

Seeing and Understanding Implications of Social Class Differences in the Undergraduate Management Classroom

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Ample research exists addressing the implications of social class differences and its impact on a student's college experience. However, research in management education rarely addresses social class. This paper reviews the results of quantitative surveys administered to management students at two Northeastern four-year institutions with large clusters of working-class students. The data and discussion highlight differences between the two groups, how they respond to certain learning approaches and the distractions they face due to living arrangements. Key findings include the students' view towards their education – relational versus transactional – based on the institution they attend. Implications for pedagogical approaches are included.

INTRODUCTION

Social class matters for understanding who college students are, why they cluster into certain types of institutions and in certain majors, and how they interpret and respond to the institutions they attend. Implications of social class differences, and how they relate to the college experience, are especially relevant to undergraduate business students because students of lower socioeconomic status, and/or first in their families to attend college, are more likely to major in business and other 'vocational' majors than other subjects (Walpole, 2003, Goyette and Mullen, 2006, Glenn, 2011, Pinsker, 2015). In addition, management degrees account for 20% of annual awarded bachelors' degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), yet research in management education rarely if ever addresses social class. Bringing a discussion of social class/socioeconomic status to the forefront allows management educators to understand what it means to teach across social class lines in undergraduate management education, the single largest undergraduate major in the United States.

In this paper, we use the term working class to describe students with low socioeconomic status (SES) and/or first-generation college student status (FGCS) status. Social class is more complex than simply socioeconomic status or first-generation student status; however, those are two ways that class is operationalized in most macro-level research. Therefore, we refer to research that primarily uses family income and parental education to describe the landscape of social class and higher education in the United States, and discuss the implications for the management major.

College student class positioning, even social class identity, is an under-theorized area (for a full description see Hurst, 2010). The few articles that describe working-class students in college tend to focus on full-time residential students in elite academic settings (Reay et al, 2009, Lehmann, 2014). Some work has been done on the challenges faced by working-class students who do not “do” college as well as middle class and upper class students (Paulsen and St. John, 2002, Warren, 2007, Collier and Morgan, 2008, Dimaggio 2012, Fiske and Markus 2012, King, 2012, Stephens et al 2012, Hurst, 2013, Stephens et al 2014), primarily in the sociology of education and higher education academic literature. At least for King, the social class differences do not stop at her parents’ and siblings’ lack of a college degree. But social class identity is developed, over time, well before working class students get to college. The trajectory working class students take to end up where they go for college matters for understanding who they are, in the classroom and outside of it, while in college.

“Social class contexts are sociocultural contexts that expose people to particular material and social conditions over time. In addition to perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others, these contexts include different absolute levels of material resources (e.g., financial assets), as well as divergent sets of ideas (e.g., stereotypes, cultural narratives, social representations), practices (e.g., socialization styles), and institutions (e.g., workplaces, schools). People’s social class contexts are important because they shape the self and corresponding patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. “(Stephens & Townsend, 2013:126)

In the remainder of this paper we integrate literature from higher education, social psychology, and sociology to describe the intersection of social class and education, who goes to college, where they tend to go, and what they bring with them when they go. As we will highlight throughout the paper, there are systematic social class-based differences that structure attitudes toward college, college selection and academic major. We then compare students in the business major at two teaching-intensive schools that have large concentrations of working-class students, with particular focus on how they behave while at college. Both schools are in New England. One is small, private, and residential, while the other is larger and has a mix of residential and commuter students. We then discuss the results of a comparative survey given to representative samples of students at both colleges, along with some implications of our findings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

We use Bourdieu’s term *habitus* to encapsulate the largely taken-for-granted and unconscious collection of preferences, behaviors, and styles of self-presentation shaped during childhood (Bourdieu, 1986). Put another way, how we grew up (where, when, with whom) shapes what we like, what we think is appropriate, what assumptions we hold about the purpose of college, the value of education, etc. *Habitus* also explains how college students internalize, unconsciously, their objective, reasonable chances for success based on their socio-economic and cultural background, and the related cultural capital they have acquired (or not), before coming to college. “Assessments of the benefits and costs [of college] are shaped not only by the demand for higher education and supply of resources to pay the costs but also by an individual’s *habitus* and, directly and indirectly, by the family, school, and community context, higher education context, and social, economic, and policy context” (Perna, 2006: 119). In other words, beliefs and attitudes about what value working class students will get out of college shapes how they evaluate their options and make decisions in terms of where to go to college.

