



# “Stressed”: Low-Income College Students’ Experiences of Poverty on Campus

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# Characteristics of the 4 campus where we conducted our ethnographies

	Robin U	Badger U	Great Lakes U	Galena U
Location	Small city	Urban	Urban	Rural
Undergraduate Enrollment	Over 10,000	Over 20,000	Over 20,000	Under 10,000
Operating Budget	Under \$200M	Over \$500M	Over \$500M	Under \$200M
% Female	60-65%	50-55%	50-55%	35-40%
% Non-Hispanic White	85-90%	75-80%	65-70%	90-95%
% State Resident	65-70%	60-65%	85-90%	70-75%
% Living On-Campus	40-45%	25-30%	20-25%	50-55%
Cost of Attendance	\$19,000	\$24,500	\$22,500	\$18,000
% Pell recipient	25-30%	15-20%	35-40%	25-30%
% Receiving Loans	55-60%	35-40%	60-65%	60-65%



# Three representations of student “poverty” on campus

1. The romance of student poverty on campus
2. The othering of poverty on campus
3. The erasing of student poverty on campus

# Some causes of student poverty on campus

- ▶ Historical inequality/SES
- ▶ The nickel-and-diming and accumulation of hidden costs
- ▶ Expectations of the student role
- ▶ Marginalization



# “College affordability” vs. Precarity

Precarity as a condition of multifaceted (e.g., social, economic, physical, academic, spiritual) instability characterized by a persistent and durative state of the heightened contingency of one’s well-being. Precarity is experienced as an additive, holistic, and relational phenomena—as an accumulation of financial costs, one added upon the next, and added holistically and seamlessly to social and academic “stresses” and to the bundle of responses that students employ to manage their precarity-fueled stress.

# The management and experience of precarity on campus

- ▶ *The rationing of recourses and activity*
- ▶ *Social and institutional alienation*
- ▶ *A compression of time cognition*
- ▶ *Awareness of the contingent nature well-being*
- ▶ *Self-consciousness of institutional goals and tracks*



# Parting thoughts: Pedagogy of the “stressed”

1. Student poverty is a systematic and institutionalized part of our campuses.
2. Low-income, first-generation students, and minoritized student experience college in fundamentally different ways than their majoritarian peers.
3. We need a new, holistic language for discussing student poverty, to better inform policy and pedagogy.