



Course Information

Prefix & number	Title
EDST 521	Foundations of Higher Education
Instructor	Prerequisites or restrictions (if any)
Sharon Stein	N/A

Focus or Content

Typically, “Foundations of Higher Education” courses focus on the linear historical development and philosophical underpinnings of western higher education. Higher education courses in general also tend to presume that any effort to problematize the current state of higher education must be accompanied by a proposal for precisely how to change and improve higher education - that is, we must follow the formula: describe the problem + prescribe the solution.

This course takes a different approach that might be understood as counterintuitive. It assumes that without committing to an ongoing practice of identifying and interrupting naturalized and normalized ways of knowing, being, and relating in higher education (which is often uncomfortable), we will only be able to want and imagine different versions of the same thing - i.e., the same universities we have inherited. Thus, in this course, students will be invited to denaturalize prevailing narratives about the foundations of higher education. We will consider how we arrived at the universities we have today, and how we might repurpose and regenerate them to be more relevant and responsible in the context of today’s many complex social and ecological challenges.

Throughout the course, we will address complex questions about the past, present, and future of higher education that lack simple answers, and confront individual and institutional complicity in systemic harm with the intention of asking: how did higher education come to be the way it is, and how might it be otherwise? While some people might find these questions unsettling at first, one of the learning objectives of this course is to deepen our capacity to be taught by these difficulties and discomforts. The course asks you to reflect on what you are learning from this process of sitting with and grappling with difficult knowledge and complex questions.

Goals, Objectives or Learning Outcomes

Readings, discussions, assignments, and activities are meant to support and equip students to:

- Engage in systemic analyses of the social and historical systems, conditions, and relationships that have produced higher education, in particular, modern/colonial universities
- Situate oneself in relation to these social and historical systems, conditions, and relationships
- Identify the naturalized forms of historical and ongoing social, ecological, and epistemological violence that have shaped and continue to shape modern/colonial universities

- Develop complex, multi-layered, and multi-voiced questions and analyses about the presumed relationships between the pasts, presents, and futures of higher education
- Hold space for, and glean insights from, the complexities, challenges, uncertainties, discomforts, and possibilities that emerge in efforts to reimagine and remake higher education
- Cultivate strategies and practices for responsibly and effectively navigating possibilities for collaboration and change in hyper-complex, polarized, unpredictable social and institutional contexts

Assignments or Assessment Process

Participation in discussions, weekly journals, final critical/creative project

Notes/Other