Students Who Are Head of Household or Working Class

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Who’s in the Room?

- How would you describe your social class growing up?

- What are some ideas about your social class culture that you brought with you to higher education?

- How does your social class upbringing influence your experience in higher education?
Student Do Pay For College

• What percent of 18 to 24 year old students are taking out loans?

• What percent of students do you think are paying/contributing to their education without taking loans?

• What is the average amount of money that students borrow via a federal loan?

• What is the average amount of money that students borrow via a private loan?
UMass Lowell

- UMass Lowell is a public university committed to preparing our students for work in the real world—solving real problems and helping real people—by providing an affordable high-quality education.

- UMass Lowell offers affordable, experience-based undergraduate and graduate academic programs...

- UMass Lowell’s history is traced back to two schools which were founded in Lowell around the same time, but had different objectives. The Lowell Normal School was originally founded in 1894 to prepare students to become teachers, and the Lowell Textile School was founded in 1895 to train technicians and managers for work in Lowell’s booming textile industry.
VIDEO

TRUE LIFE I SUPPORT MY FAMILY
Who are working-class students?

- Come from families with lower incomes
- First-generation
- Students of color
- Female
- Lower ACT/SAT
- Lower GPA
- More likely to attend 2-year colleges
Why students work?

- Must contribute to household (own or extended family)
- Greater financial burden of college
- Temporary or permanent illness/disability in family
- Cultural expectation
- Personal choice
Context of Student Affairs

- Moved beyond retention/graduation to engagement/involvement

- Emphasis on traditional, liberal arts-like values

- Value “deep” learning through:
  - Living on-campus
  - Joining/leading student clubs and orgs
  - Volunteering
  - Studying abroad
  - Conducting research with faculty
  - Participating in group projects
Student Affairs Dilemma

- When working-class students demonstrate a high sense of belonging, we take credit (our “enriching” activities)

- When they do not, we blame them for their choice (not participating in clubs, commuting)

- We may assume a “good” student is an engaged one, and all students have access to equal opportunities.
The majority of higher education research related to social class relies upon Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of social reproduction to describe the experiences of working-class students. According to Bourdieu (1986), social class is a combination of economic capital (accumulated money or wealth), social capital (network of acquaintances), and cultural capital (knowledge or familiarity with the dominant culture). Research focusing on social class in higher education has been primarily concerned with Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of “habitus,” a “common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shapes an individual’s expectations, attitudes, and aspirations”. Working-class students leave behind their former working-class family habitus to join the new, more elite habitus of the middle-class university environment. Reflective of middle-class values, culture, and customs, the higher education system contributes to the reproduction of middle and upper-class power by systematically excluding working-class students who do not fit into the middle/upper-class habitus of higher education. As a consequence, working-class students experience alienation and estrangement within the middle-class habitus of higher education.”

(Soria, K.M.2010)
Theory of Social Reproduction

“Issues relating to social class are principally ignored at many higher education institutions, often because many believe that social class is invisible on college campuses. Few colleges and universities include discussions of social class in diversity programming for new students or embed themes of social class in curricular and co-curricular content for students in transition to the university. For working-class students, the absence of social class in campus diversity can prove estranging and isolating—students who do not “see” themselves reflected in curricular and co-curricular programming may feel devalued, marginalized, and unacceptable.”

(Soria, K.M.2010)
University of MN Study (2012)

- Working-class students had a significant and lower
  a) Sense of belonging
  b) Social capital
    * Going out with companions or friends
    * Finding people on campus who share background and experiences
    * Dealing with the size and complexity of the university

- No differences in academic engagement
University of MN Study (2012)

- 37% of working class students reported spending no time per week participating in student clubs/org, compared with 29% of middle/upper class students

- Middle/upper class students slightly more likely to hold leadership positions in clubs/orgs

- Working class students more likely to work 20+ hours a week
Working Class Students

Often experience:

- Imposter syndrome
- Fear of success (moving forward = leaving behind)
- Cultural suicide (surrender of memory)
- Internalized oppression
- Code switching:
  - At school (to avoid being “outclassed”)
  - At home (to avoid being “uppity”)
- Status anxiety / survivor guilt
Resilience and Resistance

“Resilience clearly comes from a place of resistance...rather than recognize their anger as an appropriate response to their unjust circumstances or their mistrust as an appropriate response, others see these responses as hostile. Few spaces outside cultural centers recognize and respect the strength and resilience these students have gained from their experiences...and that they are the most developed and most advanced.”

