An Overview of the U.S. Higher Education System

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Roadmap

1. An overview of the U.S. HIED System
2. Take-aways for you to review later…
   • List of surprises shared by previous international TAs
   • Additional questions to consider

Suggested resources
Intended Learning Outcomes

• By the end of this session, you will be able to…
  • Identify various types of higher education institutions and settings in the U.S.
  • Discuss the diversity of students in U.S. HIED
  • Demonstrate awareness of students' rights to privacy according to HIPAA and FERPA
A (very brief) history of U.S. HIED

HIED Institutions in the U.S. ...

• Began as places for very specific populations
  • Clergy, eventually teachers, maintaining elite social class

• Access expanded to meet needs of local communities and to educate more diverse students

• Used to have philosophy of university serving as parental figure to students (“in loco parentis”)
What are the types of colleges and universities in the U.S.?
The U.S. higher education system is very large with many differences in institutional types and settings.
• Approx. 4,700 postsecondary institutions

HIED institutions are different in many ways, including variations in:
• Size
• Types and locations
• Demographics
• Selectivity
• Public vs. Private
• 2 year vs. 4 year, etc
• Mission
U.S. HIED institutional types and settings

• There are so many interesting details, we could not possibly cover them all here today! So, we’ll focus on the following:

• HIED institutional…
  • Size
  • Types and locations
  • Demographics
U.S. HIED institutions – Locations
U.S. HIED institutions – Locations
U.S. HIED institutions - Size

Undergraduate Student Body
- Small (< 2,000)
- Medium (2,000–15,000)
- Large (> 15,000)

Institutional Size
- Community Colleges
- Two year colleges
- Four year colleges
- Comprehensive universities
- Liberal arts colleges
- Technical schools

Degrees Awarded
- Certificate
- Associate’s
- Bachelor’s
- Advanced

Note: U.S. Department of Education has a federal role, but state and institutional control too
“College” vs. “University” in the U.S.

Generally people in the U.S. use the word “college” to refer to any type of higher education.

Examples:
A student at the University of Arkansas says...
“I love being a college student!”
“I’m going to college.”
“I am working on a college degree.”

An exception...
Some “colleges” relate to specific areas of study and are part of a university campus.

Examples:
College of Education at the University of Arkansas

Colleges
• Generally...
  • May be smaller than a university
  • May not offer graduate degrees

University
• Generally...
  • May be larger
  • Offer undergraduate and graduate degrees
U.S. HIED institutions - Types

Selectivity
  • Range of admissions standards from highly selective (such as Ivy Leagues) to open access (community colleges)

Institutional Types
  • Liberal Arts
  • Women’s institutions
  • Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)
  • Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI)
  • Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI)
  • Tribal colleges and universities (TCU)
  • Religiously affiliated
**University of Arkansas**
Administration Bldg 425, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701

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**Campus setting:**
City: Small

**Campus housing:**
Yes

**Student population:**
26,754 (22,159 undergraduate)

**Student-to-faculty ratio:**
19 to 1
Who are our students?
University students in the U.S.:

- ...will have a wide range of backgrounds and abilities
- ...will often have inadequate preparation for the rigors of university level academic work
- ...will not always know what they want to study and what career they wish to have after college
- ...will often have jobs to help pay for university and living expenses

“Traditional” and “Non-Traditional” Students
College Students Today

Generation Z college students: Who are they?
• Digital natives
  • Internet
  • Social Media
  • Video instruction
• Encourage independent, self-paced learning, but not at the expense of facilitated learning. While Generation Z members are the true digital natives, they place huge emphasis and value on face-to-face interaction
• Self-identify as being loyal, compassionate, thoughtful, open-minded, responsible, and determined
• Greatest concerns: Education, employment, and racial equality
• Disengaged from and skeptical of politics
• Realistic and pragmatic – Job is not guaranteed. Want to know what they are learning will translate into helping them beyond the classroom
  • Less optimistic than millennials
• Great recession = unsettled and insecure
• Career minded from point of insecure economy
• Have "thoughtful worldview" and want to engage in service that has a tangible and lasting impact on systematic and structural problems. Want to advocate and work on behalf of something they believe in.
• Capitalize on their passion and engagement because many see higher education as a steppingstone for their careers
- Prefer intrapersonal learning. They like journals, reflection, and quiet solo projects.
- Like “pre-learning” and flipped learning - having something to learn before they come to class
- They do not like group work. They like to be able to focus and go at their own pace and direction, and choose their own interests
- Less likely to take risks
- Have done a lot of self learning online, so need critical thinking skills about evaluating sources of information
- Diverse social identities
Circumstances of College Students Today:

• Balancing Multiple Responsibilities

• Older and More Racially Diverse

• Financially Support Themselves... And Often Struggle to Make Ends Meet

• Less Likely to Graduate

https://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/todays-student-infographic
Diversity & College Student Subcultures

• First generation college students
  • Students from low income backgrounds

• Students with disabilities

• Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) communities

• Older adult learners
  • Military veterans

• Race and Ethnicity
  • Religion
BALANCING MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

THREE-QUARTERS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
COMMUTE TO CLASS WHILE JUGGLING PARENTING,
WORKING AND BOTH.

STUDENTS WORK ON AVERAGE
19 HOURS PER WEEK

ABOUT
40 PERCENT
OF COMMUNITY-COLLEGE STUDENTS
WORK 20 OR MORE HOURS PER WEEK.

