nonprofit four-year colleges and universities are not doing their part to appeal to these students.

While there has been a recent push among some elite colleges and universities to recruit students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Hill and Levy 2015), I argue here that increasing socioeconomic diversity is not a desirable goal for the vast majority of campuses. Due to the reduction of governmental funding and corresponding rise in tuition rates along with the flawed system of college rankings, colleges and universities have little incentive to increase socioeconomic diversity.

DECREASING GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT AND INCREASING TUITION RATES

Because governmental support for public institutions has been drastically cut in the past few decades, public colleges and universities are increasingly reliant upon tuition.

In turn, the failure of Pell and other governmental grants to keep pace with these tuition increases necessitates that families from the lower and middle range of the income spectrum must rely increasingly on loans as a method of paying for college.

For example, the Pell grant, which was designed to aid low-income students in attending college, has not kept stride with increasing tuition rates. While the maximum Pell grant covered 87% of average public four-year tuition and fees in 2003–2004, ten years later it only covers 63% (College Board 2013). The corresponding contemporary percentage for private nonprofit colleges is a measly 19%.

Public colleges and universities, which were historically funded in large part by federal and state governments, have been raising tuition fees to make up the deficit in recent dwindling governmental support (Ehrenberg 2006). Indeed, the percentage of state funding allocated to higher education has been reduced by more than a third over the last few decades (2006).

Meanwhile, private colleges strive to find families who can pay full tuition, and spend large portions of their budgets on building state-of-the-art dining halls and dorms in order to attract the “country club” set (Jacob et al. 2013). Students who cannot pay for college out of pocket

have been forced to rely more heavily on student loans as federal and state funding for low-income students have decreased as well (St. John 2003).

The shift from government-based financing to a reliance on families to pay the college bills has resulted in an ironic shift of funding among private and public institutions. Most private institutions are able to draw on their endowments and governmental aid sources to offer students a discounted tuition rate, while public institutions have been relying in larger part on families to foot the bill and taking out more and more loans to do so. The funding limitations at public colleges and universities are especially troubling because 80% of all college students attend public institutions (Ehrenberg 2006).

Problematically, the governmental financial aid that remains has shifted in large part from being need-based (i.e., distributed on the basis of financial need) to merit-based (distributed on the basis of "merit," measured on the basis of grades and/or test scores). As need-based aid has declined, state-based merit aid programs have gained support across the country (Heller 2006).

While some research suggests that the transparent guidelines of these programs have helped low-income students gain access (Ness and Tucker 2008), other studies suggest that these programs are providing funding for students whose families would have been able to pay for college while shutting out those who could not (Heller 2006). Indeed, concurrent with an increase in non-need aid in the form of state grants in 1995–2004, data show that high-income student aid grew by more than 200% while aid for low-income students grew by only 50%, a troubling pattern across both private *and* public institutions (Haycock 2006).

Needy students who do not receive enough aid to pay the sticker price often make up the difference by taking out student loan debt, which currently is the largest type of debt in American society, having surpassed credit card debt in 2010 (Kantrowitz 2010). The majority of students borrow to pay college costs with the average debt amount upon graduation topping out at more than $26,000 (Avery and Turner 2012; Reed and Cochrane 2012).

Low-income students are more likely to take out loans and hold more debt than their high-income peers (Kesterman 2006; Warnock and Hurst 2015). Students who attended for-profit colleges, a demographic dominated by low-income students, are more likely to default on these loans (Hillman 2014).

Another change in response to declining governmental funding is the shifting composition of campus faculty, which has evolved from being mostly tenured or tenure-track to a majority of contingent faculty labor (AAUP 2015).

Seeking to cut costs in the face of reduced governmental funding, public colleges and universities in particular have eliminated tenure-track lines in favor of hiring contingent faculty, who are paid significantly less and are often ineligible for benefits. In one study of the State University of New York system, researchers found that the percentage of classes taught by tenure-track or tenured instructors had declined by 22 percentage points during the 1990s (Ehrenberg and Klaff 2003).

Research suggests that the increasing reliance on contingent faculty has come at a cost to the student body. One study found that first-year students with an "adjunct-heavy" course schedule were less likely to continue to their sophomore year (Bettinger and Long 2006). Another suggests that the increase in contingent faculty is associated with declining four-year graduation rates overall (Ehrenberg and Zhang 2006).

Colleges and universities have increasingly adopted corporate lingo as they seek to find "customers" and keep them happy (Saunders 2014). Implicit in this language is the financial relationship between college and student, a relationship that has become more akin to a transaction in recent years than the learning and apprenticeship it should be. Campuses are being designed in order to attract the "country club" set and along with them the vital dollars they need to remain viable.

Where is there room within this context for the working-class and/or first-generation student who seeks upward mobility through higher education? Where is there room for the working-class academic who seeks to foster and encourage socioeconomic diversity on college campuses? Both are a rarity on the contemporary college campus and, when they are present and vocal, they bump up against the commitment to the bottom line.

