

First-Year Seminar: Different Journeys To and Through College

Lasell University - Fall 2021
Professor Betsy Leondar-Wright

OVERVIEW: How did you get to college? You have a unique story, about your parents' and grandparents' educational experiences; about your high school; about how your tuition is being paid; and about everyone who believed in you enough to help you reach this first year at Lasell.

Whatever your background, it's a powerful experience to share your family's social-class story, and to realize how it's similar to and different than others' stories. Understanding your own advantages and/or disadvantages in relation to others, and understanding that your past doesn't control your future: those are at the heart of one of Lasell's four core Knowledge Perspectives, Individual and Society.

You will also develop the other three Knowledge Perspectives in this course, as we create and respond to art (Aesthetics and Creativity), analyze quantitative data (Scientific Inquiry and Problem-Solving), and compare US higher education to other countries' systems (Global & Historical Perspective). You will also learn tips for studying at the college level, and get lots of practice in all the reading, writing and speaking skills you'll need to ace your college courses.

The American Dream depends on higher education as the main vehicle to upward mobility, but the US today does not have a level playing field in access to college. Some students face obstacles such as weaker academic preparation, cultural differences that clash with the college environment, fewer family connections, unaffordable college costs and large loans. In this course you will learn about these obstacles and the resources needed to overcome them, using both the wide-angle lens of social injustice and the close-up lens of your own plans to succeed at college and in your career.

SUMMARY OF DEADLINES

Make sure you have a way of keeping track of what assignments are coming up.

Tues Sept 28 - Essay on expectations of you

Tues Oct 5 - Running lists of obstacles, resources/solutions and sources - bring to class

Thurs Oct 14 - Essay connecting any *Class Lives* piece to your experience

Thurs Oct 21 - Name of interviewee, date of interview and list of interview questions

Tues Nov 9 - Interview notes and photo(s)

Tues Nov 16 - Running lists of obstacles, resources/solutions and sources
Tues Nov 23 - Outline and bibliography for final paper

Thurs Dec 2 - Creative presentation based on interview

Thurs Dec 9 - Draft of final paper

Friday Dec 17 - Final paper

SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS, READINGS AND DEADLINES

Thursday Sept 9 - Welcome to Lasell, and to this course

Tuesday Sept 14 - Callings and family gifts; Overview of the course

Thursday Sept 16 - Inequality in K-12 schools

Tuesday Sept 21 - Different expectations and different opportunities

Reading: Collins, "The Wealthy Kids Are All Right," online at <http://prospect.org/article/wealthy-kids-are-all-right>

Homework due: Finish your family-knowledge tree and bring it to class to show

Thursday Sept 23 - Different graduation rates

Reading: Look at the table in the module "Graduation rates by family background"

Note: Please bring a laptop to class if you have one, or another device with Excel

Tuesday September 28 - "First Generation" documentary film

No reading

Assignment due: Essay on expectations of you

Thursday Sept 30 - International comparisons of education outcomes

Reading: Go over tables in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development charts (pdf in module) and bring clarifying questions to class

Homework due: Bring your Excel charts to class.

Tuesday October 5 - Why different graduation rates?

2 Readings: • Reynaga-Abiko, "Mexican Girl from Fontana" in *Class Lives*
• Overall, "My Parents' Hands are on My Back" in *Class Lives*

Assignment due: Bring your running lists to class in hard copy

Thursday Oct 7 - Resources to succeed in college

No reading

Tuesday Oct 12 - How much do high schools prepare students for college?

2 Readings: • Nguyen, "Small Fish in a Big Pond," online at <http://www.classism.org/small-fish-big-pond-2/>
• Collins, "Born on Third Base" in *Class Lives*

Thursday Oct 14 – Academic Obstacles

Reading: Riggs, "First Generation College-Goers," *The Atlantic*, 2014, online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/12/the-added-pressure-faced-by-first-generation-students/384139/>; <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/12/the-added-pressure-faced-by-first-generation-students/384139/>

Assignment deadline: Essay connecting a *Class Lives* piece to your own experience

Tuesday Oct 19 – Not all colleges are alike

Reading / Homework: College Scorecard - Look up all the colleges you applied to here: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>. Come to class prepared to ask clarifying questions and to compare colleges on cost, salary after graduating, SAT scores and socio-economic and racial diversity (under Student Body).

