: 103 Park Hall, (508) 286-8218***

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This course is a broad examination of American higher education: its history, structures and role in the national landscape and the people who inhabit that landscape, with a particular emphasis on contemporary issues.

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the historical underpinnings of American higher education (AHE):
 - how it developed within social, political and economic contexts
 - the different types of institutions within the American system
2. Explain and discuss current issues in higher education, for example:
 - student culture
 - financial concerns
 - marketing and branding
3. Become savvy consumers of higher education themselves
4. Place themselves and Wheaton in the larger context of the AHE landscape

Structure of the class:

This course is loosely divided into four "units" or general topics:

- The "field:" history and culture of AHE, including institution types and purposes
- The "game:" the marketing/branding/selling of institutions
- The "players:" faculty, students, other constituents
- Ongoing issues, including some of the following:
 - Financing higher education (student debt, state funding, the cost crisis)
 - Athletics (role, impact)
 - Alcohol, mental health, disabilities
 - Access and diversity
 - The role of "liberal arts" in the broader landscape of AHE
 - Compliance, governance, media and other things that make life difficult for administrators, faculty and sometimes students

General information:

If you have needs related to a learning disability, please inform me.

You are expected to be honest in your academic undertakings. As per faculty resolution in 2003, assignments should include the following statement with a signature: "I have abided by the Wheaton College Honor Code in this work."

Though I will do my best to stick to this syllabus, I reserve the right to change readings, assignments or deadlines during the semester. I will attempt to give you ample notice if this happens.

Attendance policy:

A significant portion of the grade for this class is based on participation, and thus, absences will be barely tolerated. We meet a total of 28 times. You may miss up to three of these classes without it adversely affecting your grade. For each absence beyond these three, your grade will drop by half a letter grade (e.g., A- to B+ to B to B-). Absences are neither "excused" nor "unexcused," so all absences count in the same manner. There is no make-up opportunity for missed classes.

Texts:

Delbanco, Andrew (2012). College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be.
Ferguson, Andrew (2011). Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course at Getting His Kid Into College.
Levine, Arthur and Diane R. Dean (2012). Generation on a Tightrope.
Wolfe, Tom (2004). I Am Charlotte Simmons.

Selected articles from various sources, especially the New York Times, Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE) and Inside Higher Ed (IHE).

Please subscribe to the website "Inside Higher Ed" so that you get their daily headlines. These pieces will often be discussed in class.

Evaluation:

Attendance/Participation: 20% (includes Charlotte Simmons passage)

Semester project (presentation): 30%

Portfolio: 50%

 Self-guided field trip (25%)

 Faculty/academic administrator interviews (2) (15%)

 Campus observations (3) (10%)

Schedule:

Week 1: (August 27 and 29)

Topics: Introductions, The landscape of AHE, institution types

Readings: "Sex on Campus: She Can Play That Game, Too" (NYT)

 "Study Casts Skeptical Light on Campus Hookup Culture" (CHE)

Week 2: (Sept 3 and 5)

Topics: Historical underpinnings and why they matter

Readings: Delbanco, intro, chapters 1 and 2
Wolfe, prologue, chapters 1-4
"Making the Case (for the Liberal Arts)" (IHE)

Week 3: (Sept 10 and 12):

Topics: So who are we now? Who is Carnegie? What is Carnegie? Why Do People Keep Saying That Name?

Readings: Delbanco, chapters 4-6
Wolfe, chapters 5-10
"College Enrollment Falls as Economy Recovers" (NYT)

Week 4: (Sept 17 and 19)

Topics: What has higher education done for us?

Readings: "Supreme Court Affirmative Action Decision Sends UT-Austin's Race-Conscious Admissions Back for Review" (Huffington Post)
"California Campus Sees Uneasy Race Relations" (NYT)
"Changing HBCUs to Keep Them Relevant" (Madame Noire blog)
"Do We Still Need HBCUs?" (NPR interview—read or listen)

Assignment: Charlotte Simmons passage (in-class)

Week 5: (Sept 24 and 26)

Topics: Public and private higher education

Guest on the 24th: Paula Krebs, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bridgewater State University, and former Professor of English at Wheaton

Readings: Wolfe, chapters 11-14
"Moody's Report Forecasts a Gloomy Future for Public Universities" (CHE)
"Leaders of 3 Private Colleges..." MassLive.com

Week 6: (Oct 1 and 3)

Topics: The selling of American higher education: marketing, branding, etc.

