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The Privilege of Ease: Social Class and Campus Life at Highly Selective, Private Universities

Nathan D. Martin

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Abstract Active involvement in college activities is linked to a host of student development outcomes, including personal growth, achievement and satisfaction. Yet, to date there has been too little attention to how social class shapes campus involvement. Through an analysis of survey data of students attending a single elite university and a national sample of students at highly selective, private universities, I consider how class background is associated with participation in college activities and satisfaction with campus social life. Reflecting a history of class-based exclusion, the typical elite university student enters college from an affluent household, although distinct class fractions help conceal significant gaps and differences across the college years. Dominant class students devote considerable time to social and recreational activities, while middle and subordinate class students are more likely to have a part-time job to pay for college expenses. This pattern of campus involvement explains middle and subordinate class students' lower levels of satisfaction upon graduation.

Keywords Social class · Elite education · Extracurricular participation · College satisfaction

The American postsecondary system experienced a tremendous expansion in the decades following the Second World War. Since 1960, the college enrollment rate of high school graduates has increased from 45–69% and the number of colleges and universities has more than doubled (National Center for Education Statistics 2010). Growing access to higher education accompanied great promise for broadening opportunity and fostering upward mobility (Attwell and Lavin 2007); a college diploma is commonly viewed as a ticket to middle-class prosperity that can overcome the effects of disadvantaged social origin. However, persistent gaps remain, and working- and lower-class students continue to

N. D. Martin (✉)
School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University,
PO Box 874902, Tempe, AZ 85287-4902, USA
e-mail: ndm@asu.edu

be underrepresented at four-year colleges and universities, especially at highly selective institutions (Alon 2009; Rosenbaum 2004).

Enduring patterns of exclusion at the top tier of the postsecondary system represent a challenge to standards of equity and fairness in higher education. Elite universities have a disproportionate influence despite relatively small enrollments and act as channels to lucrative careers and positions of power. Students from wealthy and well-connected families enjoy an advantage during the admissions process at highly selective colleges and universities. This advantage extends from the use of private tutors and educational consultants to policies favoring legacies and students from families who can be expected to make substantial financial contributions (Martin and Spenner 2009; Stevens 2007). Further, the informal cultural knowledge common to middle and upper class households plays a key role in facilitating success during the transition to postsecondary education (Lareau and Weininger 2008). As I show in this study, social class not only predicts unequal access to highly selective, private universities, but also is associated with distinct relationships to campus life across the college years.

An extensive literature has highlighted the benefits of active campus involvement on college student development (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Participation in extracurricular activities and frequent interactions with faculty and fellow students outside of class predict a host of academic and development outcomes. Additionally, students who are more involved in campus life are more satisfied with their college academic and social experiences (Astin 1999). Exemplary recent studies of selective college and university students confirm that active campus involvement promotes satisfaction (e.g., Charles et al. 2009; Espenshade and Radford 2009), but have underappreciated class inequalities that persist across the college years. This study adds to the existing literature by considering the role of social class in shaping participation in academic, extracurricular and recreational activities, and in moderating the link between campus involvement and student satisfaction.

This article proceeds as follows: First, I review existing studies of college student satisfaction and involvement in campus life. Second, I describe my study design. I conduct an analysis of longitudinal survey data from a study of students at a single elite university and a sample of students attending national selective, private universities. Both datasets include a set of comparable items and together provide a detailed portrait of how students devote their time and energies from the first weeks on campus to the end of the fourth college year. Third, I present results from a descriptive analysis of social class and participation in various campus activities and a regression analysis predicting satisfaction with campus community and social life. In comparison to dominant class students, middle and subordinate class students are more likely to have a part-time job while taking courses and spend less time participating in social and recreational activities. This pattern of campus involvement explains class differences in satisfaction upon graduation. I conclude with a discussion of study limitations, directions for future research and policy implications.

Student Involvement and Satisfaction with Campus Life

Students enter colleges and universities not only to acquire academic knowledge and vocational skills, but also to form friendships, find romantic partners, and participate in extracurricular clubs (Arum and Roska 2011). Over the past half-century, there has been a steady decline in the amount of time the typical college or university student spends studying or doing homework, suggesting a shift in campus culture to place more emphasis

on social life and leisure activities (Babcock and Marks 2011). Elite universities, however, have long celebrated the "collegiate scholar" subculture and a student lifestyle that balances academic achievement with an active social life (Ellis et al. 1971; Ellis and Manderscheid 1974). At Harvard, Princeton and Yale during the early-twentieth century, a commitment to club life was regularly valued over success in the classroom. This ideal of a well-rounded (if not academically-disinclined) student—typified by the "gentleman's C"—factored into assessments of character and leadership to justify the continued favoritism of the established elite (Karabel 2005).

Due to a reliable correspondence between the resources associated with dominant status origins and those rewarded in elite institutional settings, students from affluent and highly educated families experience higher levels of comfort and ease when navigating the university campus (Bourdieu 1996). Satisfaction with campus life is a useful measure of the degree of fit between students' expectations and actual postsecondary experiences for several reasons. Student reports of satisfaction provide a subjective assessment of how well colleges and universities meet their goals and promote a welcoming environment for intellectual and personal growth (Astin 1993). High levels of satisfaction are associated with a range of positive development outcomes, including student engagement, learning, and academic performance (Kuh et al. 2005). Additionally, campus administrators and faculty have an interest in maximizing student satisfaction, as it predicts college persistence and degree completion (Brown 2000; Lohfink and Paulsen 2005). Alumni who are more satisfied with their college experience are more likely to donate time and financial resources to their alma mater (Clotfelter 2003; Weerts and Ronca 2008).

The current literature supports the view that student satisfaction is a function of active involvement in campus life, including frequent interactions with faculty and other students outside of the classroom or lecture hall (Astin 1999; Lamport 1993). Studies of college and university students find positive links between satisfaction with the college experience and on-campus residence (Astin 1993), mentoring relationships (Sax et al. 2005), regular contact with faculty and peers (Endo and Harpel 1982; Pike 1991), access to campus support networks (Brown 2000), involvement in residential learning communities (Zhao and Kuh 2004), and participation in intercollegiate athletics (Pascarella and Smart 1991).

Studies of selective colleges and universities find that most students report high levels of satisfaction with their academic and social experiences (e.g., Bowen and Bok 1998, pp. 194–205), and that active involvement in campus life leads to higher levels of satisfaction. In an analysis of retrospective survey data of respondents who were enrolled at selective colleges and universities during the 1980s and 1990s, Espenshade and Radford (2009, pp. 315–325) find that students who held a job while taking courses report less satisfaction with campus social life. Additionally, female students are more satisfied with academic experiences, but male students reflect more favorably on social experiences. In a longitudinal study of students attending 28 selective colleges and universities, Charles and colleagues (2009, pp. 205–234) find that black and Asian students are less satisfied with college experiences in comparison to white or Latino students (Mooney 2010, p. 208), and that much of black students' lower levels of satisfaction can be explained by differences in college grades, self-esteem and participation in campus activities. Additionally, frequent interactions with faculty predict satisfaction for students from all backgrounds (Fischer 2007). In a study of alumni at elite, private colleges and universities, Clotfelter (2003) finds that having an academic mentor during the college years is associated with overall satisfaction with the college experience.

To date, relatively few studies have focused attention on how college experiences differ across social class backgrounds (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005, pp. 619–625; Paulsen and

St. John 2002). As a notable exception, Walpole (2003) analyzes longitudinal survey data of students attending national four-year institutions and finds that students from disadvantaged backgrounds spend less time participating in extracurricular activities, are more likely to have a job during the college years, and are less likely to ultimately earn a graduate degree in comparison to students from highly advantaged backgrounds. Previous studies of selective university students have found only weak or inconsistent effects of socioeconomic background on college outcomes (e.g., Bowen and Bok 1998; Charles et al. 2009; Espenshade and Radford 2009). This study addresses a gap in the literature by examining how social class shapes students' relationship to campus life and participation in range of activities across the college years at highly selective, private universities.

