**Reading Group Discussion Questions, 4/11/11**

1. **Weis believes that faculty produce their own “lived cultures” and that these are linked to (but do not over-determine) student culture. According to Weis, this faculty culture (particularly for white faculty) embraces their positions for reasons other than pedagogy, feels disappointed in students’ lack of “basic skills,” tends to view students as “other” (despite the fact that a large proportion of faculty lived in circumstances similar to students earlier in their lives), and accepts high attrition and failure rates among students.**

* **To what degree have faculty at KCC produced an alternative student culture? Can an “alternative faculty culture” here at the college explain why our students seem to behave differently (and to some degree, have better outcomes) than those in Weis’ ethnography?**
* **Also, Weis believes that “lack of basic skills coupled with the fact that faculty could view their…student population as ‘other’ than themselves contributes to a rising antagonism on the part of faculty and students” (p. 84). In what ways is this “othering” of our students practiced by faculty at KCC? If we agree that the “othering of students” contributes to the negative elements of student culture that we have discussed, then how might we work against this impulse?**

1. **According to Weis, black faculty are more aware of those structural barriers impeding the success of community college students, despite the fact that in Weis’ sample, they appear to push their students harder than white faculty. Weis also believes that black faculty are better able to acknowledge the “contradictions with respect to education within the black American experience” (p. 101). In particular, black faculty appear better at recognizing that while students in Weis’ sample embraced their status as college students, they felt ambivalently about achieving academic excellence. As Percy notes, “excellence means being kind of white” (p. 101). Weis also states, “One the one hand, education *is* values; on the other hand, education is not part of *our* culture” (p. 102).**

* **To what degree do we believe that students at KCC feel ambivalently about their desire to succeed? Do we agree that “students adopt the *form* of college attendance without adopting its substance?” (p. 102). Can we use our own lived interactions with students to provide for and/or against this position?**

1. **Weis talks a great deal about the “hidden curriculum” at Urban College. She says that it is transmitted largely through staffing patterns (see p. 59) and the attendance policy. Weis worries that the prevalence of white faculty at an institution that serves primarily black students from working class backgrounds reinforces students’ beliefs that “college knowledge, especially of the most prestigious sort, is possessed most ‘naturally’ by white men” (p. 60). Weis also critiques an attendance policy that is very similar to our own at KCC, and argues that it does *not* effectively foster academic achievement, but rather coerces students to “use time in a manner defined as appropriate by the college…(and) attempt to impose the dominant notion of time upon students from a subculture which embodies oppositional cultural practices” (p. 67).**

* **To what extent do we agree with Weis’ notions about the messages embedded in non-diverse hiring patterns at community colleges? With which elements of diversity should community college hiring committees concern themselves primarily?**
* **Moreover, do we agree that our current attendance policy is ineffective in promoting student achievement? Can faculty members maintain “classroom order” without it? Does it, as Weis intimates, benefit faculty more than students? Would another policy (unrelated to attendance) more effectively promote students’ learning?**

**\*\*\*OUR FINAL MEETING OF THE SEMESTER IS ON MAY 9 AT 3 PM IN THE KCTL. LET’S PLAN TO READ CHAPTERS 5 AND 8 OF WEIS’ ETHNOGRAPHY.**