Overview and goals
In this course, we will examine the higher education sector through several different lenses. The two primary goals of the course are to (1) familiarize students with many features of the U.S. higher education landscape and related policies, and (2) provide students with the analytic tools to evaluate higher education policy. Policy aims we will explore include access, persistence, affordability, and accountability. Specific policy areas include financial aid, affirmative action, state and federal support, regulation of the for-profit sector, community college transfer policies, mentoring and coaching initiatives, and many others. Our primary analytic tools will be microeconomic and statistical analysis. We will use the concepts and tools of causal inference extensively.

Prerequisites
There are no official prerequisites for this course, but PP555 (Microeconomics) and PP529 (Statistics) are highly recommended. Completion of or simultaneous enrollment in PP639 (Program Evaluation) would also greatly enhance what you will get out of the course.

Course Requirements
• Class participation (20%): This is a discussion-based course, so you are expected to attend class regularly and to have done the assigned readings prior to class. Come prepared to talk.

• Policy memo (20%): Students will write a 3-5 page memo evaluating a particular higher education policy used to influence access or student success (e.g. expanding Pell eligibility, increasing state support for community colleges, implementing a merit-based grant program, etc). You will be expected to summarize the evidence and rationale for and against a particular policy based on the readings done in class, but not on any additional research. You should conclude with a recommendation to a policy-maker. An example will be provided.

• In-class midterm exam (25%): An exam approximately halfway through the semester will cover all material discussed and presented in the class up to that point. It will consist of short-answer questions related to the readings and questions related to interpretation of data presented in the exam.

• Final presentation and paper (35% Total, 10% for presentation and 25% for paper): There are two options for a final paper, depending on your background. Regardless of which type of paper you do, you will present your analysis in the final days of class. The two options are:
  o A longer (~10 page) analysis of a specific policy in which you summarize the theory and empirical evidence (for and against) on the subject and make a recommendation. This will require you to do some research on your own.
  o An original quantitative analysis of data on a particular higher education policy or subject. If you choose this option you will not be expected to do an extensive review of existing literature on the subject, but instead will focus on conducting the quantitative analysis, presenting the results, and describing the limitations of your analysis.

Regardless of which type of project you do, you will present your analysis to the class at the end of the semester.

Course materials
Other readings consist of journal, news, and policy articles that will be available through Ctools.

**Writing Support**
I will be available to speak with you about your papers during office hours (by appointment) throughout the semester. In addition, all students are encouraged to meet with one of the Ford School writing instructors, David Morse and Alex Ralph. They are both excellent resources and is available to talk with students about various aspects of the writing process and to read and comment on rough drafts. David can be contacted at: David Morse; Weil Hall #4219; morsedl@umich.edu. Alex can be contacted at Alex Ralph; Weil Hall #4212; ralpha@umich.edu.

**List of topics (subject to adjustments):**
The course is structured in four parts: (1) overview, theory, background, and rationale; (2) access and student success; (3) accountability, performance measurement, and competition; and (4) high-level policy reform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>Introduction and overview of class and the higher education sector.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>1/10-1/12</td>
<td>Rationale: human capital vs. signaling, social vs. private returns.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>1/17-1/19</td>
<td>Basics of higher education financing. Background on trends in revenue sources, tuition and student aid.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>1/31-2/2</td>
<td>Finish financial aid. Start Community colleges</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>2/7-2/9</td>
<td>Finish Community colleges, Admissions and affirmative action</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>2/14-2/16</td>
<td>Persistence and degree completion</td>
<td>Policy memo due 2/14</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>2/21-2/23</td>
<td>Review of access and persistence</td>
<td>In-class midterm 2/23</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>2/28-3/1</td>
<td>Spring Break: No Class</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>3/6-3/8</td>
<td>Learning in college, amenities</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>3/13-3/15</td>
<td>Performance measurement and accountability</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>3/27-3/29</td>
<td>Workforce needs, rise of the for-profit sector</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>4/3-4/5</td>
<td>High-level reform</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>4/10-4/12</td>
<td>In-class presentations</td>
<td>Presentation due</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>4/17</td>
<td>In-class presentations and wrap-up</td>
<td>Final paper due 4/20</td>
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Readings (subject to revision). The readings consist of three types: (1) rigorous (typically empirical) academic papers; (2) descriptive papers; and (3) news articles meant to simulate discussion. Readings marked with an “*” are required. They are listed in the order I suggest you read them (if you cannot read them all!). The others are optional, though we will discuss some of them. I erred on the side of including more rather than fewer optional readings, particularly seminal papers, so that you would have them for reference and for your papers. You are only responsible for the required ones and the topics discussed in class. Before each class, I will post several questions to ctools about each reading and some overall, cross-cutting questions that you should come prepared to answer and discuss. Some of these questions will have "right" answers (e.g. "What population does a given paper study?") while many others will not ("Do you find their identification strategy convincing?").