THE INCENTIVE STRUCTURE OF THE RANKINGS SYSTEM

Part of the problem has to do not only with the hostile economic climate these institutions face, but also with the ways in which they seek to maintain status among their peers. *U.S. News & World Report* rankings are one of the ways institutions (and their prospective clientele) gauge their place.[1]

The *U.S. News & World Report* has published college and university rankings since 1983. Their rankings are the most widely quoted of their kind in the United States and there is evidence that parents and students consider them when making decisions on where to enroll (Griffith and Rask 2007).

The influence of rankings on enrollment decisions does not go unnoticed by college and university administrators who alter their behavior in an attempt to increase them (Ehrenberg 2003b). Universities have raised tuition rates in an attempt to seem more "elite," have sought applications from unqualified students in order to lower their acceptance rate, increased merit aid to lure high-scoring students, and have mailed out expensive publications to administrators at peer institutions to increase their reputation scores, the most heavily weighted subfactor in the rankings (Ehrenberg 2003b).

When colleges and universities do rise in the rankings, they are rewarded with more applications, higher enrollments, and improved test scores (Ehrenberg 2003a). Some research suggests that a university's ranking is even more important in drawing coveted high-income, high-scoring students than merit aid scholarships (Griffith and Rask 2007).

How are these rankings calculated? The factor weighed most heavily (and equally to student retention) in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings is academic reputation, which is measured by soliciting evaluations from college and university administrators of all institutions in their same category (i.e., administration at a "national university" rank all other national universities on nebulous factors such as "faculty dedication to teaching") and by polling counselors at the top public and independent schools.

Regardless of the questionable likelihood that these evaluators would be able to accurately gauge how well each institution truly

performs, research has shown that previously published rankings significantly influence these peer assessments, net of any institutional changes in performance (Bastedo and Bowman 2010). The past rankings influence present reputation scores which then influence future rankings, indicating that rankings are, in part, a "self-fulfilling prophecy," or a prediction that becomes true simply by virtue of its definition.

Focused on raising their rankings, all colleges and universities compete for students with high SAT scores, a measure which has repeatedly been found to correlate highly with social class background (Balf 2014; Rampell 2009; Soares 2011). The race to recruit top-scoring students has arguably led to the aforementioned shift in aid from need-based to merit-based (Burd 2013).

U.S. News & World Report has recently introduced an additional component to the rankings called graduation rate performance, which takes into account student graduation rate net of student test scores and the percentage of the student body receiving Pell grants. While this is meant to be a measure of how well institutions serve low-income and lower-scoring students, it is worth only one-third of the nebulous reputation score in determining the overall ranking and ranks less than the measure of financial resources based upon per student spending.

The incentive structure to score high in these widely used rankings is thus based upon cultivating a reputation for success, recruiting high-scoring students who are also more likely to graduate in four years, and generous spending on "student services."

The faculty component of the rankings also does not account for the growth in the percentage of contingent faculty. The closest the rankings come is to account for the proportion of the faculty who are full-time, a number that accounts for 1% of the total score.

Along with building incentives into the rankings to recruit students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, incentives to hire and employ more tenure-track faculty, and especially tenure-track faculty from working-class backgrounds, are also needed. Indeed, there have been calls for the proportion of classes taught by adjunct faculty to be included in the rankings (Rollins 2012).

As the rankings are currently calculated, there is little to no incentive to colleges and universities to recruit low-income students

and, in fact, there are arguably disincentives to do so. Institutions are rewarded in the rankings for maintaining close relationships with top-ranked high schools (where low-income students are less likely to be found), for recruiting students with high SAT/ACT scores, for retaining students into the sophomore year, for graduating students within four years, and for spending on student facilities.

Although a higher proportion of contingent faculty on campus decreases graduation and retention rates, colleges and universities are not directly penalized in the rankings for increasing reliance on these underpaid and overworked faculty. Finally, there is also no incentive among the rankings for colleges and universities to identify and recruit faculty from working-class backgrounds, a point I will return to later.

THE LOW-INCOME AND/OR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCE

For first-generation students and those from low-income backgrounds, campus priorities are all too clear. These students often feel unacknowledged and unsupported in their struggles to acclimate to a climate built for their more privileged peers (Foster 2015; Hurst 2010; Hurst and Warnock 2015; Lee and Kramer 2013; Soria 2015). When they do seek to acclimate to a campus climate that too often privileges partying as a way of life, they see far greater consequences for sloughing off academically (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

Students from low- and middle-income families are more likely to work and work more hours per week than those from more economically privileged families (Choy and Berker 2003). For students who must work their way through college and who view higher education as their ticket to upward mobility, they often find the social landscape of the college campus to be an alienating and strange place with confused priorities (Hurst and Warnock 2015).

Studies show that first-generation and working-class students are less likely to be socially involved on campus than students from more class privileged families (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998; Stuber 2011). This lack of social integration results in the greater likelihood that first-

generation and low-income students will leave college with debt and no degree (Howard and Levine 2004).

Because socioeconomic diversity is not a clearly stated goal on many campuses and socioeconomic status tends to be an invisible and often stigmatized identity, these students often feel alone on campuses. Their comparatively low numbers at the nation's most selective colleges and universities can trigger awareness of their marginal positions on campus (D. Smith 2009) and the invisible nature of social class can make finding like-minded peers a challenge (Warnock and Hurst 2014).

