OBTC 2017 at Providence College
June 14th – 17th, 2017

Submission Template

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Submission Template for the
2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title: Seeing Social Class and Understanding Our Students

Abstract: There are large gaps in academic performance between students from low and high socioeconomic groups. In this session we introduce faculty to the research that explains these gaps, and lead them through exercises that challenge them to see how their assumptions and behaviors either bridge or exacerbate these gaps. We conclude with a discussion generating supportive faculty behaviors. We expect these ideas will surprise attendees as supportive behaviors are not what faculty expect them to be. This is NOT about spending more time in office hours with students one-on-one, using class time to teach remedial skills, or lowering performance standards.

Keywords: Social Class, Socioeconomic Status, Student-Faculty Interactions, Habitus

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

Contribution

The session provides alternate ways of seeing and understanding our students; encourages us as faculty to re-examine our assumptions, expectations and behaviors about students and their interactions with us; and, enables us to recognize and better serve a rapidly growing segment of the student population, working-class students. This is particularly relevant to management pedagogy as working-class students are more likely to choose vocational majors such as business, and business departments tend to have an even higher proportion of working-class students than the college population as a whole.

Learning Objectives
1. Define Bourdieu's and Stephens' concepts regarding social class (habitus, field, practice, etc.).
2. Identify how our enactment or embodiment of these concepts affects our expectations regarding student - faculty interactions and student demonstrations of acquired knowledge and academic ability.
3. Re-evaluate at least one example of a teaching situation through the lens of these concepts.
4. Discuss the faculty benefits and challenges of teaching with an awareness and understanding of social class differences between ourselves and our students.

5. Generate plausible changes in faculty behaviors and class management techniques that enable working-class students to acquire knowledge and demonstrate ability in ways that meet academic standards and expectations.

Describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Please include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

The management and teaching topics that are relevant to this session include, but are not limited to, social class diversity, student behavior and attitudes, and faculty expectations.

Overview

To be successful in college, students must understand instructors' expectations, apply learning and study skills to those expectations, and demonstrate acquired knowledge and academic ability. Many components of faculty expectations and the subsequent student behaviors that lead to academic success are unspoken and unspecified, as it is assumed college students learned these behavioral norms during their primary and secondary schooling. We argue that part of the reason middle-class and upper class students outperform their working class peers is because middle-class and upper class students do know these norms, and thereby how to succeed in college, while most working-class students do not. Working-class students are unaware of these school norms and traditions because they hold a different habitus from middle-class and upper class students and college faculty (Bourdieu, 1990, Stephens, Fryberg, and Markus, 2011, Stephens and Townsend, 2013, Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin, 2014, Stephens, Dittman, and Townsend, 2016). Further, even when made aware of school norms and traditions, working class students' habitus may make it difficult for them to 'master their role' (Collier and Morgan, 2008) and internalize faculty expectations or behave like middle-class and upper class students. There are also significant differences in the preparation of working class students, who are often behind in learning and study skill development as well (Larimore and Sidhu, 2016). The combination makes it very difficult for them to acquire knowledge and demonstrate academic ability at the same rate as their middle class and upper class peers. Finally, under-informed faculty teaching across class boundaries may be unintentionally exacerbating these challenges in multiple ways.

Theoretical Foundations & Literature

Our society has strong narratives arguing for the existence of social mobility (Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project, 2012, Brizard, 2014, Chetty et al, 2014, Tankersley, 2014) and education is often described as an equalizer (Rhode et al, 2012, Brizard, 2014, Blank, 2015). While college is the main vehicle for formal post-secondary learning in this country, knowledge about the content of the curriculum "is only one part of the process" (Eraut, 2000:131). When two students have the same course content knowledge, the one whose behavior professors see as a better fit with faculty expectations will likely get a higher grade (Eraut, 2000, Collier and Morgan, 2008). Understanding how to show what you know, in an appropriate and understood way, can be thought of as demonstrating "role mastery" (Collier and Morgan, 2008), and is related to what Bourdieu called cultural capital, or an ease with the rules of the game (1984). Because college is the primary mechanism by which the culture of the dominant class is both

transmitted and rewarded (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), requiring students to be 'at ease with the game' in order to succeed at the game perpetuates the status of the dominant class. Instead of education being an equalizer and a path to upward mobility, it ends up perpetuating social advantages and disadvantages instead (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Understanding how students from different social classes perceive and play 'the game of college' will help faculty increase the avenues to success for students from non-dominant social classes. But first, we need to understand what social class most faculty operate within, and how faculty perpetuate existing social class structures. We suggest that faculty hold a different habitus from working class students, since faculty generally attended, and were trained at, schools comprised primarily of middle class and upper class college students (Brightman, 2009, Bok, 2013, Krebs, 2014). Most faculty were themselves very successful in college, and most likely adopted the professional attitudes, orientations, and behaviors of the dominant (middle and upper) class in the course of their own education and training. Having internalized the system that worked for them, faculty operate within the habitus of the social class of academics.