Detailed Schedule and Reading List
 (* = required)

PART I: BACKGROUND, THEORY, RATIONALE

Thursday, January 5, Class 1: Introduction to course and overview of the issues


Tuesday, January 10, Class 2: Human capital theory and basic trends


Thursday, January 12, Class 3: Returns to higher education (social vs. private)


**Tuesday, January 17, Class 4: Basics of Higher Ed Financing**


**PART II: ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

**Thursday, January 19, Class 5: Trends in Access and Affordability; Theory on Why Price/Aid May Influence Enrollment; Evidence of Credit Constraints**


**Thursday, January 26, Class 7: Financial Aid II: Loans, Debt Burden**


**Tuesday, January 31, Class 8: Financial Aid III: Simplification and Reform**


*Baum, Sandy and Michael McPherson, “Pell Grants vs. Tuition Tax Credits” in *Chronicle of Higher Education* October 28, 2011


**Thursday, February 2, Class 9: Community Colleges I: Overview**


Tuesday, February 7, Class 10: Community Colleges II: Criticisms, Reforms, and Improving Community Colleges


Thursday, February 9, Class 11: Admissions and Affirmative Action

Guest: Megan Tompkins-Stange, former admissions officer at Stanford University, Lecturer at Ford School


*Gratz v. Bollinger. Supreme Court decision. Only read the “syllabus” (summary) which is uploaded to ctools. You can find the full decision here: http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-516.ZS.html

*Gutter v. Bollinger. Supreme Court decision. Only read the “syllabus” (summary) which is uploaded to ctools. You can find the full decision here http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-241.ZO.html


Empirical estimates of the effects of affirmative action (and bans)


Overview of trends in admissions and some of the issues
John Bound, Brad Hershbein and Bridget Terry Long, “Playing the Admissions Game: Student Responses to Increasing College Competition”, Journal of Economic Perspectives 23 (Fall 2009)

Bowen, William, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, 2019. Crossing the finish line: completing college at America's public universities , Chapter 6 (pp 112-133) – discussion of predictive power of GPA vs. SAT

Recent developments


Deep background

Bowen, William and Derek Bok, 2000. The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions. Princeton University Press.( Chapters 1, 2 and 3)


Tuesday, February 14, Class 12: Trends in Completion and Explanations


* Bowen, William, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, 2019. Crossing the finish line: completing college at America's public universities , Chapter 3 (pp 32-56)

Hodara and Jaggars, 2012. "Why is it so hard to fix our system of remediation?" (this is just a short blog post).


**Thursday, February 16, Class 13: Policies to Improve Persistence and Completion**


**Tuesday, February 21, Class 14: Review of access and persistence**

No new readings

**Thursday, February 23, Class 15: In-class midterm exam**

**February 28- March 3, Spring Break**

**PART III: ACCOUNTABILITY, PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT, AND COMPETITION**

**Tuesday, March 6, Class 16: Criticisms about learning in college**


**Thursday, March 8, Class 17: College Sports and Other Consumption Amenities**

**Guest Speaker: Seth Wickersham, Sr Writer, ESPN The Magazine**

Tuesday, March 13, Class 18: Performance Measurement and Accountability


Tuesday, March 13, Class 18: Performance Measurement and Accountability


*Musick, Marc, 2011 Analysis of Efficiency and Graduation Rates at The University of Texas at Austin and Other Public Research Universities in the United States


Thursday, March 15, Class 19: Project Discussion

Today we will discuss your projects. You will present your proposed project (research question, possible data sources, identification strategy) and we will have a few minutes to discuss each one as a class.

Tuesday, March 20, Class 20: Rankings


Thursday, March 22, Class 21: Market Structure and Competition


**Tuesday, March 27, Class 22: Rise of the For-Profit Sector**

**Guest Speaker:** Bob Shireman, former Deputy Undersecretary of Education in Obama Administration, Executive Director, California Competes

*Deming, David, Claudia Goldin and Larry Katz “The For-Profit Postsecondary School Sector: Nimble Critters or Agile Predators?” Journal of Economic Perspectives

*Sandy Baum & Kathleen Payea, 2011. “Trends in For-Profit Postsecondary Education: Enrollment, Prices, Student Aid and Outcomes”

Cellini, Stephanie and Claudia Goldin, 2011. “Comprehensive View of For-Profit Postsecondary Education and the Role of Title IV in Tuition-Setting” working paper.


**Thursday, March 29, Class 23 Higher Education and Workforce Needs**

*Reamer, Andrew. 2010. Putting America to Work: The Essential Role of Federal Labor Market Statistics. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Read the 10-page policy brief. I have also posted the full report, which I don’t suggest you read. However, take a look at the table that starts on page 50 of the full report.

*Altstadt, David, 2011. Aligning Community Colleges to their Local Labor Markets The Emerging role of Online Job Ads for Providing Real-Time Intelligence About Occupations and Skills in Demand


PART IV: COLLEGE FOR ALL AND HIGH-LEVEL REFORM

Tuesday, April 3, Class 24: High-level Reform and the Spellings Commission


Bowen, William, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, 2019. Crossing the finish line: completing college at America's public universities , Chapter 12 (pp 223-238)

Pathways to Prosperity Project, 2011. Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century. Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Thursday, April 5, Class 25: One-on-one meetings to discuss papers and presentations

Tuesday, April 10, Class 26: In-class presentations

Thursday, April 12, Class 27: In-class presentations

Tuesday, April 17, Class 28: In-class presentations and wrap-up

Friday, April 20, Final Paper Due
TOPICS NOT COVERED
There are many other important topics related to public policy and higher education, that we will not have time to cover in depth. These would make excellent topics for papers:

- Returns to college quality
- International comparisons
- Structural issues: how the system is/should be structured
- Major choice and field of study; the underrepresentation of women and minorities in STEM fields
- Research & development; economic spillovers of research universities
- Graduate and professional education
- Labor markets for faculty
- The political economy of higher education
- Advising and coaching in high school
- College pricing (what determines it, impact on students)