Mapping the Futures of Higher Education
(IDS 70200)
Spring 2015 Tuesday 4:15-6:15
Professors Cathy Davidson and William Kelly

The course is designed for doctoral students across the disciplines who will be teaching during S 2015 at one of CUNY’s colleges or community colleges.

As is the case with the larger Futures Initiative, this course looks in two directions at once, at innovation and equity. First, we will explore new methods of peer learning and teaching, interdisciplinary research collaborations, experiential learning, new digital tools, and public (online) contributions to knowledge. Second, we will consider the role of the university in society, especially public education in the U.S. in a stressed time where, nationally, we have seen declining support for public education, leading both to a student debt crisis and a professorial crisis of adjunct or contingent labor practices. What are the costs? Who bears them? What are the collective investments society makes in public education and what are the rewards? How do college students themselves contribute to society? And what will our contribution be?

Because much of the apparatus of modern higher education was developed roughly between 1865 and 1925, in and for the Taylorized Industrial Age, we will be proposing new pedagogical and institutional designs for the world we live in now. Doctoral students will be putting those ideas into practice in their own teaching in S 2015 on the CUNY campuses. Their undergraduates will be included as co-learners in this project, contributing their own ideas and feedback via course websites that will connect them to one another, across the campuses. As a final project across all the courses (and embodying both aspects of the class), we will design and populate a collaborative, online, public “CUNY Map of New York,” designed to visualize what college offers the community—and vice versa.

The Futures Initiative is dedicated to creating and inspiring new methods of interdisciplinary and collaborative learning and pedagogy in order to stimulate institutional changes in higher education. Drawing upon and catalyzing the energy of CUNY faculty and students, the Futures Initiative seeks to explore new models for empowering the next generation of intellectual leaders to teach and engage in research most effectively in our modern age. The Futures Initiative encourages peer-to-peer pedagogies that support open and connected forms of learning, experimentation, and multimedia publication. Housed at the Graduate Center and extending throughout the CUNY system, the Futures Initiative serves as a model for innovation and aims to inspire public reinvestment in higher education and in our collective future as a society.

“Mapping the Futures of Higher Education” Cross-listing Departments

Anthropology (ANTH 80600)
Art History (ART 80010)
Comparative Literature (CL 80100)
Critical Social/Personality Psychology
Earth and Environmental Sciences
English (ENGL 89010)
Music
Urban Education (UED 75200)
A major component of the Futures Initiative will be the development of a research project to examine research ecosystems and postgraduate pathways. We will investigate the changing career opportunities available for PhDs as well as the impact those changes have on research within and beyond the academy.

Academic research in all disciplines is affected by the career decisions that emerging scholars make. The increasing reliance on contingent labor, the appeal of industry jobs for scientists and technologists, and the growing importance of public engagement all affect the future of academic research, undergraduate teaching, and mentorship. However, the impact of adjunct labor is typically examined separately from other factors related to career choice, and most existing research elides the ways that these elements play out differently in various fields.

At the Futures Initiative, we recognize that all of these factors—adjunctification, increasing emphasis on industry and “alternative academic” careers, and the growing importance of public engagement—all affect one another and cannot be fully understood in isolation. We hope that by examining these complex questions in relation to one another and across disciplines, we will be able to see patterns that are not apparent when focusing on a smaller subset of the academic landscape.

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