According to Bourdieu, faculty perpetuate existing class structures when they act in a way that assumes a shared habitus with their students. Habitus is "a largely unconscious collection of preferences, behaviors, and styles of self-presentation shaped during childhood." … An "embodied history, internalized as second nature" (Bourdieu, 1990:56). When we assume students come to college for the same purposes we did, or value education in the same way we do, or have the wherewithal to dedicate the same resources to college as most students do, we expect them to behave in specific ways, and reward them for doing so. When students don't live up to our taken-for-granted expectations, we see the students as a problem, not as individuals with different values, needs, or resources. When we do not see, understand or respect class-based differences, we cannot understand their choices or behaviors. Nor can we be conscious or critical of our own gaffes and faux pas that exacerbate class based differences and divisions. Further, without awareness, we cannot look beyond students' 'deviant' behaviors to seek alternative evidence of skill development, knowledge acquisition or academic ability. In this way, unaware faculty may unintentionally exclude students from aspects of a college education that enable class mobility.

Differences between working class and middle class/upper class students exist in multiple areas and these differences manifest in different 'lived college experiences' in general and different attitudes and behaviors in the classroom and during interaction with faculty. These differences have nothing to do with how smart or capable working class students are, but they have everything to do with how these students 'show us what they know.' As faculty, we are in a position of power with regard to social class in the classroom and gatekeepers with regard to social class mobility in our society. Ignoring our power means denying our role in perpetuating existing social class divisions. If we want to be effective teachers and reach all of our students, we must acknowledge our place between the social classes, and do all we can to recognize, understand, and reach across social class divides. We must examine how we can successfully educate all students, irrespective of their social class. With respect to working-class students, we must recognize and respect who they are and what they bring to our community while also

discovering, with them, which, if any, social capital they should acquire to succeed in college and their professional careers. We hope that discussions with other management educators investigating their own experiences will give us all better understanding of the ways our students differ, who they are, in what context they make decisions, interpret information, and absorb what we are teaching. We want to challenge ourselves to look at this information, develop better tools and ideas and determine how to use them to ensure greater success for all of our students.

Understanding, reaching, and ultimately educating working class students is becoming more the norm than the exception for many business faculty in the U.S. today. One-half of the U.S. college population is made up of first-generation students, or those whose parents did not receive education beyond a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education via Lynch, 2013). Students from working class backgrounds tend to major in pre-professional fields such as business (Walpole, 2003, Goyette and Mullen, 2006, Glenn, 2011). More specifically, business students are more likely than arts and sciences majors to have lower socioeconomic status and attend less selective and more comprehensive universities (Goyette and Mullen, 2006). There have been efforts in the liberal arts, humanities, and education, for faculty to try and understand who students are, what they believe, where they come from, and how that affects how they learn, in support of improving teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Winklemes, 2013). We hope to bring this understanding to business faculty as we too realize the importance of reaching across social class divides.

We argue that many students, working class, and/or first-generation college students (FGCS), and/or those of low socioeconomic status (SES), hold a different habitus from other college students and from faculty. We believe holding this different habitus thus hampers their ability to understand and internalize professors' expectations.

The issue of college students having a different habitus from faculty is not going away. Recent reports highlight a shortage of 5 million college degrees by 2020 (Carnevale, et al, 2013). With history as a predictor of future events, low-SES students will continue to choose the Business Administration major (Goyette and Mullen, 2006), so business departments will continue to receive a disproportionately high share of low SES students.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

Introduction: Demographic Trends and Theoretical Framework: 20 minutes
The session will begin with an overview of what kind of students tend to attend college and be management majors, based on broad demographic research over the past 10 years. We will

summarize some key concepts from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu—cultural capital, habitus, field, and practice. We will explore his argument that where you start out affects where you end up, and how student backgrounds and assumptions affect their ability to 'do college', their faculty interactions, and how they see the purpose of college.