Social Class, Cultural Capital and Academic Success

Class inequalities in higher education were a central concern to Pierre Bourdieu, a foundational figure to the sociology of education. In his studies of the French postsecondary system, Bourdieu finds that working class students are more likely to live at home and have a job while taking courses, and as a result participate less often in campus activities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, p. 16). Outside of the classroom, there is little interaction between working and dominant class students (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, pp. 35–38). In an analysis of his own biography, Bourdieu (2007) describes how his upbringing as the son of a rural postal-clerk caused him to feel out of place and prone to rebellion while attending selective boarding schools and universities, despite excellent grades. Even among highly talented and motivated students, experiences at elite universities can magnify the salience of class background, due to a "very strong discrepancy between high academic consecration and low social origin, in other words a *cleft habitus*, inhabited by tensions and contradictions" (p. 100).

The concept of cultural capital—or the high-status goods, standards and credentials used in social exclusion—is among Bourdieu's most popular contributions to educational research (Lareau and Weininger 2003; Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). Like economic and social capital, cultural capital can be accumulated over time and converted to other resources. Importantly, an individual's location in social space is associated with access to and acquisition of material and symbolic resources (Lin 2001, pp. 33–40). In other words, a dominant class student likely enters college with not only a wealth of economic capital but an abundance of cultural capital as well.

An analogy of a poker game is helpful in illustrating this relationship between social class and forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 98–99). Dominant class students have a greater supply of betting chips (i.e., forms of capital), allowing a more aggressive strategy and providing additional chances for winning across multiple hands and games. Like an experienced poker player seated in late position, dominant class students have more information at their disposal to assess the likelihood of success, and can thus wager their chips more effectively (i.e., deploy embodied cultural capital). At the other extreme, subordinate class students are like a novice player who must focus intently to follow the basic rules, and thus fail to appreciate the subtle hints acquired through successive hands and wagers. In this way, a dominant class background is doubly-advantaged: first, by possessing a greater quantity and variety of capital, and second by achieving greater returns for the capital they possess.

Due to an imperfect relationship between the distribution of cultural and economic capital, schools can reward dominant class origins and still appear to uphold meritocratic

principles. Additionally, the relative distribution of forms of capital divides the dominant class into competing class fractions (Bourdieu 1973, 1984), which serves to deflect attention from the role educational institutions play in reproducing social inequalities (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 272–281). For example, professionals and business executives may be considered as two class fractions distinguished by a relative abundance of cultural and economic capital, respectively. Elite universities bear a stronger correspondence to the experiences of the "cultural" fractions of the dominant class, which presents a challenge to the "economic" fractions but far from blocks other avenues to future success. For subordinate class students, however, low levels of both cultural and economic capital reinforce a cycle of cumulative disadvantage across the school career. Thus, despite the waning efficacy of direct reproduction strategies for the transmission of wealth across generations (i.e., through bequest or inheritance), schools increasingly contribute to the maintenance of socioeconomic inequalities by rewarding the cultural capital linked to certain class backgrounds and home environments.

Research Questions

This study draws from Bourdieu's work and theory to examine how students' class background is associated with relationships to campus life. Through an analysis of survey data of students attending highly selective, private universities, this study addresses three primary research questions:

1. *What is the underlying class structure of highly selective, private universities?*
   Working and lower class students have experienced increasing postsecondary attendance rates over recent decades, but these gains have been modest relative to declining racial ethnic inequalities (Gamoran 2001; Karen 2002) and stand in contrast to the growing female advantage in college attendance and completion (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006; cf. Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Additionally, existing studies have relied on broad, conventional measures of social class (e.g., low, middle or high), and have ignored potential heterogeneity within the dominant class. I examine the associations among multiple student background characteristics to provide a more descriptive measure of students' class origins and to consider how well Bourdieu's model applies to elite education in the United States.
2. *To what extent do patterns of campus involvement reflect social class differences in opportunities and interests for the college years?*
   Are there indications that students from disadvantaged social origins are excluded from campus life or encounter an environment at conflict with expectations for the college years? To what extent do students from working class backgrounds feel lost or out of place on campus in an environment where academics can appear secondary to maintaining an active social life? To address these questions, I explore social class differences across a range of academic, extracurricular and recreational activities that have been highlighted by previous research, including patterns of time-allocation, club memberships and faculty interactions.
3. *How does social class shape satisfaction with the college years?*
   I locate significant class differences satisfaction with campus community and social life and with the quality of coursework and instruction. Through regression analysis, I consider if these differences can be explained by patterns of campus involvement and time allocation. Additionally, I test for significant interactions to examine if the

effects of college activities are conditioned by social class. I find that, in comparison to dominant class students, other students spend less time in social and recreational activities and are more likely to have a part-time job to pay for college expenses, and that these differences in campus involvement explain other students' lower levels of satisfaction upon graduation. Additionally, I find that having a job is associated with lower levels of satisfaction for middle and subordinate class students but not for dominant class students, who are more apt to work out of choice than necessity.

Study Design

I conduct a secondary analysis of data collected by the Campus Life and Learning (CLL) project, a prospective panel study of students attending a single elite university, and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. The CLL follows a representative sample of Duke University students in the incoming classes of 2001 and 2002 across the college years with four survey waves, administered in the summer prior to matriculation and in the spring semester of the first, second and fourth college years.[1] In addition, nearly all CLL respondents provided access to their institutional records, admissions files and official grade transcripts. Duke is a private research university in Durham, North Carolina with a total undergraduate enrollment of about 6,000 students. Although Duke is more selective than most colleges or universities—of the roughly 20,000 applicants to Duke each fall, less than one-fifth are admitted—the CLL provides a detailed portrait of college life at a characteristic elite university (Spenner et al. 2005).

The Higher Education Research Institute has managed the CIRP and collected extensive data of college students for more than five decades (Higher Education Research Institute 2011). The annual Freshman Survey is administered to first year students at several hundred postsecondary institutions. A smaller set of institutions also administers the College Senior Survey to fourth year students. Using available data for respondents to both surveys, I restrict my national sample to full-time students who first entered college in 1999, were attending the same institution in the spring of 2003, and were enrolled at private universities with an average SAT score of at least 1,300 ($n = 3{,}174$).

As a whole, students at highly selective, private universities are ambitious and enjoy considerable family support for their college plans. Further, there is little severe academic underperformance. Less than 2% of CLL students have a final GPA below "C+" (2.3 on a 4.0 scale), and only 4% of students had not finished a degree at Duke within 5 or 6 years of matriculation (including transfers, dismissals and withdrawals). In the national sample, less than 1% of students report average college grades lower than "B− or C+" in the College Senior Survey.

The Duke (CLL) and national (CIRP) samples are highly similar across a range of indicators, but a few differences are notable. Relative to the national sample, the Duke

[1] The CLL design randomly selected about one-third of white students, two-thirds of Asian students, all black and Latino students, and one-third of bi- and multi-racial students in both cohorts, based on information provided with the application form. All analyses with the CLL data use probability weights to reflect the sampling frame. About 77% of sample members ($n = 1{,}181$) completed the pre-college survey. Of those that completed the pre-college wave, 77% also responded to the first year survey ($n = 910$), 75% to the second year survey ($n = 891$), and 67% to the fourth year survey ($n = 793$).

sample contains more racial ethnic diversity and is somewhat more affluent.[2] However, the typical student at a selective, private university enters college from an advantaged household relative to the average family. For example, 71% of CLL students and 59% of CIRP students have at least one parent who has earned a graduate or professional degree, compared to 30% of entering students at national four-year colleges and universities (Arum and Roska 2011, p. 155). About 48 and 26% of CLL and CIRP students, respectively, report pre-college family incomes greater than $150,000/year, corresponding to the top five percent of the national household income distribution (DeNavas-Walt and Cleveland 2002). Additionally, CLL students have slightly higher SAT scores than do CIRP students, although 95% of students in either sample have scores in the top quartile of the national distribution.[3]

Measuring Social Class

The concept of social class is associated with a range of definitions suited for particular research questions and theoretical perspectives (Lareau and Conley 2008; Wright 2005). Social science research frequently makes use of subjective measures of social class, or the categories to which individuals assign themselves, and objective measures, or a description of an individual's market situation and position in society. Subjective measures are helpful in understanding perceptions of class membership, but objective measures are more appropriate for considering how class position influences future life chances, experiences and well-being (Wright 1997). Although subjective class identification is often correlated with social scientists' assigned labels, there is a tendency among the poorest and wealthiest individuals to rank themselves differently than their income or education al attainment would suggest (Stuber 2006). Further, whereas the college years encompass the transition from adolescence in the family to independence and young adulthood, a student's subjective class identity could refer to their parents' social class, current social status, or aspired position or career.