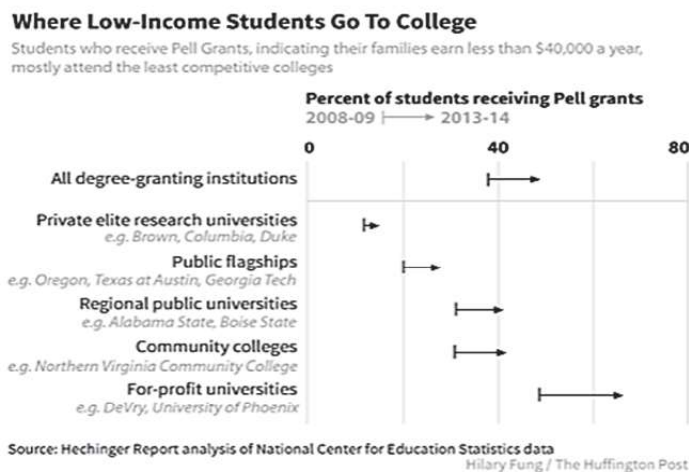
Who Goes to College, and Where

Students from households with lower incomes and where parents have less education are unequally distributed, nationally, across different types of colleges and universities (Perna and Titus, 2004, Titus, 2006, Marcus and Hacker, 2015, Rose, 2016). Slightly over ten years ago, Carnevale and Rose (2004) found that only 3 percent of students at the 146 most selective public and private colleges in America were from the bottom socioeconomic quartile. Just 10 percent of students attending one of U.S. News & World Report’s top 30 public and private universities were from families with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 (Pallais and Turner, 2006). Proportions have not improved much, if at all, since then.

Since 2008, there has been a large increase in the proportion of U.S. college students who are low income (Marcus and Hacker, 2015). Nearly half of all college students are now eligible for Pell grants, meaning their families earn less than \$40,000 a year, a number which has increased by 11 percentage points in the past seven years. Many students from the poorest families find themselves at community colleges, small, non-elite liberal arts colleges, and regional public universities, if they go to college at all (Paulsen and St. John, 2002, Cabrera et al 2003, Baum and Payea, 2004, Perna, 2006, Titus, 2006, Perez and McDonough, 2008, Paulsen and St. John, 2011, Marcus and Hacker, 2015).

Nearly one-quarter of all college students are both low-income and first-generation college students (Engle and Tinto, 2008). As with low-income students, this subset is unequally distributed across colleges and universities. First-generation, low-income students tend to apply to and attend less selective colleges that are closer to home (Titus, 2006, Engle, 2007, Perez and McDonough, 2008), as seen in Figure 1, reproduced from the Hechinger Report.

FIGURE 1
WHERE LOW-INCOME STUDENTS GO TO COLLEGE



Put another way, when colleges are compared on the basis of graduation rate, earnings post-graduation, and loan default rates, working class students are more likely than not to be attending a low-ranked institution (Rothwell, 2015). This means they are more likely to attend institutions with low graduation rates, low comparative earnings post-graduation, and high loan default rates. For first-generation college students in particular, the gap looks a little worse: those students are more likely to attend colleges with moderately high earnings outcomes but extremely poor graduation rates and loan default outcomes. Across the board, gaps in college quality from best to worst have also not decreased in recent years (Rothwell, 2015).

Factors Affecting College Selection Process on the Part of the Working Class Applicant; Why Working Class Students Tend to End up Clustering in Certain Kinds of Schools

Working class students tend to end up at non-selective, or relatively low-ranked, public and private universities for three main reasons. First, state governments have decreased investment in public education, so the large public universities that traditionally educate in-state students have begun recruiting out-of-state and international students. Out of state students and international students pay higher tuition rates, and often have higher test scores, than in-state residents. In fact, across these public institutions, “growth in the proportion of nonresident students was associated with a decline in the proportion of low-income students” (Jaquette et al, forthcoming: 2). Non-resident freshman enrollment at large public research universities increased from 20.7% of total freshman enrollment in 2002-03 to 24.7% in 2012-13

(Jaquette et al, forthcoming: 5). As a result, it becomes much harder to get into the selective flagship public universities for in-state students in general.

