Course Description: Like many institutions in our society, higher education has recently been the subject of heated public discussion and debate. Much of the focus has been not on the extraordinary achievements of American colleges and universities, but on problems, real and perceived. Also, most of the conversation has been driven by legislators, trustees, faculty, parents, and journalists; it is striking that, to date, the voice of students has not received sufficient attention. This seminar is designed as a corrective. It will function like a workshop: students will participate in the design of the syllabus by selecting, in conjunction with the instructor, four key issues on which to focus and on which they, as students, can have a real role in making change. (Possible topics include advising, the liberal arts [or general education] curriculum, the use of technology, global education, experiential education [e.g., internships, undergraduate research], learning outcomes and assessment, academic integrity, the role of extracurricular activities, and the relationship between the higher purposes of education and the practical value of a degree [career preparation]). Students will work individually and in small teams to review recent relevant literature and come up with concrete proposals for how to improve the college experience in four of these areas. No prior familiarity with the literature on this subject is required; what is required is a passion for your education, a willingness to work hard and collaboratively, and a commitment to avoid facile assumptions and generalizations in favor of concrete, evidence-based recommendations. Class readings and discussions will be supplemented by guest presentations by leaders in higher education, both from NYU and elsewhere.

Grading: In-class writing and discussion: 10%
  Paper #1: 15%
  Oral report (on paper #1): 5%
  Paper #2: 25%
  Paper #3: 30%
  Oral report (on paper #3): 15%

Attendance is required. This is a small, discussion-based seminar and meets only once a week. Thus, missing even one class session deprives oneself and one’s fellow students of the opportunity to learn from multiple perspectives. For this reason, all anticipated absences must be cleared with the instructor in advance and, in the event of unanticipated
illness or serious emergency, official documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) must be submitted. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your grade.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity is a paramount value in our academic community. Students should familiarize themselves with NYU’s published guidelines and policies in this area and carefully abide by them. Any questions should be referred to the instructor. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in a grade of F for an assignment or even for the entire course, depending on the nature of the infraction. Cases will also be reported to the Office of the Dean, which may impose more severe sanctions in certain circumstances.

**Readings:** In the first class session, students will be provided with a list of required and recommended books and articles related to the topics that will be discussed in the seminar. Also, early in the semester, there will also be an in-class presentation by Bobst Library’s subject area expert in education on how to use the library’s resources and online databases to locate relevant literature and to conduct your own research.

**Assignments:** To help promote and focus discussion, class sessions may begin with a 5-minute ungraded writing assignment in response to a prompt that the instructor will provide. There will be no examinations; but three papers of increasing complexity will be required, as well as brief oral reports on two of the papers—as follows:

The first paper will be a short (3-5 page) critical book review. Each student will choose a different book from the bibliography distributed in the first class session; then, two weeks later, students will present 5-minute oral reports on those books for discussion by the group. These written reviews (revised, if necessary, based on the group discussion) will then be submitted the next week, and collected as a reference resource to be used by all the students in the class.

The second paper will offer each student an opportunity to explore at medium length (7-10 pages) what s/he wishes to get out of college and what steps s/he will take to achieve those goals in the next three years (e.g., subjects to be explored through coursework, choice of a major [if known], plans for study away, undergraduate research, internships, and other less structured experiences outside of the classroom).

The third paper (10-12 pages) will be an opportunity for each student, reflecting on the readings and topics discussed in class, as well as the personal goal-setting and “horizon planning” described in his or her second paper, to offer concrete proposals for how the college experience can be improved—e.g., what currently works and should be retained or enhanced, and what needs to be changed or added? Before submitting their papers, students will present their proposals orally for discussion by the group, so that the final version of the paper can be revised to take into account this feedback.

Finally, depending on the quality of the proposals, they may be abstracted and collected as a “white paper” or set of policy recommendations to be shared with relevant NYU academic leaders.
Provisional Schedule of Classes
(NOTE: The specific topics below are for illustration only; the class may decide to substitute one or more other topics. Similarly, the sample readings are also tentative and will change based on students’ interests):

1/29  Introductory class: no reading assignment
       (a) Course structure, logistics, expectations
       (b) Distribution of bibliography on American higher education organized by topic
       (c) Selection by each student of a book to report on and review
       (d) Selection of four large topics for investigation by the seminar

2/5   Overview of undergraduate education (e.g., history of education from antiquity to the present; European vs. American systems; college vs. research university; public vs. private; changing goals; current issues, challenges, and critiques)
       (a) Sample Reading: Each student continues reading the book s/he selected for Paper #1.
       (b) Guest discussant: TBD

2/12  Overview, continued
       (a) Students’ oral reports (on the books which students are reviewing)
       (b) Guest discussant: TBD (library instruction)

2/19  Topic 1: Curriculum: The Liberal Arts and a “General Education”
       (b) PAPER #1 (BOOK REVIEW) IS DUE

2/26  Topic 1, continued
       (a) Guest discussant: TBD

3/5   Topic 2: Technology: Its role in teaching and learning; media literacy

3/12  Topic 2, continued
       (a) Guest discussant: TBD

3/19  NO CLASSES: SPRING BREAK
3/26 Topic 3: Global Education: Why It Matters and How to Do It
(a) Sample Readings: M. Santirocco et al., “Report of the NYU Faculty Committee on Global Learning Objectives” (June 2017); Ben Wildavsky, The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World (Princeton UP, 2010); Victor Savicki & Elizabeth Brewer (eds.), Assessing Study Abroad (Stylus, 2015)
(b) PAPER #2 (PERSONAL GOALS & PLANNING) IS DUE

4/2 Topic 3, continued
(a) Guest discussant: TBD

4/9 Topic 4: Value of College: Higher Purpose vs. Vocational Preparation

4/16 Topic 4, continued
(a) Guest discussant: TBD

4/23 Students’ oral reports (on the topics of Paper #3)

4/30 Students’ oral reports, continued

5/7 Final Class
(a) Recap and review
(b) Practical considerations (“white paper”)
(c) PAPER #3 (PROPOSALS) IS DUE