This study uses an objective measure of social class based on latent clustering analysis (LCA) of family background characteristics (Martin 2009). In short, LCA tests if the association between a set of observed variables can be explained by an underlying variable (Birkelund et al. 1996, pp. 105–109). I use LCA to determine the number of classes that are necessary to explain the association among variables for parent's education, occupational status and income.[4] From the most parsimonious solution with adequate model fit, I assign students to the latent class to which they have the highest probability of belonging

[2] CLL respondents are placed in racial ethnic categories by Census-type questions that first ask if the respondent is Hispanic and then elicit a racial category. All "Hispanic" respondents also reported their race as white; this group is classified as Latino. For CIRP students, race or ethnicity was determined from responses to the Freshmen Year Survey, or College Senior Survey if missing.

[3] The mean SAT-I score (mathematics and verbal tests) is 1,405 for CLL students and 1,343 for CIRP students. Among all college bound seniors who took the SAT-I exam in 2001, the mean score was 1,020 and the 75th percentile threshold was 1,170 (College Board 2001).

[4] Parent's education is measured as the highest degree present in the household (high school diploma, college degree, or graduate degree). Occupation status scores are applied to the three-digit 1990 Classified Index of Occupations code and are grouped into three categories: average, high and very high status. Occupation status is coded as the higher of the two scores, if available for both parents. Pre-tax, annual household income is for the student's senior year in high school, with four categories: below $42,000/year (the national median), $42,000–$72,999 (the top quartile threshold), $73,000–$149,999, and $150,000 or above. Results are consistent under a variety of alternate specifications, including the use of continuous measures of occupation status and household income and adding an indicator for business ownership.

(Hagenaars and McCutcheon 2002).[5] Results from LCA are highly consistent across both samples and suggest that the class structure of highly selective, private universities can be described with four categories, including two fractions of the dominant class ("professional" and "executive"), the "middle" class, and the "subordinate" class. To illustrate, Fig. 1 depicts the LCA schema and the class composition of students in the national (CIRP) and Duke (CLL) samples.

Professional class students comprise about 33% of students at Duke and 22% of students in the national sample. As the label implies, the professional class is associated with high-status, high-paying occupations such as medical doctors, lawyers, engineers and college professors. All students in the professional class have at least one parent with a graduate degree, and 90% report household incomes in the top quartile of the national distribution. Professional class students enter college with the most impressive records of high school achievement and admissions committee evaluations.

The executive class includes about one-eighth of CLL and one-fifth of CIRP students, and is linked to occupations such as business owners and managers. Executive class students report the highest pre-college household incomes of any group, but executive parents have fewer advanced degrees in comparison to professional parents.[6] Executive class students are more likely to attend private primary and secondary schools, use college admissions consultants, or be a legacy than are other students. Professionals and executives households are similar in terms of economic resources, although professional households contain more cultural capital, in the form of elite credentials and family experiences of success in higher education.

Two other groups on campus are characterized by having a lower overall volume of pre-college resources. The middle and subordinate classes include 37 and 17% of Duke students, respectively. In the national sample, about 47% of students enter college from middle class households, and 14% have subordinate class origins. Relative to the dominant class, the middle class has lower values across all three dimensions (parent's education, occupational status and income), while the subordinate class is even more disadvantaged. Additionally, the middle and subordinate classes contain more racial ethnic diversity.[7] I use the label "subordinate" to highlight that this disadvantage is relative to other students on campus but not necessarily to broader society. All middle class students and roughly half of subordinate class students have at least one parent who has earned a four-year college degree. Very few students at highly selective universities have poor or working class origins, and only 2% of Duke students and 4% of students in the national sample are from traditional "blue-collar" households (i.e., parents with skilled or unskilled manual occupations).

[5] LCA was performed using *Latent Gold 4.0* (Statistical Innovations 2005), and other analysis was completed with *Stata/SE 10.1* (StataCorp 2008).

[6] All executive class students in the Duke sample, and 56% in the national sample, report household incomes greater than $150,000/year, or in the top five percent of the national distribution. About 78 and 56% of executive class students in the CLL and CIRP, respectively, have at least one parent with a graduate degree.

[7] In the CLL, 74% of professional and 85% of executive class students are white, compared to 66% of middle and 44% of subordinate class students. In the CIRP, 87% of professional, 91% of executive, 85% of middle and 72% of subordinate class students are white.