In addition, families have a hard time accurately estimating the cost of college. Overall, nearly 70 percent of parents, across all social classes, are unable to accurately estimate college costs (Horn et al, 2003). Within the last ten years, a national study found that some low-income families overestimate the cost of attending college by two to three times, focusing primarily on the list prices (Grodsky and Jones, 2007), and their overestimation is higher for private colleges and public out-of-state colleges than that of public in-state institutions.

As you would expect, college costs are an important factor in the college-choice process for working class students (Perna and Titus, 2004, Perna and Titus, 2005, Perna, 2006). Most (64%) chose a college because of low tuition, student aid, or both (Paulsen and St. John, 2002: 207). Further, more than half (54%) chose their colleges because they were close to their work, because they could have low living costs while attending, or both. Additionally, more than half (55%) considered work and/or living costs as very important in their college choices. A majority (58%) also considered tuition and/or student aid as very important in their college choices (Paulsen and St. John, 2002: 208).

And working class college applicants tended to rely on a small social network of immediate family, school staff, extended family, and peers with regard to selecting a school (Person and Rosenbaum, 2006, Perez and McDonough, 2008); this phenomenon is heightened for certain low-income minority groups like Latinos. Working class college students often stay in the same geographic location for their entire lives, interact frequently with family members, and tend to be embedded in densely structured social networks (Markus et al., 2004, Perez and McDonough, 2008), especially when compared to their middle class counterparts.

A downside of this set of close connections for working class students is that they tend to be surrounded by people with limited knowledge of the "college-going" process (Mehta et al, 2011, Unverferth et al, 2012), and their parents and family members may not fully understand the time and energy that must be invested in college to be successful. (Mehta et al, 2011). As a result, family members may expect their children to contribute to the family even while in school. This expectation may contribute in part to working-class students attending schools near home. Working class students, overall, rely on a small, densely structured network of individuals with limited college-relevant cultural capital and ambiguous support for college to select the college they attend.

In sum, there is a substantial association between social origins and college selectivity (Persell, Catsambis, and Cookson 1992, Davies and Guppy 1997, Karen 2002, Paulsen and St. John, 2002, Torche, 2011). Working-class students tend to end up at less selective institutions, due to a combination of flagship public university incentives, inaccurate estimation of college costs, and a small, densely structured social network influencing their choices. Business majors at these nonselective schools receive a disproportionately high share of working-class students, who tend to be less prepared for college than their traditional counterparts. Thus class-based differences in student behavior and related assumptions will tend to be more visible in some types of schools than in others.

University Norms vs. Working-Class Student Norms

Even though working-class students are unevenly distributed across types of schools, in general, American universities are organized according to middle- and upper-class practices and 'rules of the game' (Fryberg and Markus, 2007, Stephens et al, 2011). U.S. institutions of higher education reflect and promote an independent model of competence as the cultural ideal. In a survey of administrators at a diverse range of research universities and liberal arts colleges, most reported that their institutions expect students to pave their own paths, to challenge norms and rules, to express their personal preferences, and to work on their own (Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Recognizable, and rewarded, institutional markers of student success include, but are not limited to, "academic attainment through student learning, general education, development of academic competence (e.g., writing and speaking in a clear manner), development of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions, occupational attainment, preparation for

adulthood and citizenship, personal accomplishments (e.g., work on the college newspaper, election to student office),” Braxton et al, 2013: pp 1-2). and personal development (Braxton, 2008).

In contrast to the focus on upper and middle class norms that colleges and universities organize around, working class college students have often experienced socialization that encourages children to recognize their place in the social hierarchy, to follow rules and social norms, and to be responsive to others’ needs (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011, Unverferth, 2011). Their socialization is more interdependent, not about independence, or charting one’s own path, etc. Colleges are organized around the idea that students *should and will* change in some ways (Braxton, 2008, Bok, 2009, Rubin, 2012, Braxton et al, 2012). This is reflected in the norms of the institutions. The tension and cultural mismatch between the two sets of norms has led to, frankly, well-founded concerns that American colleges and universities are “reproducing social advantage instead of serving as an engine of mobility” (Leonhardt, 2004; p. A1).