40 PERCENT
ATTEND SCHOOL ONLY PART-TIME.

40%
OLDER AND MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE

38 PERCENT OF ALL TODAY’S UNDERGRADUATES ARE OLDER THAN 25.


ENROLLMENT AMONG HISPANIC STUDENTS TRIPLED SINCE THE MID-1990’S,

AND BLACK STUDENT ENROLLMENT GREW BY 72 PERCENT.

AND THOSE TRENDS ARE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THROUGH 2021, WITH BLACK ENROLLMENT PROJECTED TO GROW BY 25 PERCENT, HISPANIC STUDENTS PROJECTED TO INCREASE BY 42 PERCENT, AND ONLY A 4 PERCENT INCREASE IN WHITE STUDENTS FORECASTED.
Almost half of today’s students are on their own financially. Half of those students (25%) have financial dependents of their own.

4.8 million postsecondary students are parents, and of those, 61 percent have no money to contribute to the cost of college.

88 percent of single student-parents have incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line.
LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE

Students with additional financial, work and family obligations are twice as likely to drop out of school in their first year as students fresh out of high school – 38 percent compared to 16 percent.

No more than a quarter of part-time students make it to graduation, even when given twice as long to complete.
UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT

40 ATTEND 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS
12 are <25
5 are 25 and older

60 ATTEND 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS
41 are <25
5 are 25 and older

PART-TIME STUDENTS
12 are <25
11 are 25 and older

FULL-TIME STUDENTS
7 are <25
7 are 25 and older
AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- 32 students receiving any financial aid
- 12 students graduate on time

AT 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- 51 students receiving any financial aid
- 35 students graduate on time
Example

UNDERGRADUATE ATTENDANCE STATUS

- 12% Part-time
- 88% Full-time

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GENDER

- 52% Female
- 48% Male
Example

**Undergraduate Student Age**
- 90% 24 and under
- 10% 25 and over
- 0% Age unknown

**Undergraduate Student Residence**
- 52% In-state
- 47% Out-of-state
- 2% Foreign countries
- 0% Unknown
Example
College Student Cultures

The life of the university community

• School spirit
• Athletics
• Student organizations based on academic, social, personal interest
• “Student Affairs” or “Student Services” for support
• Many resources to support them on campus such as academic advisors, student health and wellness centers, involvement organizations for interests
  • Good to know for referrals
Students' Rights to Privacy

Previously “in loco parentis”

Laws

- **HIPPAA**
  - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 is legislation that keeps medical information private

- **FERPA**
  - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act protects privacy of student education records
  - Students have the right to inspect and review their education records
Students’ Rights to Privacy

HIPPA and FERPA…What can you do?

• Secure files (electronic and hard copy)
  • Locked cabinets, strong passwords on computers
  • Use paper shredders for old documents

• Never release student information without their consent
  • This includes media such as reporters, family members

• Ask your department for training/resources
Books on HIED in the U.S.
- College Students in the United States by Renn and Reason
- A History of American Higher Education by Thelin
- American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century by Bastedo, Altbach, Bumport (4th ed)

Good sources for current events in U.S. HIED
- Chronicle of Higher Education
- Inside Higher Education

U.S. HIED professional associations with resources online
- ACPA: College Student Educators International
- NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in HIED
- ASHE: Association for the Study of HIED
- AERA: American Educational Research Association
Books

• Generation Z Goes to College by Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace
• Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors by Linda Nilson
• The Undergraduate Experience: Focusing Institutions on What Matters Most by Felton, Gardner, Schroeder, Lambert, and Barefoot
• How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching by Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, and Norman
• Teaching for Learning: 101 Intentionally Designed Educational Activities to Put Students on the Path to Success by Major, Harris, and Zakrajsek

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning resources

• Faculty Focus
• Michigan State U FOD
• Northwestern U SEARLE
• University of Michigan CRLT
• The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

Additional Resources
Final tidbits...

- Some common surprises for international TAs
- Other questions to consider
- Resources
Thank you!

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Some common surprises for International TAs...

• You may be the first person from outside the U.S. the student has ever met
  • Most students are excited to learn about other cultures and to make connections, although it may be new to them

• Degree of (in)formality in student interactions
  • Greetings and use of names
    • Let students know what you prefer
  • Student dress/attire often very casual
  • Communication (type and frequency)
    • Expect you to be available, approachable, and caring – but you set boundaries
Some common surprises for International TAs...

- Student expectations of faculty (including TAs)
- Amount and type of student participation in class
  - Students raising hands or speaking up with questions
  - Expect interactive, engaged learning and not just lecture and note taking
- Eating and drinking in class is common
- Use of technology in class (cell phones, laptops, tablets)
- If a student feels they have been treated unfairly, it is common for them to complain or challenge the teacher
- Students often ask for explanations of their grades and will try to “negotiate”
- Balancing the personal and professional
Other questions to consider...

(Discuss together, and ask your students!)
Other Questions to Consider...

- At what age do students begin considering attending college?
- How do students choose which college to attend?
- What are the admissions standards and requirements to attend university?
  - Entrance exams, GPA, etc.
- What percentage of secondary school students continues to university?
- How difficult is it to get into university?
  - Mass education or elite? Public or private good?
- Who pays for college?
- Who sets the curriculum and how much freedom do students have in choosing their major area of study?
- When and how do students decide on their major specialization?
Other Questions to Consider...

- What is university student culture like?
- How do students typically spend their time outside of the classroom
  - Time spent studying? Socializing? Working? With family obligations?
- Where do students live while in university?
- How long is the typical undergraduate degree program?
  - Graduate degree program length?
- What is the relationship like between university students and faculty members?
  - Formal or informal? Frequent contact?
- What is the classroom climate like?
  - Formal or informal? Common types of learning activities and teaching styles?
- How is student learning assessed?