

Socioeconomic status and college: How SES affects college experiences and outcomes.

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Abstract

This study investigated college experiences and outcomes for low and high SES students utilizing data from a longitudinal database. Low SES students engaged in fewer extracurricular activities, worked more, studied less, and reported lower GPAs than their high SES peers. Nine years after entering college, the low SES students had lower incomes, educational attainment, and graduate school attendance than high SES students. These experiential and outcome differences are tied to differences in cultural capital and habitus.

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Students from low socioeconomic (SES) families have been part of American higher education since its earliest days, although always in small numbers, and are still underrepresented in higher education, particularly in four-year institutions and more selective colleges (Hearn, 1984, 1990; McDonough, 1997). Although this group of students is widely acknowledged as educationally disadvantaged, they have received scant attention from researchers, in spite of calls for such research (Berger, 2000; Berger, Mikem, & Paulsen, 1998; Tinto, 1987, 1993). This lack of attention is due, in part, to a traditional higher education research focus on mainstream students (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). In recent years, however, although low SES students have received little attention, scholarship focusing on the ex-

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