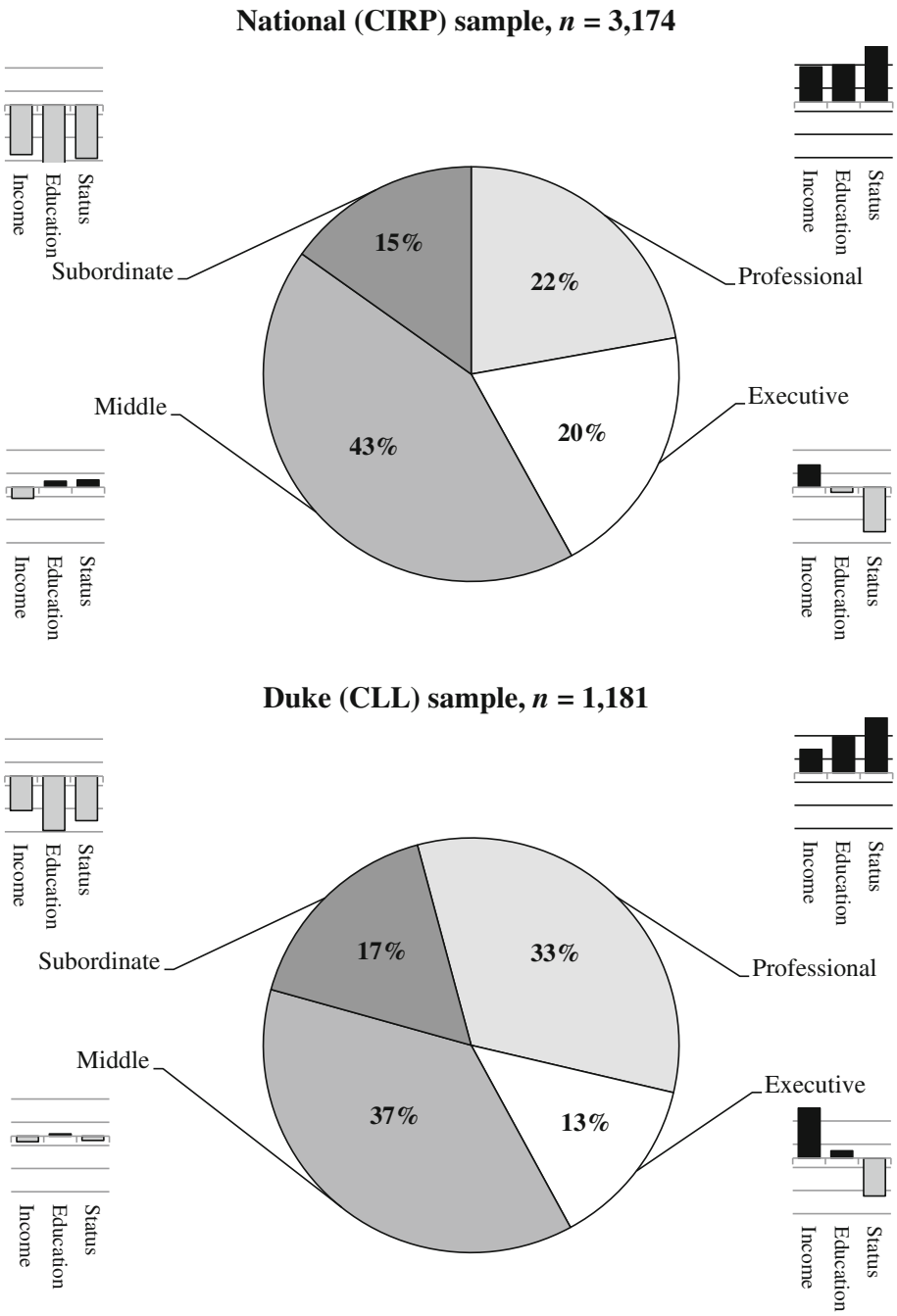

Fig. 1 The class structure of highly selective, private universities. *Notes:* Student class background is determined by LCA of variables for parent's education, occupational status and income (see "Measuring Social Class" section and footnote 4 for details); *bar* graphs describe mean values for annual household income, parent's years of education, and parent's socioeconomic status score, standardized as z-scores (positive values in *black*, negative values in *gray*)

Variables and Strategy

Considered together, the two datasets used in this study counterbalance some of their respective weaknesses and allow an in-depth examination of how social class operates within an elite institutional field. As mentioned above, the Duke (CLL) sample provides a highly detailed portrait of campus life and combines student responses to four survey waves with information from admissions records and official grade transcripts. In comparison, the national (CIRP) sample contains less detail across the college years and is restricted to student reports and reflections collected during the fourth year. With a larger sample that spans multiple institutions, the CIRP provides greater statistical power and supports the generalization of results to other highly selective, private universities. Additionally, both the CLL and CIRP provide an opportunity to connect with the existing literature and to reconsider how social class can shape relationships to campus life. Duke is consistently ranked among the nation's top undergraduate institutions and has been included as a characteristic highly-selective university in previous research (e.g., Bowen and Bok 1998, p. 337), and the CIRP was important in establishing the many benefits of active campus involvement for personal development and success.

See the Appendix for measurement notes and descriptive statistics for all variables included in this study. Unless indicated, information on family and high school background is from the Pre-College (CLL) or Freshman Year Surveys (CIRP). For Duke students, semester grades, graduation honors and final major field of study are drawn from official transcripts. For the national sample, college grades and final major are from student reports to the College Senior Survey. Student satisfaction is measured as scales from exploratory factor analysis for overall satisfaction with campus community and social life, coursework and instruction, and campus facilities. These survey items were collected at the end of the fourth year and ask students to reflect on their college career. No variable used in this study contained more than 2% missing values, which were replaced by mean imputation.

In the sections to follow, I first examine social class differences in weekly time allocation and participation in campus activities across the college years. In descriptive tables, I note significant between-class differences as determined from one-way ANOVA for continuous and ordinal variables and chi-squared tests for categorical variables. Next, I conduct an OLS regression analysis to explore how patterns of campus involvement predict student satisfaction at the end of college. Results are highly consistent across the two samples with few exceptions, noted in the text or footnotes. To draw on each dataset's relative strengths and to emphasize the clearest results, I use the Duke (CLL) sample to highlight patterns across the college years and the national (CIRP) sample to examine the relationship between campus involvement and satisfaction and to consider how the effects of college life are conditioned by class background.

Results

When students first arrive on campus, social class is associated with different plans and expectations for the college years. At highly selective, private universities, students from all backgrounds have strong expectations for academic achievement and skill development. However, in comparison to professional and executive class students, middle and subordinate class students place more emphasis on personal growth and assign less importance

to social life and relationships.[8] Additionally, middle and subordinate class students are more reliant on grants, loans and scholarships to cover college expenses, and are more likely to expect to work while completing coursework. At the beginning of the first year, nearly half of subordinate class students in the national sample plan to get a job to help pay for college expenses, compared to less than one-quarter of professional and less than one-third of executive class students.

Time Allocation and Campus Activities

Patterns of weekly time use and participation in campus activities reflect these class differences in pre-college expectations.[9] Table 1 describes the average time Duke students spend in various activities across the college years. Babcock and Marks (2011), analyzing six waves of data from four national surveys of college and university students, find that the average time spent in class or studying has declined from about 40 h per week in the early-1960s to 26 h per week in 2004. In line with this recent figure, Duke students report spending about 24 h per week in academic activities during the first year (including attending classes or labs, studying or doing homework), and 20 h per week during the fourth year. Notably, there are very few significant differences in academic time use across class backgrounds.

Beyond the formal curriculum, social class is associated with a distinct pattern of participation in campus social life. In comparison to dominant class students, middle and especially subordinate class students are less involved in campus social and recreational activities and are more likely to have a part-time job during the academic year. During the first year on campus, subordinate class students spend about 5 h less each week socializing with friends or partying than do executive class students, and about 1 h less participating in extracurricular clubs than do professional class students. Across the college years, middle and subordinate class students spend 2 to 3 h more each week working at a job than do dominant class students. Additionally, subordinate class students are least likely to be members of social fraternities or sororities and intramural sports teams, the two most popular activities listed for professional and executive class students across all college years (Table 2).[10]

[8] Items in the CLL Pre-College Survey ask students about what they would like to gain from their experiences at Duke. About three-quarters of middle and subordinate class students report that expectations for personal growth and awareness are very important, compared to less than two-thirds of dominant class students. About 68 and 76% of professional and executive class students, respectively, report that expectations for social relationships are very important, compared to 67% of middle and 58% of subordinate class students.

[9] Time-use variables for the CLL and CIRP are recoded from eight discrete categories to the midpoint of each category range, using linear interpolation for the top category ("20 h or more").

[10] Patterns of weekly time use and campus participation are highly consistent for students at other highly selective, private universities. During the fourth year, CIRP students spend about 25 h each week in academic activities. Dominant class students spend about 21 each week partying or socializing, roughly 2 and 4 h more than do middle and subordinate class students, respectively. Subordinate class students spend more than 7 h each week working at a job, compared to 5 h for professional and executive class students and 6 h for middle class students. Additionally, more than one-third of subordinate class students in the national sample report that there were times when job commitments interfered with studying and coursework, compared to one-quarter of other students. In the national sample, 32% of professional and 30% of executive class students report joining a social fraternity or sorority, compared to 23% of middle and 20% of subordinate class students.

