

History 1C: Why College?

Spring 2021

Professor Burke

This first-year seminar, taught in association with the [Aydelotte Foundation](#), is an opportunity to study and reimagine the history, present and possible futures of colleges and universities. As the fraught intensity of the experience of applying for college fades and Swarthmore students begin to reckon with the nature of the experience they've had so far and the three years ahead--an always difficult and ambiguous moment, never more so than in the middle of the covid-19 pandemic--it is common to get lost in the pace of coursework, campus jobs, looking for summer opportunities, and conversations with advisors about possible majors. Why College? is meant to create a space for some reflection.

In this class, we will talk about how to interpret the college experience, both your own and many others in institutions like and unlike Swarthmore. We will be using debates about college's purpose and problems that arose out of historically black colleges and universities, tribal universities, for-profit education, community colleges, and the experiences of underrepresented groups and first-generation students to understand the entirety of higher education and student experience. We will work both to understand those experiences in their specificity but also to use them as a way to critically reimagine what college has been and could be for anyone and everyone. E.g., when you read something like Cottom's Lower Ed, you will be trying to read both about the specificity of for-profit higher education in the last two decades and you will be trying to think about what that implies for the rest of higher education and your own perspective and identity.

This is a writing course. We will be writing work in several genres: book reviews, op-eds, personal statements, policy advocacy. You will need to bring a draft to the class sessions designated on the syllabus--we will be doing live revision work during those classes, and then you will be working on further revision in the week that follows.

Our discussions will be on Zoom on Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:30-5pm EST. We'll spend around 45 minutes or so working with the assigned reading. We'll then talk for another 30-40 minutes in a looser way about aspects of the college experience (both your own and in a broader comparative perspective) that relate somewhat to the issue for the day. You will always be welcome to bring your experiences and questions into the second half of conversation: Why

College is also an opportunity to critically explore Swarthmore, its peer institutions, and many other kinds of educational institutions.

For that reason, I ask that you do not record our class discussions and that you treat our discussions as confined to this class. I will answer questions about higher education frankly and forthrightly and I expect all of you to speak honestly and listen carefully to one another. However, I stress that you are not required to share your own inner thoughts and personal experiences--and for that reason I also do not require you to have your cameras on for Zoom (though I encourage it if you are comfortable doing so). **I want to stress that you are always welcome to adopt a critical perspective on our readings**, e.g., that even though many of them contain strong elements of advocacy, you are not in any sense required to align with them.

You are required to have purchased the following books through Swarthmore's bookstore:

Tressie McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed*
Mat Johnson, *Pym*
Kiese Laymon, *Heavy*
La Paperson, *A Third University Is Possible*

If you need assistance with textbook purchases, please contact the Dean's Office.

Other readings will be available via Moodle or in a few cases as links to online publications.

I will spend a bit of time at the end of each class session talking about our next class reading. Some of our readings this semester deal with traumatic experiences, and I will give you some advance warning when they're approaching. In general, if you find a reading is making you very uncomfortable or exacerbating mental health challenges, I urge you to stop engaging that particular reading without concern for that affecting my evaluation of your work overall in the course.

Your grade for the class will be based on your four writing assignments and your participation in class discussions. We also will have two mandatory events (one in February and one in April) that you are required to attend.

If you have questions about disability accommodations or known needs for accommodations, please be in touch with the Disability Services office as early as possible. I am always flexible on deadlines for final work, but I will need everyone to bring at least some portion of a draft to the scheduled sessions where we are working on revisions.

Week of February 8th

Wed. February 10: Introductions, overview

Week of February 15th

Mon: Institutional histories

Try to scan over these institutional history pages.