What Kind of College Students Tend to be Business Majors

There are systematic, class-based differences between students who choose vocational majors, including business administration, and those who major in arts and sciences (Walpole, 2003, Goyette and Mullen, 2006, Glenn, 2011, Pinsker, 2015). More specifically, Goyette and Mullen (2006), using data from two national surveys, found that students were more likely to choose an arts and sciences major when their parents had more education, and more likely to choose a vocational major when their parents had less education (defined as high school or less). They found that the following factors increased the likelihood that students would choose a vocational major: lower socio-economic status; lower tested proficiency; attending a less selective and more comprehensive university; not planning to attend school after college; and valuing high income and steady employment.

The last factor is consistent with Longwell-Grice’s (2003) findings that one of the most important reasons for working-class students to go to college is to get a good job after college graduation. Interpreting this through a Bourdeusian lens, students who choose a vocational major have less cultural capital that is relevant to education — they are less competent in their student role. These students are also more aware of the need to have a steady income in order to support themselves than students who choose arts and sciences majors (Pinsker, 2015).

In addition, business majors were the most likely of all the majors, both vocational and arts and sciences, to have full-time employment four years after graduating. Conversely, they were *least* likely to be enrolled in graduate school; 83.5% were not enrolled in any type of higher education at the four-year post-graduation mark (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). The same was true for students who go on to get doctoral degrees—very few business majors do (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). An important implication of this is that faculty with doctorates, teaching students in business programs at non selective colleges and universities, are far more likely to have had undergraduate majors in arts and sciences, and to have come from a higher socio-economic background than our students.

Cultural Capital and the Experience of College

The few articles that describe experiences of working-class students in college and effects on habitus focus on full-time resident students in elite academic situations (for fuller discussions see Reay et al 2009, Lehmann, 2009, Lehmann, 2013). In contrast, this paper describes our students and their experiences as members of a student body with large numbers of working-class students (FGCS). Challenges and obstacles that working-class students face in the predominantly middle-class culture of college include but are not limited to, feelings of disconnectedness, not belonging, and isolation (Tokarczyk and Fay, 1993; Dews and Law, 1995, Ostrove and Cole, 2007, Lehmann, 2009, Lynch, 2013). Low-SES college students tended to study less, spend more time working off campus (McCormick, Moore, and Kuh, 2010), and ultimately had lower levels of involvement and achievement (Walpole, 2003) than their higher-SES counterparts.

Working-class college students, too, have expectations about school that conflict with those of traditional college students (and the faculty who teach both kinds of students), which, among other things,

contributes to a sense of not fitting in (King, 1996, Collier & Morgan, 2008). Taken together, this research is consistent with that of Hurst (2013) and King (2012), whose work (implicitly or explicitly) describes working-class students' lack of cultural capital — they do not display student role mastery, or “do college” as well as students in other social classes. Attending and completing college is a vehicle of class mobility, not just in economic terms (Goyette and Mullen, 2006, Torche, 2011) but also in terms of acquiring cultural capital (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, Hurst 2010, Hurst 2013, King 2012). Acquiring cultural capital happens not just as an automatic effect of attaining the credential, but through a student's experiences and changes during their time as a college student.

METHODS

This is an exploratory study, carried out in the Business Administration programs at a small Northeastern Liberal Arts College (NLAC), and a small Northeastern State University (NSU). After financial aid awards, both schools have similar tuition and fees. We gave Business Administration majors at both schools a quantitative survey using a publicly available instrument that is tested and validated, the Princeton National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen Wave 2. From the NSU, we received 114 complete responses to the quantitative survey. From the NLAC, we received 102 responses. Based on a review of the literature, we developed two hypotheses to test:

1) H1: The residential nature of the NLAC, compared to the mixed commuter/residential nature of the NSU, will lead to NLAC students forming more connections with fellow students. These connections would be demonstrated by NLAC students enjoying and valuing group work more than NSU students. Research shows that college students who spend most of their time studying and developing connections with their campus community are most likely to stay in school and receive a degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2012).