Readings: Ferguson, intro, chapters 1-4
Wolf, chapters 15-22
"Colleges' Debt Falls on Students" (NYT)
"Define 'Frill' and Use it in a Sentence" (IHE)

Week 7: (Oct 8 and 10)

Topics: Selling, cont., rankings, institutional re-invention

Readings: Ferguson, chapters 5-end

Wolfe, chapters 23-27

“To Raise Graduation Rate, Colleges are Urged to Help a Changing Student Body” (NYT)

“Masters Degree is New Frontier of Study Online” (NYT)

Fall Break

Week 8: (Oct 17)

Topic: More on MOOCs, and Beginning to Understand Faculty

Readings: “The Professors’ Big Stage” (NYT)

“1940 AAUP Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” (PDF OnCourse)

Week 9: (Oct 22 and 24)

Topics: Faculty culture, tenure, the adjunct “revolution”

Readings: Wolfe, chapter 28-end

“The Long Odds of the Faculty Job Search” (CHE)

“Adjuncts Build Strength in Numbers” (CHE)

Due Oct 24: Faculty/academic administrator interviews

Week 10: (Oct 29 and 31)

Topics: Students, student culture

Readings: Levine and Dean, Chapters 1-4

“Class Warfare Along Partygoer Lines” (NYT)

Week 11: (Nov 5 and 7)

Topic: Challenges to the Status Quo,

Guest on the 5th: Elizabeth Beaulieu, Dean of the Core Division, Champlain College

Readings: “End the University as We Know It” (NYT)

“When Home is a Campus Parking Lot” (NYT)

Week 12: (Nov 12 and 14)

Topic: Students, health, alcohol and other challenges

Readings: Levine and Dean, Chapters 5-8

The Story of a Suicide (New Yorker)

Due Nov 14: Self-guided field trip report

Week 13: (Nov 19 and 21)

Topics: Financial issues, student debt, "Is the model broken?"

Guest (Nov 19): Brian Douglas, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Wheaton College

Readings: "Student Debt and the Crushing of the American Dream" (NYT)
"Better Colleges Failing to Lure Talented Poor" (NYT)
"New Gauge of Colleges' Financial Health Comes Up Short" (CHE)
"Is Your College Going Broke?" (Forbes)

Due: Campus observation reports (3)

Week 14: (Nov 26)

Topic: Athletics

Readings: "The Shame of College Sports" (The Atlantic)

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: (Dec 3 and 5)

Due: Class Briefings

Week 16: Final Exam Week

Due: Briefing Portfolio

Assignments:

1. Passage from "I Am Charlotte Simmons"

Due Sept 17

This will be an in-class activity. Choose a passage (approximately a paragraph) from the chapters assigned thus far. Be prepared to read it to the class and explain what you believe the author is saying about students and/or about college life, etc. There is no right or wrong here. Choose something that struck you, and explain why.

2. Faculty/Academic administrator interviews (2)

Due October 24

The purpose of this assignment is to hear a more personal set of observations about how people choose their institution(s), how some decide to stay in the academy as professionals, and how the enterprise looks to those on the "inside."

Choose two individuals at Wheaton. They can be faculty or academic administrators (e.g. from the Provost's office, academic advising, Global. Check with me if you're not sure).

Try to choose two people who are at different points in their careers (early, middle, late).

Start by getting a quick "institutional bio" of your subject. What institutions have they attended/worked at?

Some questions (you can make up your own as well):

- When did you first start thinking about going to college?
- With whom did you consult about this process? Who/what influenced your thinking?
- When did you start thinking about a career in higher education? What led you to that idea?
- How have the institutions you have attended/worked at been similar to one another? Different?
- If you could go back to your junior year in high school and start again, would you choose different institutions for your education?
- How would your day-to-day work life be different if you worked at an institution very different from Wheaton?

Please submit a two-to-three page summary of each interview. You can write it as a narrative or a Q and A format.

Conclude your summaries with a paragraph or two sharing what you learned from these two interviews about institution types and choices, and anything else that struck you as important.