Table 1 Hours per week in selected college activities (mean), by social class

	Dominant class		Middle class	Subordinate class
	Professional	Executive		
Attending classes and labs				
First year	13.50	13.21	13.84	13.20
Second year*	13.15	11.44	12.77	13.07
Fourth year	10.28	10.30	10.16	10.85
Socializing with friends				
First year**	11.90	12.47	11.27	10.21
Second year*	10.32	11.53	10.44	9.20
Fourth year	10.49	11.19	10.37	9.54
Studying and homework				
First year	11.11	10.60	10.66	10.93
Second year	11.01	10.05	10.62	10.88
Fourth year	9.74	10.15	9.56	9.43
Exercising or sports				
First year	5.32	6.02	5.46	5.27
Second year	4.96	5.46	5.31	5.28
Fourth year	4.84	5.57	4.22	4.36
Partying				
First year***	5.24	6.03	4.33	3.72
Second year**	5.05	5.85	4.36	3.66
Fourth year	5.13	5.33	4.77	4.13
Working (for pay)				
First year***	1.80	.94	3.12	4.29
Second year***	2.90	2.09	4.49	4.71
Fourth year***	3.90	4.30	6.35	6.80
Participating in student clubs				
First year**	3.18	2.79	3.01	2.21
Second year	3.79	3.13	3.70	3.36
Fourth year	4.62	3.85	4.49	3.61
Meeting with faculty (office hours)				
First year	.81	.82	.88	1.01
Second year	1.06	.76	1.01	1.11
Fourth year	1.34	1.42	1.24	1.21
Interacting with faculty (other)				
First year	.55	.50	.56	.43
Second year	.55	.39	.62	.50
Fourth year*	.98	1.05	1.38	.80

Source: CLL ($n = 793$–910)

Note: Significant intergroup differences are noted as ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$ (two-tailed tests)

Selective colleges and universities not only have relatively high rates of participation in varsity sports, but also encourage students to exercise by requiring physical education and providing state-of-the-art gyms and fitness centers (Bowen and Levin 2003). Stevens

Table 2 Membership in extracurricular activities (percent), by social class

	Dominant class		Middle class	Subordinate class
	Professional	Executive		
Study abroad program**	53.4	44.8	45.2	31.3
Fraternity or sorority				
First year***	45.4	38.3	32.3	22.2
Second year**	46.1	47.4	34.1	30.6
Fourth year*	42.7	45.5	34.2	28.8
Intramural sports team				
First year***	36.9	42.2	39.0	15.8
Second year	34.4	24.5	30.5	22.1
Fourth year	31.9	27.8	27.6	23.9
Community service club				
First year	29.9	27.7	25.4	24.1
Second year	25.7	26.5	18.5	22.1
Fourth year	28.3	24.7	19.6	22.4
Intercollegiate sports team				
First year*	7.0	14.4	8.3	16.2
Second year*	5.6	11.7	9.7	15.6
Fourth year	5.2	9.0	4.6	7.8
Student government				
First year	7.7	3.4	9.4	5.6
Second year	6.5	8.0	7.7	4.7
Fourth year	8.0	9.7	6.7	7.0

Source: CLL ($n = 793$–910)

Note: Significant intergroup differences are noted as ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$ (two-tailed tests)

(2007, pp. 95–139) describes the strong emphasis in elite education for physical fitness and attractiveness. At Duke, subordinate class students are more likely to be a member of an intercollegiate sports team during the first two college years, but are less likely to participate in intramural teams or clubs. In the national sample, subordinate class students report spending about an hour less each week exercising or playing sports and are less likely to participate in intercollegiate athletics in comparison to professional or executive class students.

Subordinate class students are less likely to participate in two other activities that are quite popular among dominant class students at highly selective, private universities: studying abroad and drinking alcohol. The study abroad experience, which has grown in popularity in recent years, can be viewed as a present-day extension of an American elite tradition of sending young people to Europe to acquire cultural sophistication (Stevens et al. 2008, p. 141). About 53% of professional class students at Duke spend at least part of their junior year abroad, compared to 45% of executive and middle class students, and 31% of subordinate class students. Additionally, professional and executive class students report that alcohol is more important to their enjoyment of campus life and is present more often at the social events they attend. For example, during the first college year—when most students are still two years from legal drinking age—about 28% of executive and 26% of

professional class students at Duke report that alcohol is very or extremely important to their enjoyment of campus life, compared to 16% of middle and 12% of subordinate class students. About 81% of executive and 77% of professional class students report that alcohol is often or always present at the social events they attend, compared to 66% of middle and 61% of subordinate class students.[11]

In sum, middle and subordinate class students spend less time participating in several popular aspects of dominant class student life, a consequence of financial and time constraints and different plans, goals and expectations for the college years. Before students arrive on campus, dominant class students report stronger expectations for building social relationships and having an active social life. To pay for college expenses, middle and subordinate class students are more likely to have a part-time job during the academic year. This added time at work is offset by spending less time socializing with friends, participating in extracurricular activities—in particular, social fraternities or sororities and intramural sports teams—and partying, often with alcohol. In line with recent trends at national colleges and universities, students at highly selective, private universities devote at least as much time to social activities as to academic activities. There are no substantial differences across class backgrounds in time spent in class, studying, interacting with faculty or participating in activities such as community service and volunteering. However, across the college years, middle and especially subordinate class students are less involved in campus social and recreational activities.

College Grades and Achievement

As mentioned above, the students in this study have impressive records of high school achievement, commensurate with gaining admission to a highly selective university, although subordinate class students have somewhat lower test scores relative to professional class students. At Duke, about 98% of professional and executive class students have SAT-I scores that place in the top quartile for all college-bound high school seniors, compared to 96% of middle and 91% of subordinate class students. In the national sample, about 95% of professional and executive class, 94% of middle class, and 88% of subordinate class students have scores that are above this threshold.

An achievement gap between professional and subordinate class students persists across the college years. Additionally, a more unexpected gap emerges between professional and executive class students, the two dominant class fractions. Executive class students resemble professional class students in terms of socioeconomic background, but are more similar to subordinate class students in terms of college grades. At Duke, professional class students have the highest grades in nearly every semester, slightly higher than the grades of middle class students, while subordinate class students have the lowest average semester grades, slightly below the grades of executive class students. At graduation, 27% and 23% of executive and subordinate class students, respectively, receive official honors recognition, compared to 32% of middle and 39% of professional class students.[12] In the

[11] In the national sample, about 53% of professional class students participate in study abroad programs, compared to 46% of executive, 45% of middle and 37% of subordinate class students. During the fourth college year, 55% of professional and 58% of executive class students report frequently drinking beer, wine or liquor, compared to 50% of middle and 42% of subordinate class students.

[12] Graduation honors, collected from official transcripts, include Latin honors (*summa, magna* and *cum laude*) and departmental honors or prizes. At graduation, professional class students at Duke have a final (cumulative) GPA of 3.44 on a 4-point scale, compared to 3.41 for middle, 3.35 for executive and 3.31 for subordinate class students.

national sample, 20% of professional class students report average college grades of "A" or above, compared to 17% of middle, 14% of executive and 13% of subordinate class students.

Others have noted the complicated relationship between student satisfaction and academic achievement (e.g., Bean and Bradley 1986; Pike 1991). It is unclear whether higher grades lead to greater satisfaction with the college experience, or vice versa. Data limitations prevent me from scrutinizing possible causal relationships, as the only available measures of college satisfaction were collected at the end of the fourth college year. Building upon the existing literature, my strategy is to treat academic achievement as a control variable, along with student reports of feelings of depression, overall life satisfaction, and major field of study (Astin 1993; Charles et al. 2009; Lounsbury et al. 2005; Pilcher 1998). In the next section, I explore which college activities and aspects of campus life predict college satisfaction in both academic and social domains, net of the association with grades and other important controls.

Satisfaction with Campus Life and the College Experience

In general, most students at highly selective, private universities report at least moderate levels of satisfaction. However, professional class students consistently report the highest levels of satisfaction across several aspects of campus life (Table 3). In comparison to executive, middle and subordinate class students, professional class students report higher levels of satisfaction with campus community, social life, coursework and quality of instruction.[13] Notably, there are few significant class differences for satisfaction with campus services and facilities relative to other areas of undergraduate education.

To examine how campus experiences and activities affect satisfaction at the end of the college years, Table 4 presents nested regression models predicting overall satisfaction with campus life. The outcome variable is a scale that combines full responses to the seven items listed in Table 3 related to campus community and social life.[14] A baseline model includes only dummy variables for class background (Model 1). Relative to professional class students, other students report significantly lower levels of satisfaction at the end of the college years. The influence of class background remains significant and largely unchanged with the addition of other sociodemographic variables (Model 2). Female students report higher levels of satisfaction than do male students, and black students are less satisfied with campus community and social life than are other students.