While some campuses have programs to support first-generation and low-income students and some student-led groups have popped up on campuses around the country (Pappano 2015), the problem of upward social mobility on the contemporary college campus is too often painted as an individual journey (Hurst and Warnock 2015). This individualist rhetoric reinforces the neoliberal policies touting education as a private good that families and students should shoulder the burden for, as well as the merit-based aid policies that too often reward success on measures that have clearly been demonstrated to be class biased.

Low-income and first-generation students are often also at a loss for visible role models. Socioeconomic diversity among faculty has been largely ignored in the literature on diversifying faculty, although research suggests that faculty from working-class backgrounds differ in important ways from their more privileged academic peers (Haney 2015). Specifically, working-class academics remain hyperaware of their class background, reporting the need to work harder to compensate for their comparative lack of cultural and social capital. The sacrifices working-class people make by joining the academy, such as the guilt suffered at leaving behind friends and family, are real and often go unacknowledged.

Detailing the unique contributions of working-class academics to pedagogy and scholarship, including making class visible on campus by revealing their class backgrounds in the classroom and using their experiential knowledge of social class to shape their research agendas, Stricker (2011) makes a compelling argument for recognizing and recruiting for social class diversity within the professoriate. College can

be an alienating and even hostile environment for first-generation and working-class students.

The presence of working-class faculty can help these students to realize that someone like them can be successful in this environment. In addition, working-class students are more likely to seek out mentor relationships with faculty who come from similar backgrounds and are, thus, more likely to understand the challenges they face. The support that these students receive from similar background faculty could make the difference between leaving and staying.

Finally, working-class academics are more likely to pursue research agendas informed by their social class backgrounds and are more likely to be sensitive to the needs of working-class and first-generation students in the classroom. All of these components are a win for the retention and support of students who are too often overlooked on campus.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST STATUS INCONGRUITY

What does all of this mean for the working-class academic? It is difficult to reconcile the goals of facilitating upward mobility for students from similar backgrounds while being aware that the goals of many colleges and universities stand in contrast to the recruitment and support of these students. This, combined with the fact that campuses are increasingly reliant on adjunct labor, makes it difficult for the contemporary tenure-track or tenured working-class academic to reconcile his or her position in the academy.

Working-class academics already suffer from “status incongruity,” or a sense of being caught between two worlds, their working-class origin and their middle-class destination in academe (Sennett and Cobb 1972). Adding to this sense of unease is the realization that one’s work in the academy may be contributing much more to the social reproduction of class stratification in society than to the desired goal of aiding in students’ upward mobility that many working-class academics share (Stricker 2011).

If the goals of higher education truly are to provide the chance for upward mobility, then much work remains to be done. Central to this

task is the working-class academic and likeminded allies who understand the importance of recruiting low-income and first-generation students to four-year institutions and making sure that they receive the recognition and support they deserve once there. College ranking systems like the *U.S. News & World Report* should reward institutions that seek to increase socioeconomic diversity not only in the student body but in the tenured and tenure-track faculty as well.

Part of this also means acknowledging and seeking to reduce stratification among the faculty. Institutions of higher education must examine their goals of prestige and consider those who are being sacrificed in their quest to rise in the rankings. Finally, state and federal policymakers crafting decisions in higher education funding must consider the consequences for the low-income and first-generation students of this country.

All of these goals are difficult in the current sociopolitical and economic climate of higher education, among rising tuition rates, declining governmental aid, and students' necessarily increasing reliance on loans to pay for college. However, change is essential.

Rather than capitalizing on class by profiting from the loans of students who seek upward mobility through higher education and seeking to increase prestige through paying high-scoring (and all too often high-income) students to enroll, institutions should be capitalizing (or prioritizing) social class on campus, recruiting and supporting students and faculty from underrepresented low-income and/or first-generation backgrounds.

According to Soria (2015), concrete steps that campuses can take to recruit and support working-class students include

- Restructuring admissions policies
  - Eliminating legacy preferences and early decision admissions
  - Reducing the emphasis on test scores
  - Practicing need-blind admissions
- Increasing and better publicizing need-based financial aid
- Recruiting students from low-income public high schools

- Reaching out to families of first-generation and/or working-class students
- Implementing precollege bridge programs
- Diversifying tenure-track faculty on the basis of socioeconomic background
- Including social class as an important form of campus diversity
- Providing a safe space for students to explore their social class identities

Had these priorities been emphasized at the campus described in the opening vignette, the student group, and all working-class, first-generation, and/or low-income students and faculty on campus would have found crucially needed support.

These goals are not easy to attain in the current political and economic climate. However, colleges and universities must begin to demonstrate a commitment to socioeconomic diversity among the student body and the professoriate if we are to continue to identify higher education as a pathway to upward mobility.

NOTE

1. In the analysis of the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings reported here, I am using the 2014 criteria that were used to calculate the rankings for the 2015 issue, released on September 9, 2014. Information on the measures used can be found at http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2014/09/08/best-colleges-ranking-criteria-and-weights.

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