Note: Please bring a laptop to class if you have one, or another device with Excel

Thursday Oct 21 – Knowledge about how college works

2 Readings: • Alvarez, "First in the Family," online at <http://www.classism.org/first-in-the-family/>
• Orland, "Money Was Never a Worry" in *Class Lives*

Assignment deadline: Turn in name, place and date for interview and interview questions

Tuesday Oct 26 - Knowledge about applying to college

Reading: • Dynarski, "Personalized Tips from a Counselor? That's Priceless," *New York Times*, February 21, 2016, online at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/21/upshot/how-to-help-more-college-students-graduate.html?_r=0

Thursday Oct 28 - Getting into college

2 Readings: Golden, Daniel, 2003, "Family Ties" and "Extra Credit," online at http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/Polk_Alumni.htm and http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/Polk_Rich_Applicants.htm

Tuesday Nov 2 – Social and cultural obstacles - Families

2 Readings: • O'Connor Duffy, "Blue-Collar Heart, Ivy League World," from *Class Lives*;
• Martinez, "On Being an Other," online at <http://www.classism.org/on-being-an-other/>

Thursday Nov 4 - Low-income students on mostly upper-middle-class campuses

2 Readings: • Lopez, "Top 10 Classist Things about College" <http://www.classism.org/top-10-classist-college/>
And "Clueless on Campus" booklet (paper copy handed out in class)

Tuesday Nov 9 - Financial obstacles**3 Readings:**

- Loftis, "The anger of a first-gen," <http://www.classism.org/anger-firstgeneration-student/>
- Marshall, "Going on Trial," <http://www.classism.org/trial-prove-belong/>
- Maldonado, "My Background Made Them 'Uncomfortable' at Princeton," <http://www.classism.org/background-uncomfortable-princeton/>

Assignment deadline: Notes from interview with successful first-gen graduate

NO CLASS ON THURSDAY NOVEMBER 11

Tuesday Nov 16 - College costs - Comparing the US today with other countries and eras

- 2 Readings: • Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development fact sheet, bottom of p. 4 to middle of 8, online at <https://www.oecd.org/unitedstates/CN%20-%20United%20States.pdf>
- Zimmerman, "How did college education become so ridiculously expensive?," online at <http://www.alternet.org/education/how-did-college-education-become-so-ridiculously-expensive>

Note: Please bring a laptop to class if you have one, or another device with Excel

Assignment due: Running list of obstacles and resources, with sources for each

Thursday Nov 18 - Improving your writing; Tips on creating a useful outline of a paper

Preparation: • Take this online tutorial on APA style:

http://flash1r.apa.org/apastyle/basics/index.htm?_ga=1.141635125.62221231.1466696224

- Then find answers to your questions about APA style by clicking topics on the left side of this web page: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Tuesday Nov 23 - Career Development

Assignment deadline: Outline of final paper and bibliography

NO CLASS ON THURSDAY NOVEMBER 25 - HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Tuesday Nov 30 – Career development

TBA

Thursday Dec 2 - Inspiration for college success: Student presentations

Assignment deadline: Be ready to give your creative presentation on your interview

Tuesday Dec 7 - Inspiration for college success: Student presentations**Thursday Dec 9 - College success for all students; Final paper problem-solving clinic**

Assignment deadline: Rough draft and bibliography of final paper

Deadline for final paper: Friday December 17, 5 pm

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING:

1) Reading. First-person stories, news stories, big ideas, data - you will read many kinds of sources to get a three-dimensional picture of the different journeys of college students from different backgrounds. That's why doing all the reading is a very important part of the course.

The discussions and activities we do in class will presume you have done the readings *by the date they are listed*. Please come to class ready to ask questions about them and discuss them.

Clarifying questions are always welcome, in class, in the professor's office hours or by email.

The class participation grade will be based not only on attendance and verbal participation, but on demonstrated understanding of the readings.

2) Class attendance and participation. In the classroom you will practice the skills of a successful college student, by sharing your experiences and ideas and listening to others, by giving small presentations, by doing in-class exercises, and by discussing the readings. That's why your most important responsibility is to come to every class and engage fully while here.

Both speaking and focused listening will be valued; either too much silence *or* too much over-participation (interrupting others or dominating discussions) could negatively affect your grade.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate and for following any links on Canvas to keep up. More than three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by 1 point per absence. Arriving more than 10 minutes late counts as half an absence.

Mental absences will be treated the same as physical absences. Please do not look at or listen to unrelated content on a device (laptop, phone, etc.) during class; offline laptops may be used for taking notes only. Please put phones out of sight, disconnect from the internet, and shut off any device that might make noise or otherwise distract you or others during class.

Homework assignments will count towards this part of your grade. Conversations with the professor and peer mentor outside of class also add points to your grade. Please make one appointment to meet one-on-one with the professor and one to meet with the peer mentor during the semester. We want to get to know you!

3) ASSIGNMENTS. You will need to hone your writing and speaking skills to succeed at Lasell, and the assignments in this seminar are designed to help you learn and practice those skills.

Please submit written assignments electronically via the online submission function of the Canvas course website unless otherwise noted.