(Borrego, S. E., & Manning K. 2007)
Students at UMass Lowell

• Interviewed UML students

• Who did we interview
  • Those who send money home
  • Undergraduate and graduate students who are actively helping to pay bills in their household

• What are some of their expenses
  • Rent
  • Helping to pay for utilities
  • Paying for their own car/insurance
  • Paying for their own college degree aside from loans; buying their own books, paying tuition fees, and taking out private loans that they will begin to pay before they graduate
Interview Questions:
• As a contributor to your household how often are you expected to help out financially?

• What are some of your financial responsibilities (rent, pay for groceries, paid for your own college education, etc.)?

• Did you have a job while attending college?

• Did you work to pay for college?

• How were /are you affected by being a contributor to your house (were you stressed, did you feel overwhelmed, did you enjoy helping, did this give you experience for your financial independent future, etc...)?

• Did/are you learning how to be financially responsible for this experience?

• Now that you have a college degree do you feel added pressure to contribute (only a question for alumni)?

• Did you have friends that were also contributed to their household financially?
Students at UMass Lowell

Responses:

• “Sometimes my responsibilities outside of school really overtake what I need to do for school...I am too tired to study but I do because it’s the only way out.” – DH

• “I know how to take care of myself and my family...often times I feel like my problems are very different from my other college friends.” – CH

• “I believe that it is important to contribute back to the household, so that my youngest sibling won’t feel or go through the same experiences I went through.” – AF
Students at UMass Lowell

**Responses:**

- “I have two jobs and feel like it’s not enough for me to maintain the expenses I have...I stress more about that then school.” – CH

- “My family doesn’t understand why I am going to a 4 year school...they would prefer that I go to a 2 year college or get a certificate in something...my mom doesn’t understand.” – DH

- “I learned how to be very self-reliant and responsible. I learnt how to budget and plan ahead.” – AF
Students at UMass Lowell

**Responses:**

- “I don’t really talk about my contribution in the home with my friends...I feel that they would not understand.” – DH

- “Helping my family has showed me the value of working hard to get the things you want in life...for that I am thankful.” – CH

- “I couldn’t do fun things with my friends...I had to sacrifice a lot of great opportunities to get through school.” – AF
Open to share
UMass Lowell Costs

• As of this year how much is tuition at UMass Lowell?

• What are is the most affordable meal plan rate?

• What is the most affordable housing rate?
Social Capital Also Know as “The Hook Up”

• Social capital facilitates upward mobility and contributes to the direction of individuals’ career trajectories...

• Social capital resources help people obtain jobs...

• It's harder for students who are first-generation, come from a lower income, and students of color to have social networks that help them obtain jobs, internships, and receive career opportunities for upward mobility.

• Due to the lack of support and network these students may not know how to navigate the educational bureaucracy, career counseling, and mentoring to help them with their personal and professional growth.
Social Capital Also Known as “The Hook Up”

- How do we make these opportunities happen for our students within this identity who may not have the network to do so?
  - Mentor programs
  - Professors providing more research assistant positions
  - Internships and Co-op opportunities mentioned early on in students college tenured ...as early as freshman year
  - Encouraging students to join organizations on campus
Opportunities for Change

- Develop stronger commuter programs / services
- Offer paid employment for leadership positions
- Offer extra services or assistance to help students understand the costs of college. Help them weigh the costs and advantages of working extra hours to pay for college vs. shorter time to degree.
- Broaden understanding of what an involved student looks like for leadership positions and scholarships (ex. Family obligations, off-campus employment)
Opportunities for Change

- Share information with students about programs, clubs, and activities that might appeal to their work ethic and sense of accomplishing something. (Service projects/service learning)

- Be conscious of economic capital required to navigate university systems (deposits, reimbursements)

- Start and support a working-class identity group

What are your additional thoughts or recommendations from your experience?
VIDEO

TRUE LIFE I SUPPORT MY FAMILY
References

- Borrego, S. E., & Manning K. (2007). Where I am From: Student Affairs Practice from the Whole of Students’ Lives. USA: NASPA.