2) H2: The residential nature of the NLAC, compared to the mixed commuter/residential nature of the NSU, results in NLAC working-class students internalizing the field's norms and ‘doing college’ better than the NSU students, who often live at home, and whose residents go home on the weekends. “Doing college better” would be demonstrated by NLAC Business students' lower scores on ‘tried to study but distracted by someone watching TV’, lower scores on ‘tried to study but had to work’, and higher scores on ‘I have a place to be alone to read or study.’

RESULTS

Small Northeastern State University (NSU)

There is a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately 5,500, with a gender distribution of approximately 40 percent male students and 60 percent female students. The NSU has approximately 600 undergraduate business majors. Nearly two-thirds of NSU students come from the county where the university is located, which is whiter, less educated, and less affluent than the overall average for the state. Most of the students come from lower middle class or working class backgrounds, based on GSS/NORC coding for parental occupational prestige. Approximately 70 percent of the student body identifies as white. Based on survey responses, 75 percent of Business department students live off campus, and nearly 50 percent live at home. 90 percent of students surveyed work, on average 21 hours per week.

Small Northeastern Liberal Arts College (NLAC)

The Northeastern Liberal Arts College has a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately 1,200 students, with a gender distribution of approximately one-third male and two-thirds female. It has approximately 160 undergraduate business majors. While only about 18% of domestic undergraduates identify as minorities, the NLAC has a college-specific program which seeks to provide educational

opportunities for mainly first-generation college students typically from urban (densely populated) areas, and to bring more geographic, racial and ethnic diversity to the college.

Nearly half of the students who responded from the NLAC are from states surrounding the one in which the college is located. This means that students have anywhere from a 1.5 to 5 hour ride to their home. Many students return home only a few times per semester. Students without a personal vehicle find themselves at the mercy of friends with cars or using the bus systems, and there are somewhat direct routes to either Boston or New York City.

Many NLAC students thus have no choice but to remain on campus for long periods of time. This residential status requires that they develop relationships with peers that extend well beyond the classroom. Additionally, because of the number of students who are unable to return home with some frequency, particularly those from other countries, the college has established a “Friendship Family” program, where local families, including many faculty and staff, “adopt” a student for their four-year stay. This greatly impacts a student’s assimilation into the campus and the extended community, thereby strengthening the bond between the student and the college.

Almost 80% of students reside in on-campus housing with the majority of those in residence halls. Because the students are residing away from home, daily interactions with family members are limited to those obtained by using technology, specifically their smartphones or computers. Many students verbally report communicating with family members via text or calls at least once per day. As such, the physical or face-to-face distractions faced by students at the NSU, those related to living at home, are minimized for the NLAC population. NLAC students, particularly those who are working-class, may therefore have an easier time assimilating into their role as students as compared to NSU students.

Unlike the students at the NSU, only about 61% of the surveyed NLAC students indicated they work and of those reporting, they average 12-13 hours per week. As such, the students at NLAC are able to spend more time on other activities including, but not limited to, studying, socializing and other extracurricular activities. This data is supported by our results which indicates how the NLAC students spend their time. These students are able to step more fully into the role of student without having to juggle multiple roles, unlike the NSU students.

In order to determine statistical significance between the two groups, two-tailed t-tests were conducted on the responses to several survey questions. These include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. I have a place to be alone to read or study | 6. Do you feel it is necessary to work to finance your college education? |
| 2. I was trying to study but was distracted by talking | 7. I learn more in a group setting than on my own. |
| 3. I was trying to study but was distracted by someone watching TV | 8. I think a group project is a waste of time. |
| 4. I was trying to study but I had work responsibilities | 9. I learn important things with other students. |
| 5. I was trying to study but friends talked me into going out. | 10. It is good for students to help each other learn. |

Questions 3, 4, 8, and 10 had t-test results that were statistically significant. Our first hypothesis, H1, regarding the NLAC students forming more connections with fellow students than NSU students, was supported. As indicated in Table 1, NLAC students had higher means on “good for students to help each other learn” and lower means on “think group projects are a waste of time” compared to NSU students. Our second hypothesis, H2, regarding NLAC students internalizing the norms of college better than NSU students, was partially supported. The data is shown in Table 1, below.

