Examining Class in the Classroom: Utilizing Social Class Data in Institutional and Academic Research

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What is Social Class?

• Social category that shapes identity
• Complex multi-dimensional factor inclusive of
  o SES
  o parents' educational attainment
  o occupational prestige
  o socio-cultural elements
Why Social Class Matters

• Students from lower social class backgrounds are less likely to persist, graduate from college, and attend graduate school

• While many surveys gather data on some of the variables comprising social class, few actually collect the holistic variable of social class
Research Questions

• What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social class indicators in institutional and educational research?

• Are students credible in self-identifying social class?

• Do different social class indicators have different effects on student outcomes?
Research Question One

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social class indicators in institutional and educational research?
Class Measurement

Challenges:

• No single definition or categorization of class is universally utilized
• Variety of conceptual theories and frames are used in class research
• Cultural differences challenge the validation of instruments
• Class consciousness and salience can vary in specific contexts and change over the lifespan
Class measurement

Conflation of terminology: SES & social class

• SES
  o parental income
  o parental education
  o parental occupation

• Social class
  o includes a cultural component; many researchers have noted the "culture shock" associated with college attendance
Challenges to Class Measurement

- Parental occupational prestige
  - Titles can be relatively meaningless; women may have high prestige positions but lower incomes; no indication of wealth or capital
- Parental wealth and income
  - FAFSA data sometimes missing; self-reported
- Parental education
  - Different criteria are used; missing data
- Social and cultural capital
Research Question Two

Are students credible in self-identifying social class?
Conceptual Framework

- Social identity: an individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social group
- Social identity is clarified through comparison with others in ingroups and outgroups
- Social class identity interacts with other identities
Subjective Self-identification of Class

• "how the person believes and feels about things" and the "person's style of life" is more important than objective measures of social class (Jackman & Jackman, 1983)
Subjective Self-identification of Class

- Factors influencing self-identification in social class:
  - social status of group
  - clarity and permeability of class boundaries
  - perceived similarity to prototypical group member
  - (several strategies to avoid stigmatization: heterogeneity and denigration of the superior group)
Methods

SERU survey:
• single institution: 35% response rate in 2010
• 12 institutions: average 34.7% response rate in 2010

Measures
• social class
• parental education
• family income
• ACT/GPA
• sense of belonging
Results: Income & Class

The chart illustrates the distribution of income classes across different income brackets. Each bar represents a specific income range, with different colors indicating the percentage of individuals falling into each income class category.
Results: Income & Class

![Graph showing the relationship between income and class levels.](image)
Results: Income & Class
Results: Income & Class

[Graph showing income levels across different class categories: Wealthy, Upper-Professional, Middle-Class, Working-Class, Low-Income. The graph compares Parents’ AGI and EFC.]
Results: Parental Education & Class

- **First-Generation**
- **Non-First-Generation**

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- **Wealthy**
- **Upper-Professional**
- **Middle-Class**
- **Working-Class**
- **Low-Income**
Results: Parental Education & Class

- Low-Income
- Working-Class
- Middle-Class
- Upper-Professional
- Wealthy
Results: Demographics & Class

[Bar chart showing the distribution of gender (Female and Male) across different classes: Wealthy, Upper-Professional, Middle-Class, Working-Class, Low-Income.]
Research Question Three

Does social class impact student outcomes?
Results: Academics & Class

![Graph showing ACT scores across different class levels](image)
Results: Academics & Class

Diagram showing the relationship between class and GPA. The GPA decreases as the class level decreases from Wealthy to Low-Income, with the following GPA values:
- Wealthy: 3.22
- Upper-Professional: 3.27
- Middle-Class: 3.16
- Working-Class: 3.01
- Low-Income: 2.94
Results: Sense of Belonging & Class

![Graph showing sense of belonging for different class levels. The graph indicates a decrease in sense of belonging as class level decreases, with the highest sense of belonging in the upper professional class and the lowest in the low-income class.](image-url)
Discussion

• Social class matters in educational and institutional research.

• Several challenges are present in social class identification.

• Students appear to be relatively credible in their social class identification.
Recommendations

Consider including social class within institutional or educational measures.

Further testing of students' credibility could be achieved through interviews and follow-up surveys.
Questions?

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