Example Application: 10—15 minutes
We will work through one example, using the discussion questions below, to illustrate the ways that our emotions, thought processes, actions, and course design changed as a result of applying these theories to ourselves and our students.

Application and Discussion: 25—30 minutes
We will work through some 'typical' classroom scenarios, incorporating this new information about students, and ask participants to re-examine their own assumptions about what is happening, and why students are behaving as they do. Participants will have 5--10 minutes to work through the questions on their own, before coming together in groups to discuss. Depending on the number of attendees present, we may assign different scenarios to different groups so they have time to go more in depth on the process questions.

Debrief: 20—30 minutes
After the groups discuss each scenario and the process questions, we will have a debriefing where we share each scenario and the ideas each group generated with regard to course changes or faculty behavior changes. We will summarize on a whiteboard or poster board the concrete ideas that are generated. We will lead the group towards additional ideas together. Finally, we will close with a conversation regarding our role to balance both empowering students to come as they are and grow as they will with the 'proper' acquisition of college and professional capital. We will leave attendees with the question - where is that line? Is it shifting? How far are you comfortable with moving it?

Note: the discussion and debrief times are intentionally long based on our experience presenting this at one of our schools. It can be difficult for participants to shift the focus away from the students and toward themselves and their own assumptions, and we want to have enough time for this to at least begin to happen.

Scenarios:
1) It's the third week of class. You receive an email from a student that says, in part, "I can't do my homework because I don't have the book yet. I ordered it online two weeks ago, but it's not here yet."
2) Your class includes a lot of discussion. One student never volunteers, but sometimes will answer if you ask him directly. Once, when you were talking with his group about something they did not do well, he looked at the ground the whole time and seemed ashamed and maybe scared.
3) Your class has a weekly online quiz. One week, only 4 of 25 students took it. When you ask, they say, "We didn't know it was due. You didn't write it on the board last week." You say: "It's in the syllabus! It doesn't matter whether I write it on the board; it's still due!"

Outline for Scenarios Activity/Process

Read each scenario, then answer these questions

1. What is your first reaction, emotional and/or otherwise?

Now think about this scenario in light of Bourdieu's theories.

2. What are the practices in this field that the student is not following?
3. What options might be invisible to the student? To you?
4. What externalities might be causing or affecting this situation?
5. What can you change about the course structure or infrastructure to avoid this situation in the future? Note: Course infrastructure includes things like putting books on reserve in the library or policies that you tend to keep consistent across courses you teach.
   a. To accommodate externalities?
   b. To encourage otherwise unfamiliar behaviors?
   c. To make visible norms or possible student choices that might otherwise be invisible?
   d. To encourage acquisition of college-relevant cultural capital?
6. What about your classroom behavior, student interactions, explanations of policies, etc., can you change:
   a. To make explicit the practices in this field and/or that practices differ in different fields?
   b. To accommodate externalities?
   c. To make the invisible become visible?
7. What is one thing you can do now, for this student?
8. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, how can we allow this way of seeing to change us?
   a. How can we access our privilege?
   b. How can we learn to recognize
      i. The practices in our field
      ii. Our own habitus—or at least our assumptions, preferences, and behaviors
      iii. The invisible and visible choices/options?
      iv. How does this way of seeing our students change the way we feel?

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

Demographics are changing rapidly in the U.S., and student demographics are changing first. While the population overall is not projected to be a minority-majority until approximately 2043, the demographic shift has already occurred in primary and secondary schools and is headed towards college (Williams, 2014). In 2014 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that there were more minority students than white students in primary and secondary public school classrooms (Williams, 2014). In 2013, the percentage of primary and secondary students in low-income households grew to 51% (Bidwell, 2015). So it shouldn't

be a surprise that the University of California system admitted more Latino students (29%) than whites (27%) in 2014, and that young people seeking a college education today are increasingly likely to be first generation college students and/or students that struggle to gather the resources necessary to attend and succeed (Williams, 2014). Both our institutions and our faculty need to understand this population and their needs if we are to serve them well.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

The research in this proposal has been presented at a conference other than OBTC, but we did not engage the audience in the reflection exercises or discuss the teaching scenarios proposed here. The research and an early version of the reflection exercises were presented during a workshop for faculty at one of our institutions. It is not under review.

An earlier version of this proposal was submitted to, and accepted for, IOBTC 2016, but was not presented due to a funding shortfall at one of our institutions.

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