TABLE 1
T-TESTS AND COMPARATIVE RESULTS

Question	School	N	Mean	Std Dev.	Std. Error Mean	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig (t-tailed)
Q3. I was trying to study but was distracted by someone watching TV	NSU	114	4.018	2.8688	.2687	.151	.698	3.26	214	.0001***
	NLAC	102	2.745	2.8587	.2831					
Q4. I was trying to study but I had work responsibilities	NSU	114	6.026	3.1495	.296	2.291	.131	5.741	213	0***
	NLAC	102	3.475	3.3633	.3347					
Q8. I think a group project is a waste of time.	NSU	114	2.474	1.0743	.1006	7.462	.0007	3.257	214	.0001***
	NLAC	102	2.02	.9747	.0965	*equal variances not assumed				
Q10. It is good for students to help each other learn.	NSU	114	3.07	.7725	.0724	.599	.44	-2.392	214	.018**
	NLAC	102	3.314	.7173	.071					

**Significant at .05 level

***Significant at .01 level

As indicated, we found some support for differences in Questions 3 and 4 -- NLAC students being less distracted than NSU students by someone watching TV, or by having to work. The answer to Question 3 in particular indicates an area that warrants more exploration, since it conflicts somewhat with our findings on how many students reported a quiet place to read or study. In our second hypothesis, we expected to find a higher percentage of NLAC students than NSU saying they had a quiet place to read or study, primarily because of the on-campus library. In reality, we found that 90% of NSU and 78% of NLAC students reported they had a quiet place to read or study. We think that NLAC students might have interpreted the question more literally (dorm rooms or suites only) than the NSU students.

But, to go back to Question 3, being distracted by someone watching TV would support the demographics of the two groups - the NLAC students live on campus and have a quiet place (the library) accessible to them, whereas the NSU students may not have an option to escape the distraction of TV (or may not think they do). Even though 90% of NSU students indicated they have a quiet place to read or study, 50% of them live at home, where TV viewing is more likely to be occurring, is possibly unavoidable, and disruptive to studying. NSU students may have access to a quiet place to study, such as their own bedrooms, but are not using that place, for some reason. Again, this is an area that may warrant more exploration.

Students at the NSU also seem to be more challenged than their NLAC counterparts in balancing their school obligations with other events occurring around them. In our survey, we asked students to rank how often various activities occurred that interfered with their ability to study (television, being distracted by conversations, or having work responsibilities, etc.). When NSU students were asked to report how often work responsibilities interfered with their ability to study, on a 10-point scale with 10 indicating it happened virtually daily, the mean score was 6 out of a possible 10, with the mode being 10 out of 10, and the next most common answer being 8 out of 10. And, NSU students are struggling with their multiple roles - as student, as family member, and as employee. As mentioned earlier, 90 percent of

students surveyed at the NSU worked on a weekly basis, with the average being approximately 21 hours per week. First-generation college students often manage hair-raising schedules of work, family, and college (Bozick, 2007, Warren, 2007, McCormick, Moore, and Kuh, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS/FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

We believe that the residential nature of the NLAC, the Friendship Family program, and the limited options for leaving campus as well as the rural setting (fewer social distractions), leads to more on-campus connections among NLAC students. We further believe that these connections create possibilities for tacit learning about how to behave while in college and what it means to be a student, as compared to someone who just shows up and takes classes somewhere. In turn, the connections and the learning they engender support a relational view of education at the NLAC.

The relational approach is demonstrated by NLAC students being more invested in groups, and more invested in learning from fellow students, as compared to the NSU. This matters since both kinds of schools attract clusters of working-class students. We believe the relational view of education held by NLAC students is at least partially due to the NLAC students being constrained to the immediate campus. This requires NLAC students to develop relationships with their peers, both in and out of the classroom. Those that work are averaging 12 hours per week, versus 20 for their peers at NSU. Group projects, while not necessarily convenient, are generally well received. It is difficult to avoid working with a group partner if they live across the hall from each other. Similarly, students are more inclined to work together outside of the group project as it enhances their social relationships. As such, these established relationships aid in the group development stages of forming-storming-norming-performing, (Tuckman, 1965) making group work less onerous from an interpersonal standpoint. Additionally, students have more opportunities to interact with faculty outside of the classroom. This also works to improve in-class interactions, enabling better learning. These are all opportunities not available to, or accessed by, many NSU students.