3. The Self-Guided Field Trip

Due November 12

The purpose of this assignment is to turn your eye-in-training upon another institution and see what you can learn about it. Choose an institution you will be able to spend at least half a (work) day at (3 hours minimally). It can be any kind of IHE.

Before you go:

Review the institution's website to find the answers to these questions:

1. In what "Carnegie classification" is this institution?
2. How does it describe itself?
3. How much does it cost to attend?
4. What size is the student body? Undergraduate? Graduate?
5. What is the make-up of the student body?
6. Is it residential? Non-residential? A mix?
7. Download a map if one is available.
8. Look at its academic offerings. What stands out for you?
9. Look at its campus life/student life site(s). What are they trying to tell you?
10. Find some profiles of its faculty.
11. Learn what you can about its curriculum.

Your Visit:

If at all possible, choose a day when classes are in session.

Visit the following places (or similar locations):

- Campus or student center
- One academic/classroom building
- Library
- Dining hall
- Admissions office

Collect items or photograph things that you think tell you something about the institution: admission viewbooks, student newspapers, etc. Take a couple of photos of yourself in front of some campus landmarks. If you feel comfortable doing so, introduce yourself to some students and ask them about their experience at this institution. Has it measured up to what they were promised? Would they recommend it to others?

Answer these questions:

- Where/what is the "center of campus"?
- Is the campus "visitor-friendly"?
- What cultural artifacts do you see, and what do they tell you about the campus?
- Is what you're seeing congruent with how they presented themselves on the website?

Write up a report of your visit in 2-3 pages, answering these and any other questions you find pertinent. Put the report in a folder with items you've collected.

4. Campus Observations (3)

Due November 21

You must select three events to attend during the semester. These must be in the following categories:

Formal meetings of student organizations (to which you do not belong)

- Faculty-sponsored lectures or symposia
- Events sponsored by SSSR or the Marshall Center
- Events sponsored by Programming Council or SAIL (please check these with me first)
- Visiting Artists series events
- Gallery/exhibition openings
- Admission open house event (panel, Q and A)
- An entire varsity athletic contest—start to finish, half-time included.
- Other ideas? Check with me.

Choose no more than one per category.

Carefully observe the following:

How was this event publicized to the community?

Who was in attendance? Faculty and staff? If students, note the gender balance and, if possible, class balance.

What happened during the event? Was it what you expected? Different?

What was the primary purpose of this event, and did it meet its goal? That is, was it to plan an event? To support learning? To provide an enrichment opportunity?

Choose a reading, either from the class or something you come upon yourself, that connects the observation to a larger question. For example, if you attend an athletic event, identify and cite a reading about the role of athletics in a student's life, or the importance of ritualized activities for a campus. Use your imagination to make this connection.

Write a description, answering the above questions and other insights you want to share, in a 2-page summary (one for each observation).

5. Class Briefings

Presentations: Dec 3 and 5

Written component: Final exam week

The purpose of this assignment is to have you dig deeper and learn more about a topic you find interesting while simultaneously sharing useful information and facilitating discussion with your classmates.

Imagine that you have been asked to present to a delegation of international educators about some of the most interesting and/or challenging topics in American higher education today.

You will choose your topic, research it and prepare a 20-minute presentation to your audience on the topic. Your presentation should be a “briefing” that allows your audience to understand the issue and why it’s significant, and place it in the context of the semester’s work.

The following are possible topics. You can also suggest others to me, and I’ll consider their merit:

Tenure
Title IX
Title II and “Direct Threat”
The Clery Act
International students
MOOCs
Thiel Fellows
Americans with Disabilities Act
Deferred maintenance
Discount rate
Affirmative Action
Access for undocumented residents
Institution mergers
Adjunct faculty
The University of Phoenix
Study Abroad risk management

These topics are purposefully vague. Before you choose one, I encourage you to do some initial research on a few and see if you think you can turn it into both an interesting briefing and a substantive written document. Some of these topics could fill an entire book. Your task is to figure out an interesting angle and then distill the topic down to the time you have, in a way that truly informs your audience. Set some context, go deep, and then pull back with a wider view.

The written document does not need to be extensive. It should be 1) a summary of your presentation, 2) a copy of your material (Powerpoint, etc), and 3) a list of references you used. I anticipate the summary being 3-4 pages, and the list of references to fit on one page. References are most likely going to be current articles in the popular and higher education press.