

Honors 398 H
The American University: Purpose, Promise, and Politics
Spring, 2007
Thursday afternoons 4:00-6:50
Glenn 308
President Paul Zingg, Department of History
Professor Andrew Flescher, Department of Religious Studies

Course Description

What are we all supposed to be doing here on a university campus? What are our aims and purposes? To whom do we owe their successful pursuit? How shall we balance the demands of teaching, research, and service that have arisen and will continue to arise in the 21st century? In this course we will reflect on the challenge of academia to deliver on its promise to inform and serve its various constituents and stakeholders. Throughout the semester, our concerns will divide along two general fault lines. These can be presented as themes: (1) the university as a place of public purpose and service; and (2) the university as a place of values and a value-added experience for those who are a part of it.

With respect to the first of these themes, such questions arise as: How is the history of the American university, originally conceived with religious underpinnings, related to its contemporary mission as an institution that is to serve a diverse public in a pluralistic society?; Does the plurality of our constituents impose any constraints on the manner in which knowledge is pursued?; Should “academic freedom” ever have any limits?; What ought the role of research be at a university (and at which *kind* of university)? How do we negotiate the funding of public and private support for research, and who owns the rights to the fruits of such research, once borne? Are we, in essence, a grand think tank, here to produce and disseminate new information for the world to consider, or a well-organized training factory poised to prepare and “credential” professionals to enter the work-force, or an institution of liberal education focused on “learning for learning’s sake,” or rather, some combination of these? If some combination, then what combination? If we are here to educate not just the privileged, but all who wish to advance their well-being by participating in the university experience, what does this imply about our responsibility as a society to make higher education accessible and affordable? Just what, precisely, is the nature of our responsibility to the public?

The second theme invokes the issue of what we value in this place, as well as the question of what value higher education *adds* to the well-lived life, which in turn gets us into questions about our identity, normative commitments, and politics. What should we *do* at a university that we do not or cannot do elsewhere? What, exactly, is “education” and why is it a good thing? This is all to ask: how do we go about determining the *content* of higher education, particularly when what is being taught in our classrooms poses challenges to the various worldviews that are often markedly different than those typically found on a university or college campus. For example, what arguments are available for defending the pursuit of scientific knowledge when that knowledge rubs up against values espoused by practitioners of particular religious traditions? How do we get

past the “culture wars” that pervade our classrooms? Finally, what is the relationship between education and citizenship? What *moral* expectations ought we to expect universities to promote among its administration, faculty, and students?

In the course of pursuing these two clusters of questions, we will read several classical and contemporary thinkers who have written on the problems facing higher education, including: Plato, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, Thomas Jefferson, John Henry Cardinal Newman, A. Bartlett Giamatti, David Goodstein, Diane Ravitch, Gerald Graff, James Davidson Hunter, Clark Kerr, Bill Readings, Bill Cronon, Arthur Levine, George Marsden, and Jane Smiley. It is plainly apparent from this list that the course will have an interdisciplinary flavor to it, venturing onto fields as diverse as education, history, sociology, philosophy, religious studies, and even some of the hard sciences, particularly when we cover issues surrounding research. As such, this course will expose students to several disciplines by way of addressing a series of ubiquitous, seminal questions about the place at which they have chosen to spend a few years of their lives.

Purpose and Intended Outcome

The purpose of this course is to bring an exciting and important new course into the curriculum and to expose students to the benefits of taking a team-taught course where one of the instructors is the president of the university. This aim has several benefits, for example: it will (1) give students the chance to grapple self-reflectively with issues about higher education that directly concern them; (2) promote conversations across the disciplines; (3) create a unique opportunity for interaction between the student body and the faculty and administration; (4) raise the standards of intellectual rigor and academic breadth in our classrooms; and (5) open sessions of the seminar to the general community of the university. Additionally, we fully expect our course to have ramifications in terms of influencing some of the policies that Chico State University will consider adopting or reconsidering in the future. To be sure, this course is intended to have “real-world” implications and will, over the course of a semester, precipitate a “learning community” consisting of representatives at the highest level of administration, faculty in various departments, students, and several, nationally renowned leaders in higher education.

Course Requirements

Course Requirements consist of three papers of 4-5 pages, which are due at the end of each of the three units that comprise the course, and a class participation grade (about which we say more below). The papers will each count for 25% and the class participation grade will be 25% as well. Each week, you should come prepared, with readings in hand, at the beginning of every class. In addition, you will be expected to be in attendance at every session. There are no exceptions to this rule. Unless you have an extreme emergency, you must be present. At the end of the semester, you will be required to give a class presentation that will count towards your class participation grade. In the three papers, you will be asked to interpret, and optionally criticize or develop the ideas that emerge from the readings. We expect you to put significant effort into these.

The reading is substantial and at times will be difficult. Do not panic. It is our job to help you to understand the major concepts and authors’ arguments, and we will go out of our

way to answer any questions that you may have. Please consider, however, that adequately understanding these authors necessarily requires effort on both of our ends. Passages that are particularly difficult will become much more accessible to you if you have already struggled through them on at least one prior occasion on your own.

Finally, enjoy yourself! The books you will be reading are not only historically important in the history of the development of higher education, but they are profoundly engaging. We are confident that you will enjoy the reading, and will even wager that you will not sell these books back to the bookstore by the end of the semester. Trust us when we say that we are going to have a lot of fun this semester.

