

Exclusion, Inclusion, and the U. S. Academy

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Principal Questions

In this seminar we propose to explore two interrelated questions. First, we wish to examine institutional forms of exclusion that determine the nature of colleges and universities in the United States. Second, we want to explore the ways in which a variety of academic disciplines are defined by exclusions. (Those exclusions have to do with things such as training, disciplinary parameters, and the distribution of resources within the disciplines.) We treat institutions of higher education as a whole, and the production of knowledge as a link in the broader regime of capitalist production. Although the seminar would consider a broad range of questions, it would focus on specific set of issues that are closely related to the future of Haverford College.

Overview of the Topic

Recently many colleges and universities have declared that they are deeply committed to the cause of inclusion. Such declarations are hard to take at face value. The declarations certainly have not even begun to put an end to exclusions in academia; obvious manifestations of such exclusions are multifarious. Harvard University, for example, has lately taken to festooning its campuses with banners that say things like: “Harvard: Everyone Belongs Here.” Some of the banners are located a few yards away from the entrance to a library—Widener—that is as hard to get into as Fort Knox. Harvard’s ability to keep so many people out is key to maintaining its reputation for “excellence.”

A similar pattern is evident at Stanford University. Stanford has recently established an Office of Inclusion, Belonging and Intergroup Communications. Stanford also rejects 95% of the people who apply to study there as undergraduates. The selectivity of Stanford’s admissions process, while supposedly “merit-based,” systematically ignores the structural underpinnings that make some applicants more “worthy of admission” than others. And by one measure, at least, Stanford does a truly terrible job of admitting students who are poor and of supporting those poor students once they arrive on campus.¹

Exclusions are, of course, quite evident at Haverford as well. For most of its history, Haverford discriminated against anyone who was not a white, well-to-do, male Protestant. It is still the case that when Haverford is deciding whom to appoint to the Board of Managers and to the Haverford Corporation, it discriminates against people who are not Protestant Christians. (Quakers are given preferential treatment). There are many other obvious exclusions at Haverford. If you apply for a tenure-track job at Haverford, the chances of your getting one are quite remote. (In one recent job search, for example, over four hundred people competed for one position.) People of color are dramatically underrepresented in the college’s faculty; we are doing an especially poor job of hiring, retaining, supporting, and promoting professors who are Native American, Black or Latinx. If you apply to study at Haverford, the odds against your being admitted are something like 17-3. Haverford does a poor job of attracting and retaining poor students. (According to one measure, 2166 of the 2395 colleges in the US do a better job of doing that than Haverford does.²) Nor is Haverford a place where a great many students of color find a home. According to one standard source, less than ten percent of the college’s student body is Hispanic, less than seven

¹ “Educational Diversity and Student Outcomes at Stanford University.” *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/stanford-university>.

² “Educational Diversity and Student Outcomes at Haverford College.” *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/haverford-college>.

percent is Black, and less than one percent is Native American.³ Frustration with the ongoing failure to address these exclusions, which are part of the warp and woof of life at Haverford, was of course central to the student strike of fall 2020. The anger sparked by the various exclusions which are a part of the warp and woof of life at Haverford was, of course, part of what fueled the student strike that was launched in the fall of 2020.

Some professors might want to argue that the blame for the exclusive nature of academia ought to be laid solely at the feet of administrators. Such arguments are not at all compelling. Professors are not free-floating agents of knowledge production who are only incidentally attached to institutions. Institutional exclusions are reinforced by other exclusions related to professors' overly narrow conceptions of the academic disciplines. Those conceptions, which help determine which people can work on which topics and whose work is seen as the most prestigious, are a large part of what makes academia so exclusive.

Professional organizations whose membership rolls are dominated by professors routinely practice exclusion while trumpeting inclusion. The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) has recently adopted an *A Statement of Inclusive Excellence*, but only 75 people—nearly all of whom are quite “distinguished”—are allowed to serve as delegates to the council. When delegates to the ACLS meet together to talk about inclusion, white women and men sometimes make up over 90% of the people who are a part of the conversation. In a way, that is not at all shocking: the academic disciplines around which professional societies are organized exist in no small measure to create cultural capital and to distribute it unequally. The disciplines are defined as much by the people, questions, and methods they screen out as they are by those they choose to include.

