

Social Class Supports: A Book Review

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CITATION

Martin, G.L., & Ardoin, S. (Eds.) (2021). *Social class supports: Programs and practices to serve and sustain poor and working-class students through higher education*. Stylus Publishing.

THE OVERALL NUMBER OF U.S. UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS HAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE

past 20 years. This growth has been due, in large part, to an influx of students from low-income families and students of color (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). In 2016, 20% of dependent undergraduate students were from families in poverty, up from only 12% in 1996, suggesting that more poor students are enrolling in and attending postsecondary institutions (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). With the increase of this student population, institutions must be adequately prepared to support and sustain them through programs and practices that are intentionally designed to address the needs of poor and working-class students.

As first-generation college students, editors Martin and Ardoin, lend their research expertise, passion, and personal experiences to *Social Class Supports*. Georgianna L. Martin is an associate professor of counseling and human development services at the University of Georgia. Her research interests include social-class identity and the college experiences of low-income, first-generation students; the impact of college students' out-of-class experiences on key learning outcomes such as critical thinking and socially responsible leadership; and social/political activism. Sonja Ardoin is a self-described higher education scholar-practitioner, who is proud of her rural, working-class background, and first-generation college student-to-Ph.D. journey. She is an associate professor in the higher education and student affairs program at Clemson University. Her research interests include social class identity in higher education; college access and success, particularly for first-generation college students and students from rural areas; student and women's leadership development and practice; and career preparation and pathways in higher education and student affairs.

Social Class Supports, the authors and editors present a range of strategies to provide the fundamental supports that poor and working-class students need to succeed while dismantling the inequitable barriers that make higher education difficult to navigate. They offer programs and practices that serve and sustain poor and working-class students through higher education. Framed around Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, and Liu's (2004) social class worldview model, the models provide a deeper understanding of and support social class identity.

The book is intended for future and current higher education professionals and educators whose aim is to effectively serve students from poor and working-class backgrounds. The editors note that there are many motivations for selecting and reading this book. Some readers may have similar experiences from poor or working-class backgrounds and seek to assist students with a shared identity. Others may want to do what they can through their influence and are motivated by values or altruism. Other readers may be reading the book reluctantly, as required by their department or institution to serve poor and working-class students. Others still may be motivated to increase retention and graduation rates, thus impacting their institution's "the bottom line." *Social Class Supports* is written to urge administrators, higher education professionals, and faculty to make institutional commitments enhance the collegiate experiences of poor and working-class students, a substantial and growing demographic on the college campus.

The concept of social class is complex and difficult to define. It has multiple layers and is often deemed a taboo subject (Martin & Ardoin, 2021). In their introduction, Martin and Ardoin ensure that readers have a baseline understanding of the holistic nature of social class and the terms that are often interchangeably used in higher education to describe it: low-income, low-socioeconomic status, disadvantaged, and Pell-eligible, among others. Furthermore, they offer Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model and Liu's (2004) social class worldview model as frameworks to grasp the overall nature of social class identity. The editors emphasize that social class is just one facet of an individual's identity and that it intersects with other social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and religion.

With a significant amount of theory-to-practice application for administrators and practitioners, the *Social Class Supports* authors and editors offer tried-and-true programs and practices implemented by higher education institutions to support poor and working-class students. As such, the book is organized into parts that illustrate the holistic ways institutions can support students from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Part One, *Access Supports*, is based on the belief that higher education institutions should begin supporting poor and working-class students before they ever reach the campus. It focuses on how to support students from underrepresented backgrounds and areas. With a total of three chapters, each presents a practical model based in theory to support access to students.

Part Two, *Basic Needs Supports*, addresses the most basic needs of poor and working-class students that further impact their access to and success in higher education, including housing insecurity and homelessness, food insecurity, clothing needs, medical and health-related needs, and access to local and community resources. The innovative ways to provide support for students once they enroll in their institution are explored further in Part Two, with the authors sharing how institutions provide resources and privacy for students experiencing basic needs insecurities.

In Part Three, *Academic and Learning Supports*, the authors explore how to add academic and learning support programs for poor and working-class students, with institutions implementing programs to increase academic engagement being showcased.

Part Four, *Advising Supports*, explores the critical role academic advising plays in supporting poor and working-class students and provides educators with an understanding of how faculty and administrators help students view advising as central to their success. In Part Four, the authors express, “Advising is one of very few college services that touches all students at some point during the higher education experience. Yet too often in higher education, advising services have been a missed opportunity, particularly when it comes to supporting poor and working-class students” (p. 195). The varied identities that intersect with social class are also highlighted in *Social Class Supports*.

Part Five, *Supports for Specific Populations*, takes a deeper look at supporting specific populations through the intersections of identities, including first-generation college students, undocumented or DACA students, Black students, students at Hispanic serving institutions, LGBTQ students, students formerly in foster care, and graduate students.

In the final part, Part Six, *Supports Through External Partnerships*, the authors examine external partnerships and collaborations that institutions should pursue as a means of supporting poor and working-class students. Through strategic partnerships, institutional leaders may identify individuals and external sources of funding to develop and sustain supports for poor and working-class students. The authors discuss the importance of developing shared vision and values across institutions and external partners to benefit each party. Desiree Polk-Bland, in chapter 26, presents how community colleges can partner with community-based organizations. Supporting poor and working-class students at two-year institutions is especially important, given that this student population overwhelmingly enrolls at community colleges (Pascoe, 2019). This was one of the few two-year institutions featured in *Social Class Supports*, demonstrating the need for more awareness and engagement with community colleges that are effectively supporting students from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Social Class Supports provides highly relevant and useful knowledge for higher education professionals and educators, especially with the practical application of the material. The theory-to-practice approach is user-friendly and highlights numerous real examples of institutions implementing best practices to support poor and working-class students. Martin and Ardoin compiled a robust collection of resources to support an ever-growing student population in higher education, drawing upon the expertise of students, practitioners, faculty, and scholars.

The editors and authors make extensive use of the terms “poor” and “working-class,” but a singular definition is never provided. Interchangeable terms are also used assuming that readers are aware of the criteria for these labels. Additional context or definitions early in the introduction would have provided a baseline for understanding exactly the populations under study throughout the book. Furthermore, most of the examples of programs and practices are from four-year institutions. Limited examples were provided of the supports in place at two-year institutions where there are higher rates of enrollment of low-income students. There is great need for programs and practices that support poor and working-class students at two-year institutions, and more theory-to-practice examples would have enriched the book. The editors also mention the need for access supports starting in middle school and high school, but no application or examples are presented. This is a missed opportunity to showcase programs that provide access to higher education for students from low-income backgrounds.

Overall, *Social Class Supports* offers theoretically sound and practical advice for those employed in higher education with poor and working-class students. It is a great introductory text to understanding the complexities of social class identity and supporting poor and working-class students. It provides scholars and practitioners alike with insights into the challenges poor and working-class students face when navigating academia. More importantly, *Social Class Supports* offers examples of programs and practices in place at higher education institutions. The contributors to the book are exceptionally diverse in race, ethnicity, culture, and gender, adding to the various experiences and perspectives. *Social Class Supports* is a must-read for those working in higher education with any student population, given the increase of students from poor and working-class backgrounds.

References

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