Grading

Grading breaks down as follows:

25% First paper (4-5 pages)----**due end of Part I (February 22nd)**

25% Second paper (4-5 pages)---**due end of Part II (April 5th)**

25% Third paper (4-5 pages)---**due end of Part III (May 17th)**

25% Class Participation---including attendance, class discussion, and final presentation

A Word on Class Participation

Each week you will be expected to consult three websites in order to acquaint yourselves with the current debates pertaining to higher education. The websites are:

(1) www.insidehighered.com

(2) www.academicimpressions.com/news.php

(3) http://vocuspr.vocus.com/vocuspr30/Publish/14442/Forward_14442_1150366.htm

We will likely begin each period discussing some of the “hot-button” issues mentioned in these sites that are relevant to our topic for the week. We see this course as an exercise in self-reflection. As such, we want you to come to class prepared to contribute actively to these conversations. Your final presentations will likely incorporate your insights about these current events. We will say more about the final presentations later in the semester.

Required Texts

(1) William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, Eugene M. Tobin, Susanne C. Pichler, eds. *Equity And Excellence In American Higher Education*: Thomas Jefferson Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series (University of Virginia Press, 2005)

(2) Gerald Graff: *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1993)

(3) George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford University Press, 1996)

(4) Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Harvard University Press, 1996)

(5) Jane Smiley, *Moo* (Flamingo, 1996)

(6) Course packet, to be purchased at Mr. Kopy, 119 Main Street, Chico

Part I

Whence the American University?: The Inception of “Higher Education”

Week 1 (January 25th): Introduction to Course---Roles and Purposes in Higher Education in a Democratic Society

Week 2 (February 1st): The History of Higher Education and the Advent of the American University

Reading:

Arthur Levine, “A Chronological History of Undergraduate Education: From Ancient Greece to the Present,” (Course Packet)

Plato, *Socrates’ Apology* (translated by Benjamin Jowett), (Course Packet)

Benjamin Franklin, “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania” (1749), (Course Packet)

Arthur Levine, “A Comparison of Modern Philosophies of Higher Education,” (Course Packet)

Week 3 (February 8th): University Education and Democracy---The Values of Civility, Community, Reason, Respect, and Academic Freedom

Reading:

John Dewey, “Democracy and Education,” (Course Packet)

Amy Gutmann, “Democratic Education,” (Course Packet)

Israel Scheffler, “Moral Education and the Democratic Ideal,” (Course Packet)

Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to Peter Carr,” (Course Packet)

Week 4 (February 15th): The Role of Religion on the University Campus---Sectarian and Non-sectarian Models

Reading:

Thomas Jefferson (excerpts), “Publicly Supported Education” (Course Packet)

George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (selected chapters)

Part II

For What Purpose? For Whose Sake?

Week 5 (February 22nd): The Goals of Liberal Education

Reading:

William Cronon, “Only Connect...”, (Course Packet)

Cardinal John Henry Newman “Scope and Nature of University Education,” (Course Packet)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “On Education,” (Course Packet)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” (Course Packet)

Paper #1 is due

Week 6 (March 1st): The University and its Obligation to the Public

Reading:

A. Bartlett Giamatti, *A Free and Ordered Space*, selections, (Course Packet)

Clark Kerr, “The Idea of a Multiversity,” (Course Packet)

Week 7 (March 8th): Higher Education and Justice---How can we Simultaneously aim for Excellence and Equity?

Reading:

William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, Eugene M. Tobin, Susanne C. Pichler, eds. *Equity And Excellence In American Higher Education* (Thomas Jefferson Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series)---selected chapters

Diane Ravitch, “The Fall of Standard-Bearers,” (Course Packet)

Ward Connerly, “Letter to Bill Clinton,” (Course Packet)

Week 8 (March 15th): The American University and the Problem of Corporate Consumerism

Reading:

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (selected chapters)

Warren J. Baker, “Bridging the High Tech Workforce Gap: In Search of Educational Strategies to Meet the Workforce Needs of the New California Economy,” (Course Packet)

March 22nd: Spring Break

Week 9 (March 29th): Funding Higher Education (and the case of California)

Reading:

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (continued)

David W. Breneman, “The Challenges Facing California Higher Education,” (Course Packet)

The California State University Budget (Chico and CSU system) (hand-out)

Part III

The American University Today: Contemporary Issues

Week 10 (April 5th): The American University, Research, and Ethics

Reading:

David Goodstein, “The Big Crunch,” (Course Packet)

David Goodstein, “Conduct and Misconduct in Science,” (Course Packet)

Paper #2 is due

Week 11 (April 12th): Culture Wars in the Classroom---The Political University

Reading:

Gerald Graff: *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* (selected chapters)

Week 12 (April 19th): Culture Wars in Classroom---The Case of Intelligent Design

Reading:

Gerald Graff: *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* continued (selected chapters)

Troy Jollimore: “Intelligent Design in the Classroom” (Course Packet)

William Dembski: “Teaching Intelligent Design as Religion or Science?” (Course Packet)

Week 13 (April 26th): Issues of Town and Gown---A Discussion of what it means to be a “Regional University” (Panel involving the Mayor and City Council Representatives)

Reading: (To be Announced)

Week 14 (May 3rd): Life on the Campus---A Critical (and Comical) Look at the “College Experience”

Reading:

Jane Smiley, *Moo*

Film: Of your choosing, to be read alongside this text in common

Week 15 (May 10th): Student Presentations

Finals Week (May 17th): Student Presentation continued

May 17th: Paper #3 is due