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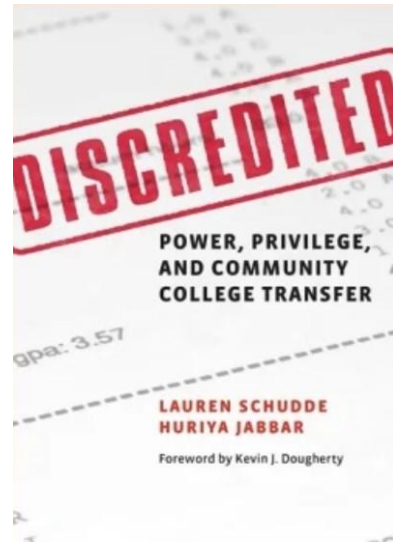
Schudde, L. & Jabbar, H. (2024). *Discredited: Power, privilege, and community college transfer*. Harvard Education Press.

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Discredited provides an eye-opening look into the deeply imbalanced system of higher education. Lauren Schudde and Huriya Jabbar weave in accounts from community college attendees who recount their experiences with the system, painting a clear picture of the miscommunication and trivialization embedded within an inequitable structure. By breaking down each role within the system into various actors and the positions they occupy, they offer a unique and clear way to understand how this system functions relationally—and how hegemonic forces keep it in place. Schudde, Associate Professor at University of Texas at Austin, and Jabbar, Associate Professor at the University of Southern California, ask thought-provoking questions, examining the broad scope of higher education and, specifically, the role elitist universities play. The authors offer a peek into the complicated, convoluted transfer credit system that community college students must endure if they are seeking to attend a degree-granting institution. Schudde and Jabbar argue that this is not an issue to be examined solely within the structure of the community college but needs to be expanded to include communication and power exchanges across degree-granting universities, students, and state legislators.



In the first chapter, they discuss how the onus is not exclusively on the community college; in fact, the community college operates within hidden power dynamics shaped by university institutions. To understand the situation is to not examine it in a vacuum, but through the lens of the entire system, a system made up of hierarchical roles of power that determine whose credits are accepted, or not.

The authors effectively demonstrate their argument, providing powerful examples throughout the text and breaking down the categorized roles and power positions each player assumes in the process. In the second chapter, they first examine those who hold the most power, labeled the “incumbents” and “governance units”—those who have the authority to shape and transform the field. Schudde and Jabbar argue that incumbents, often administrators or faculty at flagship or selective universities, hold disproportionate influence and aim to maintain a perceived

integrity of their institution. Often, incumbents perceive community college credits as subpar and deem the syllabi inadequate to be considered transferable, arguing that accepting such credits would lower the standards of their institutions. Incumbents adhere to a social order and maintain the status quo of higher education. Occasionally, in less selective universities, challengers arise to disrupt this prescribed norm, seeking greater accessibility for transfer students.

Within the community college, there are shifting roles of power as well. In the third chapter, the authors explore how challengers within these institutions question the lack of clarity in transfer requirements, often seeking new agreements between universities and state policymakers. Counselors and administrators can work to simplify the process by seeking answers and creating clear guides, but the responsibility almost always falls on the community college rather than the university to explore and recommend. Many recognize the imbalance of power that universities hold and, despite continuing to advocate for their students, concede that “the most powerful actors were not on board” (p. 78), acknowledging that real change must come from the universities.

However, not all community college actors challenge the current balance of power. Some reinforce the status quo. While they recognize the confusion of the transfer process, they often place the burden on students to figure it out. Those upholding the status quo expect students to blindly trust the system while simultaneously triangulating information and filtering out misinformation.

Next, Schudde and Jabbar examine how students themselves play diverse roles: questioning the advice they are given, seeking answers on their own, or simply following what they’re told, often at the considerable cost of time and money. The issues that arise from the convoluted transfer process often result in finger-pointing, individualizing the blame. But as the authors argue, it is an institutional problem. Throughout this blame game, it is important to note that “the consequences of this system, and the power dynamics between community colleges and universities, are ultimately felt by transfer-intending students who are forced to negotiate these complex webs of information in pursuit of their educational aspirations” (p. 88). Like most systemic imbalances, it is those with the least power who suffer the greatest consequences.

The final chapter offers a path forward. Noting the small percentage of community college transfer students, Schudde & Jabbar ask, “Why is it, then, that these elite universities, who are not transfer receptive, drive transfer policies and pathways in public higher education?” (p. 46). Questions like this appear throughout the book, sparking thoughtful moments of reflection and engagement, leaving the reader to question whom higher education truly benefits. *Discredited* addresses inequities within higher education, describing the barriers to entry for marginalized communities and the impact of being a first-generation college student. However, deeper engagement with these dynamics could have provided a richer understanding of the inner workings of the systems the authors describe. While they position the university as the main barrier and community college staff as limited in their ability to create change, the research is primarily focused on those in community colleges. It would have been interesting to examine incumbents’ perceptions of their roles as

gatekeepers within universities, potentially revealing the underlying biases that sustain inequitable systems.

The author's research focuses primarily on the Texas school system, frequently citing UT Austin's policies as central to the issues discussed. Their own positionality—as faculty at selective universities—places them in a unique position to advocate for change from within. While they call for institutional change, ideally, they can implement some of their suggestions. Schudde's previous research explores dual enrollment paths from high school to community colleges. Her work often critiques social inequities and emphasizes how unfair systems disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Both authors advocate a systemic change, including guaranteed transfer credits and government accountability to ensure enforcement. Overall, *Discredited* presents a strong argument to address the problems in the transfer phenomenon and offers practical, thoughtful solutions for a deeply flawed process that rarely gets the attention it deserves.

About the Reviewer



Anda Pearson is a Ph.D. student at Utah State University in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership, specializing in curriculum studies with an emphasis in cultural studies. Her research explores youth identity development, belonging, and empathy. She is interested in how curriculum and school culture influence students' sense of self, as well as how feminist theory and post-structuralism can inform educational research. Anda also examines the role of literature, especially young adult texts and graphic novels, in supporting empathy and emotional development in secondary classrooms. Before beginning her doctoral studies, she taught middle school English language arts and creative writing.

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