In contrast, we believe that so many NSU students living at home, or going home on the weekends (which many on-campus residents do), means students are not making the same kinds of connections while attending the NSU. We believe that the students at the NSU see the process of going to college as more mechanical, that they are not as emotionally invested in college as students at the NLAC. This approach is at least partially due to their often limited connections with other students, work schedules (which can involve jobs not necessarily near campus), and often living at home; group projects interfere with their other activities and are not helpful. Thus, for these students, group work can be seen as a challenge given school and work schedules, instead of a learning opportunity. Learning from and with other students takes time they do not have. It becomes a possible stressor instead of a possible stress reliever, or chance to build a connection.

The different view of group work between the NSU and NLAC students is a symptom of larger differences between the two kinds of schools. However, the view of group work and the importance of working as part of a group, or team, matters because it is a critical skill employers look for (Adams, 2013, Ryan, 2016). If NSU students are more likely to think group projects are a waste of time, even though they think learning from others is important, they could be hampered in finding good jobs post-graduation or may struggle with group projects once employed.

Impact on Our Pedagogy

We are not suggesting that we have answers to the following questions. However, we believe these are important things that we as educators need to think about in our classrooms. How do we approach students as learners - one program, size fits all, custom programs, something else? Do we always know who is a commuter and who lives on campus? How do we know if a student has responsibilities outside the class that are impacting his/her/their ability to learn? Are we unintentionally excluding students based on our own, sometimes, poorly grounded assumptions - for example, every student comes to class with a

clear mind, free from distractions, with plenty of time to devote to school? The issue of group work is a symptom of a larger issue - availability.

Additionally, surveys show employers are looking for students who have practical work group experience and good social skills (Pew Research Center, 2016). As such, how do we teach interpersonal skills to students we see for about 150 - 200 minutes per week? In this technological age, in which employers are moving more and more towards virtual workspaces, students are expected to have “online” skills. But, employees are still required to have good interpersonal skills. How can we develop these skills in students who are on campus for the least amount of time? How can we compete with their outside responsibilities?

Moreover, increasingly colleges are offering online degree options. Students find these classes appealing as it frees up time for other activities. Students at the NSU might use this time for work. Students at the NLAC could use this time for other classes or extracurricular activities. Since online programs are much more cost effective for institutions, how do we encourage students to opt for on-ground classes so that we can teach them the skills they need to be successful in the work world?

How to reach these working-class students, how to get them to learn and then demonstrate teamwork skills to employers will become more important over time, not less. The issue of what kind of student is going to college, and where, is not disappearing. Recent reports highlight a national shortfall in predicted degrees – a shortage of 5 million college degrees by 2020 (Carnevale, et al, 2013). State schools like the NSU will be shouldering much of the related burden, generally because “that is where most college graduates earn their degrees and far more likely to be where low-income and first- generation students enroll for bachelor’s degrees” (Blank, 2015:1).

College students in general tend to choose more vocational majors like business when the economy is uncertain (Blom et al, 2015), a trend projected to continue. With history as a predictor of future events, working-class students will continue to choose the Business Administration major (Goyette and Mullen, 2006, Engle and Tinto, 2008). Since business students are more likely than arts and sciences majors to have lower socioeconomic status and attend a less selective school (Goyette and Mullen, 2006), business departments at schools like the NLAC and NSU will continue to receive a disproportionately high share of low SES, first-generation students.

The challenges posed by the changing demographics of the traditional undergraduate student are made more difficult by employer requirements. We, as academics, are required to rethink our pedagogical approaches to the persons that are seated before us so that we maximize their ability to learn, all the while knowing that the amount of time they spend with us is a fraction of that which they spend attending to other responsibilities. One approach may not work for all, and while program customization at the college level is, among other descriptors, impractical, sensitivity to SES factors may prove to be invaluable.

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