College grades, major field, and feelings of depression are all strongly associated with satisfaction (Model 3). In short, students with high grades and majors other than

[13] Items from the CLL Senior Year Questionnaire ask students to rank their satisfaction with various aspects of their undergraduate career. Relative to professional class students, middle and subordinate class students report lower levels of satisfaction with their overall Duke experience, residential living, social life, fraternity or sorority experiences, major field, size of classes, and faculty mentors. However, given the smaller sample size, most of these differences fail to reach significance.

[14] The CIRP College Senior Survey asks students to rate their satisfaction with their college across 28 areas (1 = dissatisfied, 4 = very satisfied). Nearly one-third of students indicated that they had no experience with financial aid services, so this item was dropped from analysis. Three readily interpretable factors were identified by principal component analysis under a varimax solution, with a mean loading of .59 and a minimum loading of .40. Based on this solution, items were combined into scales describing satisfaction with campus community and social life (alpha = .82), coursework and instruction (alpha = .79), and campus services (alpha = .76).

Table 3 Percent of students very satisfied with selected aspects of campus life, by social class

	Dominant class		Middle class	Subordinate class
	Professional	Executive		
Community and social life				
Overall college experience***	53.4	42.7	45.1	41.8
Sense of community on campus*	45.0	39.3	42.4	37.2
Interaction with other students**	46.0	40.1	38.6	37.2
Opportunities for community service*	43.5	38.9	37.3	41.2
Recreational facilities	33.1	32.3	28.8	27.9
Leadership opportunities*	28.1	23.4	23.3	20.4
Student housing	17.8	14.7	18.5	18.3
Coursework and instruction				
Courses in your major field**	53.6	48.6	46.4	45.1
Overall quality of instruction***	45.3	34.4	35.4	34.3
Class size*	36.8	34.7	30.7	31.2
Amount of contact with faculty**	37.9	29.0	31.7	32.9
Social science courses***	36.8	25.3	29.2	31.2
Ability to find a faculty mentor*	31.5	25.3	27.7	25.4
Humanities courses***	33.5	22.9	25.9	25.8
General education courses***	32.8	23.9	24.7	23.3
Science and mathematics courses***	22.3	15.0	16.5	12.3
Relevance of course to everyday life	16.9	15.6	15.1	15.4
Campus services				
Availability of internet access	59.0	58.0	58.9	64.5
Computer facilities	43.2	39.7	40.1	41.6
Library facilities*	40.5	36.9	34.2	36.2
Laboratory facilities and equipment**	28.8	23.6	22.2	22.9
Quality of computer training/assistance	14.5	16.7	13.8	14.8
Academic advising	14.6	12.1	12.6	14.1
Tutoring or academic assistance*	14.8	11.2	10.7	13.1
Career counseling and advising	12.1	10.5	11.2	11.9
Job placement services for students	10.4	11.3	9.0	12.5
Campus health services	11.5	10.2	8.2	10.6

Source: CIRP ($n = 3{,}174$)

Note: Significant intergroup differences are noted as ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$ (two-tailed tests)

engineering report higher levels of satisfaction, and students who report that during the past year they frequently felt depressed were significantly less satisfied with campus social life. By adding these controls, the satisfaction gap relative to professional class students declines by 41% for subordinate class students and by 21% for middle class students, although coefficients for class background remain significant (Model 3 vs. Model 1). In other words, even after taking into account professional class students' higher grades, other students report significantly lower levels of satisfaction with campus community and social life at the end of the college years.

Table 4 OLS regression models predicting student satisfaction with campus community and social life

	Model 1 coeff. (s.e.)	Model 2 coeff. (s.e.)	Model 3 coeff. (s.e.)	Model 4 coeff. (s.e.)
Social class (ref. professional)				
Executive	−.58 (.21)**	−.59 (.21)**	−.52 (.21)*	−.47 (.19)*
Middle	−.43 (.18)*	−.44 (.18)*	−.34 (.17)*	−.22 (.17)
Subordinate	−.74 (.23)***	−.67 (.23)**	−.44 (.22)*	−.26 (.22)
Race/ethnicity (ref. white)				
Black		−1.29 (.40)***	−.99 (.40)*	−.85 (.38)*
Latino		.13 (.32)	.15 (.31)	.22 (.30)
Asian		−.51 (.28)	−.38 (.27)	−.30 (.26)
Female		.88 (.13)***	.76 (.14)***	.59 (.14)***
Major area (ref. engineering)				
Natural sciences			1.13 (.26)***	.90 (.25)***
Business			1.27 (.26)***	1.19 (.25)***
Social sciences			1.03 (.25)***	.67 (.24)**
Arts and humanities			1.12 (.25)***	.71 (.25)**
Other			.67 (.30)*	.48 (.29)
College grades: "A" average			.79 (.18)***	.41 (.17)*
Frequently felt depressed			−2.48 (.26)***	−2.31 (.24)***
Hours per week:				
Socializing with friends				.05 (.01)***
Studying or homework				.05 (.01)***
Exercising or sports				.03 (.01)*
Working (for pay)				−.03 (.01)*
Student clubs or groups				.10 (.01)***
College activities:				
Fraternity/sorority				−.97 (.15)***
Intramural sports team				.61 (.15)***
Community service				1.10 (.17)***
Student government				.94 (.18)***
Study abroad program				.54 (.13)***
Frequent contact with faculty:				
Guest at faculty's home				.99 (.25)***
Visit during office hours				.55 (.15)***
Constant	22.02 (.14)***	21.63 (.16)***	20.66 (.25)***	18.67 (.32)***
R^2	.01	.02	.07	.17

Source: CIRP ($n = 3{,}174$)

Note: Significant coefficients are noted as ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$ (two-tailed tests)

A variety of measures for time allocation and participation in campus activities are significantly associated with student satisfaction (Model 4). Typical hours spent each week socializing with friends (beta = .08), studying or doing homework (beta = .08), exercising or playing sports (beta = .04) and participating in extracurricular clubs (beta = .12) have

relatively moderate to strong effects on satisfaction, while time spent at work has a negative effect (beta = −.04).[15] Additionally, students who participate in intramural sports, community service, student government and study abroad programs are more satisfied with campus social life, as are students who frequently interact with faculty outside of class. Together, these measures for campus involvement and faculty contact explain an additional 41% of the remaining satisfaction gap for subordinate class students and an additional 29% for middle class students (Model 4 vs. Model 3).

In the final model, the coefficients for middle and subordinate class background are reduced to insignificance, but the executive class coefficient remains robust. Middle and subordinate class students' lower levels of satisfaction can be attributed to differences in campus involvement, but enduring differences between professional and executive class students is suggestive of different academic orientations among the two dominant class fractions. In comparison to professional households, executive households provide less cultural capital in the form of advanced credentials and family experiences of success in higher education. Executive class students fall short of the "collegiate scholar" ideal most rewarded on campus and in the classroom, leading to persistent achievement and satisfaction gaps across the college years. As a result, executive class students are relatively disadvantaged within the field of elite universities, even as nearly all will graduate with a degree from a highly selective university.

In results available upon request, I test for significant interactions between social class and all variables included in Table 4. Most measures of campus involvement have positive effects for all students irrespective of class background, including college grades, socializing with friends, participating with extracurricular clubs, volunteering, studying abroad, and interacting with faculty. However, time spent working for pay has a significant, negative effect on satisfaction for middle (beta = −.05) and subordinate (beta = −.12) class students only. This result highlights an important distinction between having a part-time job out of choice or to support an active social life and working out of necessity to pay for college tuition, room and board, and other expenses.