A. Two essays

a) Expectations you felt - Due September 28 on Canvas. Up to 5 points. 500 to 750 words of text, in a Word document with your last name in the filename.

Who had what kind of expectations of you when you were growing up? Name both high and low expectations, if possible. How did they affect you in high school and in applying for college? Comparing your situation with the four young adults profiled in the Collins article,

what similarities and differences do you see with your own family?

- b) Comparing your story to one story in *Class Lives*** - Due October 14. Up to 5 points. 500 to 750 words of text

Look through the narratives in *Class Lives* and find a writer whose experience was similar to your own in some way. Write a short essay comparing and contrasting your story and his or hers, including intersecting identities such as gender, race, class and nationality.

What similarities and differences do you notice? What learning or inspiration did you get from reading his or her story?

Grading: Both essays will be graded on how well they fit the assignment, coherence and quality of writing, and thoughtfulness. To merit an A (4.5 or 5 points), an essay should be the right length, cover the assigned topic thoroughly, weave together material from the relevant readings with your own thoughts and/or experience, use in-text citations and a reference list, show thoughtfulness, and be clearly and coherently written with few errors.

B. Interview with and creative presentation about a successful first-generation graduate

Each student will interview and photograph a successful professional who was in the first generation of his or her family to go to 4-year college and do a presentation to the class about the lessons for success learned from the interview. (See detailed instructions on Canvas.)

- a) Name, date and interview questions by October 21; up to 5 points.
- b) Interview notes and photos by November 9; up to 5 points.
- c) Creative presentation in class on Dec 2; up to 10 points

C. Final synthesis paper on obstacles and resources for first-gen/low-income success

As you notice obstacles faced by first-generation and low-income college students and solutions and resources to overcome those obstacles (in readings, films and classroom activities), you will write them on your running lists. Then you will prioritize which you think are the most influential on students and write a final paper that explains your priorities by drawing on course readings. (See detailed assignment instructions on Canvas.)

- a) Running lists of obstacles and resources. Due October 1 (bring hard copy to class) and November 16. Up to 10 points.
- b) Outline and bibliography. Due November 23. Up to 10 points.
- c) Draft of paper. 1000 – 1500 words. Due December 9. Up to 10 points.
- d) Revised final paper. 1200 – 1500 words. Due December 17. Up to 10 points.

LEARNING GOALS OF THE COURSE

This First-Year Seminar is designed to strengthen your skills and knowledge in the core areas that Lasell prioritizes. As you practice the 4 Knowledge Perspectives (KPs) and the 7 Core Intellectual Skills, you will build your capacity to excel in all your other college courses - and in your future career.

4 Knowledge Perspectives:

- to interpret and analyze the complex interrelationships and inequities in human societies in a global and historical context (Global & Historical Perspective)
- to analyze modes of creative self-expression with an aesthetic perspective (Aesthetics & Creativity)
- to apply the process of scientific inquiry to comprehend the natural world and to solve problems (Scientific Inquiry & Problem Solving)
- to evaluate and understand how individual differences relate to social norms, trends and problems (Individuals and Society)

7 Core Intellectual Skills:

- to read and respond in an informed and discerning way to written texts of different genres
- to write clear, well-organized, persuasive prose
- to use listening and speaking skills to express ideas and information clearly and confidently in a variety of settings
- to apply quantitative reasoning to solve problems effectively
- to use appropriate technological tools to solve problems efficiently
- to collect, analyze, and synthesize appropriate data and sources effectively, ethically, and legally
- to work effectively in collaborative settings

Learn the ropes of succeeding at Lasell College:

- How to use Canvas and syllabi to understand professor expectations
- Where to get support with academic, health and other problems
- How to manage your time, meet your deadlines and maximize your grades
- How to come across like a professional to professors and employers

Policy on student opinions

The final paper, essays and discussions will require you to put forward opinions. Feel free to try out a stance new to you, or one you aren't sure you actually agree with. If you disagree with the professor or the author of a reading, you will not be graded more strictly for that; if you agree, you will not be graded more leniently. All positions you take will be evaluated only by whether you present evidence and whether you make a reasoned argument.

Diversity and Inclusion

The Lasell community appreciates diverse, global perspectives and recognizes that students, faculty, and staff from a range of backgrounds make our campus greater. We are committed to providing our community with the academic resources and professional development needed to foster an inclusive environment. More information is available at:

<https://www.lasell.edu/campus-life/diversity-and-inclusion.html>.

Definition of Connected Learning

Connected Learning is the Lasell University educational philosophy describing the process of integrating ideas, concepts, and direct experience through action, combining projects, simulations, and real-world situations with direct, critical reflection. At Lasell, we include these components in every course so that students further develop and apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom.

Lasell's mission statement: We immerse students in experiential and collaborative learning that fosters lifelong intellectual exploration and social responsibility.