<https://www.swarthmore.edu/a-brief-history#event-swarthmore-college-a-brief-history>

<https://www.harvard.edu/about-harvard/harvard-glance/history>

<https://www.lincoln.edu/about/history>

<https://www.newschool.edu/about/history/>

<https://www.berea.edu/about/1855-to-today/>

<https://bfcc.edu/about-us/>

<https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/smith-history>

https://www.cod.edu/about/profile_history/cod-history.aspx

<https://www.jefferson.edu/about/traditions-history.html>

<https://www.liberty.edu/aboutliberty/index.cfm?PID=33803>

Discussion: Reading against the grain

Wed: Reimagining histories

Daniel Magaziner, *The Art of Life in South Africa*, Prologue and “A Hillside in South Africa”

[Jelani Favors interview with Andy Hines](#)

Discussion: How students, faculty and administrators inhabit colleges and universities

Week of February 22nd

Mon: WEB DuBois, “The Training of Black Men”

Booker T. Washington, “The Awakening of the Negro”

Discussion: Two visions of liberal arts and education

TUESDAY 7pm: Mitchell-McKittrick event (Mandatory, sign-up required)

Wed: Ellis, *Between Washington and DuBois: The Racial Politics of James B. Shepard*, Chapter 2

Discussion: A third vision of liberal arts and education

WRITING IN-CLASS Draft and revision of a question for Nick Mitchell

Week of March 1st

Mon: Nick Mitchell, "(Critical Ethnic Studies) Intellectual"

Discussion with Nick Mitchell

Wed: McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed*, Introduction and Chapters 1-3

Discussion: "The Education Gospel" and contemporary labor markets

Week of March 7

Mon: McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed*, Chapters 4-6

Discussion: The range of academic institutional forms in relation to student experiences

Wed: Miranda Haskie, "Teaching Sociology at a Tribal College: Navajo Philosophy as a Pedagogy"

Discussion: Institutional forms and institutional epistemologies

Week of March 14

Mon: Mat Johnson, *Pym*, Volume I (Chapters 1-6)

[Interview with Mat Johnson](#)

Discussion: The culture of academia

Wed: Mat Johnson, *Pym* (as far as you can get)

Discussion: Knowledge and exclusion

Draft of book review of *Lower Ed* due at start of class: revision in class

Week of March 22

Mon: Teaching and Course Design

Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*, "Josephine Miles: English 1A"

Discussion: Connecting syllabi to teaching; knowing about teaching

Finished revision of book review due at start of class

SPRING BREAK MARCH 24-28

Week of March 29

Mon: Pandemic Education

Betsy Barre, "The Workload Dilemma", https://cat.wfu.edu/2021/01/the-workload-dilemma/?fbclid=IwAR2788EMRztMXQXCcWZz2PcF10XCXuTxwgLT4fk_nBjMQ3VM3FiR8FkySio

Anne Fadiman, "Screen Share: A College Teacher's Zoom Journal"

<https://www.wired.com/story/screen-share-a-college-teachers-zoom-journal-anne-fadiman/>

Discussion: Pandemic classrooms and mental health

Wed: Selective private colleges and social transformation

Anthony Abraham Jack, *The Privileged Poor*, pp. 1-79

Discussion: College and social mobility, round 1

Week of April 5

Mon: The ethical implications of social mobility

Jennifer Morton, *Moving Up Without Losing Your Way*, Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 3

Discussion: College and social mobility: round 2

Wed: College outcomes

Ilana Gershon, *Down and Out in the New Economy*, selection
Gasman and Nguyen, *Making Black Scientists*, Chapter 2 and 5

Week of April 12

Mon: Identity, Memory, Education

Kiese Laymon, *Heavy* (try to get to about p. 103 or so)

Warning: this is an intense and often upsetting book. We'll talk about it on the previous Wednesday.

Draft of op-ed on inequality and outcomes: revision in class

Wed: Laymon, *Heavy* (try to finish the book)
Remember to register for Perry/Givens

Week of April 19

Mon: Identity, Memory, Education, continued

Monday: No class

Revision of op-ed due at 5pm.

**MON APRIL 19:
Perry/Givens event (mandatory)**

Wed: Identity and elitism

Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies*, Chapter 1-2

Kronman, *Assault on American Excellence*, short selection

Discussion of personal statement assignment.

Week of April 26

Mon: Draft work on personal statement

Wed: Reform and reimagination of higher education
Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Generous Thinking*, selection
Zurn and Shankar, "What Is Curiosity Studies?"

Revision of personal statement due by 5pm on FRIDAY April 30th

Week of May 1

Monday: A new university?

La Paperson, *A Third University Is Possible* (as much as possible)

Live discussion of research strategies and policy statement assignment.

Wednesday: A new university?

La Paperson, *A Third University Is Possible* (finish the book)

Continuing discussion of research strategies

Final version of policy statement/political demand due on Monday May 7