In other results not shown, I conduct parallel analyses predicting satisfaction with the quality of coursework and instruction and with campus services. A similar but weaker pattern of results is found for satisfaction with coursework. Subordinate class students are less satisfied with the quality of coursework relative to professional class students, and this gap can be explained by differences in campus involvement. As above, there is a significant, negative interaction with time spent working for pay and satisfaction with coursework for subordinate class students but not for other students. In contrast, social class is not associated with differences in satisfaction with campus services. As above, students who more frequently use campus facilities, such as gyms, libraries and student centers, are more satisfied with this aspect of their college education, although fraternity or sorority members deviate from this pattern. Compared to other students, fraternity or sorority members spend more time socializing and participating in extracurricular activities, are more likely to study abroad, and are less likely to report feelings of depression. However, fraternity and sorority members also spend less time studying, have lower grades, and consistently report lower levels of satisfaction across all three dimensions of the college experience. Charles

[15] Previous studies have found positive effects of on-campus employment on student satisfaction (e.g., Astin 1993). With other available measures of student employment, I find that subordinate class students are more likely to report having an on-campus or off-campus part-time job and a full-time job than are other students. Replacing typical hours spent each week at work in Table 4 (Model 4) with these alternative measures yields a significant, positive effect for on-campus employment and a significant, negative effect for off-campus and full-time employment.

and colleagues (2009, pp. 213–218) also report an ambivalent influence of fraternity or sorority membership on satisfaction and find that while membership is positively related to satisfaction, living in a Greek house has a negative effect.[16]

To summarize, at highly selective, private universities, class background is associated with different expectations for and experiences with campus social life. Dominant class students devote considerable time to social and recreational activities, including socializing with friends and exercising or playing sports, and these activities are associated with higher levels of satisfaction upon graduation. In comparison, middle and subordinate class students enter college less interested in several aspects of campus life that are quite popular with dominant class students. During the academic year, middle and subordinate class students are more likely to have a part-time job to help cover college expenses. Working while completing college coursework is associated with lower levels of satisfaction upon graduation for middle and subordinate class students, but not for dominant class students. Although durable achievement gaps underscore the college years, there are few significant class differences in academic expectations or the amount of time spent attending classes or studying. Instead, middle and subordinate class students' lower level of satisfaction is explained by differences in social and extracurricular activity participation.

Discussion

In line with the existing literature, this study finds that active campus involvement leads to higher levels of satisfaction at the end of the college years. Students at highly selective, private universities who spend more time socializing with friends, exercising or playing sports, and participating in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports teams, volunteer organizations and student government, report higher levels of satisfaction with campus community and social life. Students who participate in study abroad programs and frequently interact with faculty are more satisfied with the college experience, while students who have a part-time job during the college years are less satisfied.

A key contribution of this study is to highlight significant social class differences in campus involvement, and to show that class background moderates the relationship between working during the college years and satisfaction with academic and social life. Espenshade and Radford (2009, p. 322) propose that students from low-income families are less satisfied with social experiences at selective colleges and universities due to a combination of financial and time constraints and a general discomfort with elite surroundings. Using detailed survey data collected across the college years, the current study provides empirical support for this claim. Middle and subordinate class students are more likely to have a job to help pay for college expenses, leaving less time for campus social and recreational activities across the college years. Differences in campus involvement, along with college grades and emotional well-being, explain middle and subordinate class

[16] There is a consistent but weaker pattern of results with the CLL data ($n = 793$). In OLS models predicting scales for satisfaction with campus social life (alpha = .68) and academics (alpha = .78), coefficients for middle and subordinate class background are always negative, but do not reach significance. Duke students who spend more time socializing with friends, studying, and participating in extracurricular activities are more satisfied with campus social life, and time spent studying has a positive effect on satisfaction with coursework. In contrast to the results with the national sample, members of fraternities or sororities are more satisfied with campus social life.

students' lower levels of satisfaction with social and academic experiences. Additionally, for middle and subordinate class students only, there is a significant, negative interaction between working for pay and college satisfaction. In other words, for dominant class students, who are more likely to have a job out of choice than necessity, working during the college years does not influence satisfaction with campus life.

In his classic studies of French education and society, Bourdieu offers a distinctive and somewhat unconventional model of social class with positions located within institutional fields based on the associated volume and composition of economic and cultural capital. In short, the dominant class tends to possess more of all forms of capital than do the middle, working or subordinate classes, but within these broad categories—and especially within the dominant class—the relative composition of economic to cultural capital leads to the formation of competing class fractions. These fractions are associated with distinctive lifestyles and attitudes towards education. For example, Bourdieu (1973, 1984) finds that French business executives, who owe their dominant position to a wealth of economic capital, express status through the purchase of luxury goods, and have an instrumental view of schooling as an effective way to transfer privilege across generations. Teachers and artists, on the other hand, participate frequently in less expensive but intellectually more demanding activities, such as visiting art galleries or attending the theater, and show the greatest commitment to educational success. Possessing relatively less economic capital, these class fractions owe their dominant position to an abundance of cultural capital rewarded in schools. In between, medical doctors, lawyers and engineers are advantaged in terms of both economic and cultural capital, providing the resources to indulge in expensive objects and to demonstrate worldly sophistication.

Bourdieu's theory has been regularly criticized for being too specific to the French case (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007, p. 25). This study shows the usefulness of Bourdieu's model of social class for the study of an elite population in the United States: students at highly selective, private universities. Results from LCA of family background variables locate two distinct fractions within the dominant class, which other schemas or measures of socioeconomic background would fail to appreciate. Other studies of selective college and university students use measures of socioeconomic background that obscure this heterogeneity within the dominant class. For example, Bowen and Bok (1998, pp. 46–50, 426–431) rely on three broad categories of socioeconomic status, combining all students who have at least one parent with a college degree and high family incomes into a single group, and find weak and inconsistent effects on college satisfaction. Studies with the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen data include family income—measured as a single dummy variable indicating income greater than $75,000 or $100,000 per year—as a separate control variable, and consistently find insignificant effects on college satisfaction (e.g., Charles et al. 2009; Fischer 2007; Mooney 2010). Effectively, these conventional treatments of socioeconomic background combine students from professional and executive households into a single category, and thus obfuscate class differences in satisfaction and participation in campus life.

By pairing a commitment to academic excellence with active involvement in social and extracurricular activities, professional class students embody the "collegiate scholar" tradition of American elite education that aims to prepare well-rounded students for leadership roles and positions of power (e.g., Ellis et al. 1971; Karabel 2005). Professional and executive class students enter college from households with very high incomes and an abundance of economic capital, but executive households contain less cultural capital in the form of advanced academic credentials. Although the two dominant class

fractions show a similar pattern of active involvement in campus social and recreational activities, executive class students have lower grades and are less satisfied with college life. Money may bring happiness, but it is high levels of cultural capital that is associated with satisfaction at highly selective, private universities.

Subordinate class students, in contrast, are relatively disadvantaged along both the economic and cultural dimensions. In comparison to professional households, subordinate class households have considerably lower incomes and are less likely to contain a graduate degree or advanced credential or legacy tie to campus. Balancing an active social life with academic success comes naturally for professional class students, who arrive on campus with impressive records of achievement and strong expectations for fostering social relationships. Across the college years, subordinate class students remain excluded from several popular social and recreational activities, partly by choice—as suggested by differences in pre-college expectations—and partly out of necessity, due to time and financial constraints and greater work commitments. With less support from parents to pay for college expenses, subordinate class students are more likely to have a job while taking courses, leaving less time for social and recreational activities. Further, the supplemental income from a part-time campus job is not sufficient to support a lifestyle of fancy restaurants, expensive mixed drinks, and exotic spring break destinations (Stuber 2010). In addition to tuition and living expenses, students at elite colleges and universities spend about $825 each month on clothes, dining, entertainment and other nonacademic discretionary items—a figure that is about 27% more than the national average for college and university students (Kaufman 2001).

Of course, this study contains important limitations that provide suggestions for future research. First, the primary dependent and independent variables were collected at the same survey waves, preventing definitive statements about causal ordering. Although patterns of results are consistent between the two datasets and robust across model conditions, it is possible that student satisfaction leads to greater campus involvement, not vice versa. Second, data limitations prevent close examination of students from poor or traditional working-class backgrounds. Fewer than 10% of students in either sample have parents who have not earned at least a college degree, and fewer than 4% are from traditional blue-collar, working-class households. This data limitation speaks to enduring class inequalities in postsecondary education and at selective colleges and universities in particular.