Provisional Outline of the Proposed Seminar

The seminar would be divided into six sections. The first section would focus on the ways in which exclusions have defined—and continue to define—Haverford College. The second would analyze some of the exclusions that shape higher education in the United States. Literary, philosophical, and theoretical texts that interrogate some “common sense” assumptions about exclusion and exclusivity would be the focus of the third section of the seminar. The fourth section would consider the role that exclusions play in creating and sustaining academic disciplines. (In this section we hope to foster wide-ranging discussions led by professors from all three divisions of the college's curriculum: the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.) The fifth section would be devoted to discussing short papers written by participants in the seminar. The paper topics would, of course, be determined by those participants. The papers might be based on ethnographic, historical, literary, or survey research. Our hope would be that about half of the papers would rely heavily on quantitative methods. The sixth section would encourage participants to ask themselves—and one another—hard questions about how the things they have learned in the seminar should affect the way professors at Haverford think and act in the future.

This proposal and the bibliography that supports it were produced collaboratively; they reflect the ideas advanced by members of the staff, faculty, and student body. If it ends up being held, the seminar would not be especially hierarchical. Important decisions would be made by the group as a whole. During seminar discussion both of us would refrain from making many comments about the substance of the discussion. We would encourage participants to adopt guidelines (such as “no one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once”) that would ensure that no one person (or group of persons) dominates meetings of the seminar.

³ United States Government: Department of Education, *College Scoreboard* <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/school/?212911-Haverford-College>.

One final note. Neither of us assumes that academic disciplines or highly-selective liberal arts colleges can be made perfectly inclusive. However, both of us believe that there is no good reason for disciplines and colleges to remain as exclusive as they currently are. Our interest in this topic is practical and personal. It's not purely "academic."

Bibliography

(Please note that the readings listed below are only illustrative. They are certainly not set in stone.)

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Section Two. Exclusions in U.S. Colleges and Universities

Boggs, Abigail, et. al. “An Invitation to Abolitionist University Studies.”

<https://abolitionjournal.org/abolitionist-university-studies-an-invitation/>. Accessed March 20, 2021.

Du Bois, Ellen C. et. al. *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe*.

Karabel, Jerome. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of American Admissions and Exclusions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*.

Selingo, Jeffrey. *Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions*.

Tough, Paul. *The Inequality Machine: How College Divides Us*.

Wilder, Craig Ferguson. *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*.

Zabrana, Ruth Enid. *Toxic Ivory Towers: The Consequences of Work Stress on Underrepresented Minorities*.

Section Three: Broader Perspectives on Exclusion

Atshan, Sa’ad. “There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions.”

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*.

Jibrin, Rekia and Sara Salem. “Revisiting Intersectionality: Reflections of Theory and Practice.”

Markovitz, Micahel. *The Meritocracy Trap: How America’s Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite*.

North, Michael S. and Susan T. Fiske. “Driven to Exclude: How Core Social Motives Explain Social Exclusion.”

Jakobsen, Janet. *The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics*.

Virdee, Satnam. "Racialized Capitalism: An Account of Its Contested Origins and Consolidation."
Williams, Cristan. "Radical Inclusion: Recounting the Trans Inclusive History of Radical
Feminism".

Section Four: Patterns of Exclusion in Academic Disciplines

Asai, David J. "Race Matters."

Domingo, Mariano R. Sto. et. al. "Replicating Meyerhoff for inclusive excellence in STEM."

Harris, R. B. et. al. "Reducing Achievement Gaps in Undergraduate General Chemistry Could Lift
Underrepresented Students into a 'Hyperpersistent Zone.'"

Kawa, Nicholas C. et. al. "The Social Network of US Academic Anthropology and Its Inequalities."

Leighton, M. "Myths of Meritocracy, Friendship, and Fun Work: Class and Gender in North
American Academic Communities."

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Roberts, Steven O. et. al. "Racial Inequality in Psychological Research: Trends of the Past and
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Yudell, Michael et. al. "Taking Race Out of Human Genetics."