Third, results should not be generalized to all postsecondary institutions. Historically, selective, private universities have played an important role in elite class formation and reproducing privileged status across generations (Stevens et al. 2008). It is reasonable to expect that, in comparison to other tiers of the postsecondary system, elite universities would cater more strongly to dominant class interests and aptitudes. On the other hand, the greater wealth of elite universities can help provide more financial assistance to students and reduce pressures to work long hours while completing college coursework. In comparison to students at elite universities, students at other four-year colleges and universities are more likely to have a job, a trend that has been increasing steadily across the past few decades (Riggert et al. 2006; Stern and Nakata 1991). For students at national postsecondary institutions, working more than 20 h per week or living off-campus with parents or relatives is associated with dropping out during the first year of college (Bozick 2007, p. 272). More research is needed to examine how subordinate class background and financial need impacts campus life and student involvement at public and less selective colleges and universities.

The financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent economic recession presents many challenges to postsecondary education. A more precarious economic outlook adds to pressures faced by admissions committees to not only recruit students who contribute to goals of maximizing academic excellence and broadening social equity, but also to admit students who can help meet immediate concerns for financial stability and campus growth (Bowen et al. 2005; Espenshade and Radford 2009, pp. 74–79; Stevens 2007). In response to recent budget shortfalls, many selective colleges and universities have backed away from need-blind admission policies or have accepted more international students, who are not usually eligible for financial aid (Brint 2010). Leading public colleges and universities have stepped up recruitment of out-of-state students, who pay higher tuition rates and are more likely to come from wealthy families (Lewin 2008).

The results from this study suggest two downsides to a strategy of allocating a higher proportion of spots in each incoming class to students from families who can afford to pay the full cost of attendance. To the extent that it would lead to more matriculating students from executive class backgrounds, this strategy could conflict with other goals and objectives. The executive class contains the least racial ethnic diversity of any group, with about 9 out of 10 executive class students being white. In comparison to other students from affluent households, executive class students appear less motivated academically and report lower levels of college satisfaction. Additionally, this strategy could serve to widen the class divide and further ostracize subordinate class students from campus social life. Having to work to help cover college expenses leaves less time to participate in social and extracurricular activities and results in a less satisfying college experience for middle and subordinate class students. More research is needed on the effects of employment during the college years, in particular the type of work performed and relevance to one's coursework or field of study. Importantly, previous studies highlight a distinction between on-campus and off-campus employment (see footnote 15). A tentative conclusion of this study is that, in order to address enduring social class inequalities across the college years, highly selective, private universities should aim to increase financial aid so no student is obliged to work during the academic year.

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Appendix

See Table 5.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics and measurement notes, by dataset

Variable	Measurement notes	Mean (standard deviation)	
		CLL	CIRP
Social class			
Professional	Class position is determined by a LCA of variables for parent's education, occupational status and income (see "Measuring Social Class" section and footnote 4 for details)	.33 (.47)	.22 (.41)
Executive		.13 (.34)	.20 (.40)
Middle		.37 (.48)	.43 (.49)
Subordinate		.17 (.37)	.15 (.36)
College satisfaction scales			
CIRP	Scales are determined by principal component analysis of 27 items from the College Senior Survey (see "Satisfaction with Campus Life and the College Experience" section and footnote 14 for details)		
Community and social life		–	21.60 (3.79)
Instruction and coursework		–	30.54 (4.73)
Campus facilities		–	30.40 (4.88)
CLL	Scales are determined by principal component analysis of 17 items from the Senior Year Questionnaire (see footnote 16 for details)		
Community and social life		40.96 (8.04)	–
Instruction and coursework		42.29 (9.18)	–
Control variables			
Racial ethnic group			
White	From responses to Census-type questions in the Pre-College Survey or institutional records if missing (CLL), and student responses to the Freshmen Year Survey, or College Senior Survey if missing (CIRP) (see footnote 2 for details)	.67 (.47)	.84 (.36)
Black		.08 (.27)	.03 (.17)
Latino		.08 (.27)	.05 (.21)
Asian		.14 (.34)	.06 (.24)
Other		.03 (.17)	.02 (.14)
Female	1 = female, 0 = male	.50 (.50)	.51 (.50)
Major field area			
Engineering	1 = yes, 0 = no Categories combine major fields as listed in official transcripts (CLL) or responses to the College Senior Survey (CIRP)	.16 (.37)	.11 (.31)
Natural sciences		.18 (.39)	.16 (.37)
Business		–	.18 (.38)
Social sciences		.45 (.50)	.23 (.42)
Arts and humanities		.20 (.40)	.23 (.42)
Other		–	.10 (.29)
College grades			
Honors	1 = Latin honors or official distinction (from transcripts)	.32 (.47)	–
"A" average	1 = "A" average grades (from student reports)	–	.16 (.37)

Table 5 continued

Variable	Measurement notes	Mean (standard deviation)	
		CLL	CIRP
Time allocation			
Attending classes and labs	Hours spent in a typical week in each activity. Time-use variables are recoded from eight discrete categories to the midpoint of each category range, using linear interpolation for the top category ("20 h or more")		
First year		13.54 (3.81)	–
Second year		12.78 (4.12)	–
Fourth year		10.33 (4.17)	12.04 (4.84)
Socializing with friends			
First year		11.46 (5.16)	–
Second year		10.32 (5.29)	–
Fourth year		10.38 (5.29)	13.23 (6.32)
Studying and homework			
First year		10.84 (5.10)	–
Second year		10.72 (4.98)	–
Fourth year		9.68 (5.24)	12.79 (6.54)
Exercising or sports			
First year		5.46 (4.84)	–
Second year		5.21 (4.89)	–
Fourth year		4.64 (4.23)	6.31 (5.74)
Partying			
First year		4.75 (4.46)	–
Second year		4.63 (4.59)	–
Fourth year		4.87 (4.54)	6.40 (5.46)
Working (for pay)			
First year		2.60 (4.34)	–
Second year		3.74 (4.83)	–
Fourth year		5.29 (6.42)	5.76 (5.85)
Participating in student clubs			
First year		2.90 (3.02)	–
Second year		3.60 (3.76)	–
Fourth year		4.31 (4.25)	3.03 (4.52)
Meeting with faculty (office hours)			
First year		.87 (1.32)	–
Second year		1.01 (1.27)	–
Fourth year		1.29 (1.68)	–
Interacting with faculty (other)			
First year		.53 (.90)	–
Second year		.55 (1.08)	–
Fourth year		1.10 (1.79)	–
Campus activities			
Study abroad program	1 = participated in a student-abroad program, 0 = no	.46 (.50)	.46 (.50)
Fraternity or sorority	1 = member, 0 = non-member		

Table 5 continued

Variable	Measurement notes	Mean (standard deviation)	
		CLL	CIRP
First year	For CIRP respondents, referent is since start of college	.36 (.48)	–
Second year		.39 (.49)	–
Fourth year		.38 (.49)	.26 (.44)
Intramural sports team	1 = member, 0 = non-member		
First year	For CIRP respondents, includes students who "frequently" participated in intramural sports since start of college	.35 (.48)	–
Second year		.30 (.46)	–
Fourth year		.28 (.45)	.25 (.43)
Community service club	1 = member, 0 = non-member		
First year	For CIRP respondents, includes students who "frequently" participated in volunteer work during the last year	.27 (.44)	–
Second year		.22 (.42)	–
Fourth year		.24 (.43)	.18 (.39)
Student government	1 = member, 0 = non-member		
First year	For CIRP respondents, referent is since start of college	.07 (.26)	–
Second year		.07 (.25)	–
Fourth year		.08 (.27)	.16 (36)
Faculty contact	1 = frequent contact, 0 = occasional or no contact		
Guest in faculty's home		–	.08 (.26)
Visit during office hours		–	.26 (.44)

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