Aspiring Adults Adrift:
Implications for Colleges and Universities
Jennifer L. Jennings, NYU Sociology
Four issues the book raises for me

- **The Lord of the Flies Dilemma**
  - Adult support and advising in college
  - What students want when they get to college, and what they find waiting for them

- **Building the College “Iron Triangle”**
  - Some thoughts on students’ personal and academic development in college

- **The Division of Labor/Virtues of Specialization**
  - Do good researchers make good teachers?

- **Rule or Be Ruled?:**
  - Are we the problem? Could we be the solution? Faculty incentives to improve teaching and develop mentoring relationships with students
The *Lord of the Flies* Dilemma

- **College matriculation as a vulnerable transition point for young adults**: Why do we let our students live under their parents’ watchful eyes one day, and fully govern themselves the next?

- Could colleges and faculty instead scaffold this experience more effectively?

**Where we are at present**

**Where we need to be**
* My claim: Most students come to 4-year colleges excited to learn; a great deal of college teaching manages to put out the fire, rather than to light it.

* Some quotes from “Urban Education Policy” freshman seminar students on first day of class survey:

  * “I wanted to explore a subject that I am not that familiar with. I wanted an adventure.”

  * “I’m searching for something I can feel passionate about improving/influencing, and this class sounded like something I could take an interest in.”

  * “I’m literally bursting at the seams thinking about how much I will learn from this course.”
Building the College “Iron Triangle”

Where we are at present
Content and skills

?  Professor

Where we need to be
Content and skills

Student  Professor

* Educating 18-24 year olds is not only about building academic skills; it’s our job to help students navigate a new period of life and build pro-social attitudes and non-cognitive habits and skills.
Division of Labor/
Virtues of Specialization

* Teaching at the undergrad level and doing exceptional research require two very different skill sets.

  * Almost no training in teaching for grad students

* Adam Smith was right: There are good reasons to specialize, and most other fields do.

  * “Each manufacture will be divided in as many parts as possible. In the making of a watch, if one man shall make the wheels, another the spring, another shall engrave the dial plate, then the watch shall be better and cheaper than if the same work were put on any one man.” - Adam Smith

* My claim: In an ideal world, these two functions would be decoupled; we would hire researchers based on research, and teachers based on teaching.
Rule, or be ruled

• Faculty at research universities face the wrong incentives if a goal of a university is to provide high-quality instruction to undergraduates.

• Three paths forward:
  • Change the incentives
  • Split the research and teaching functions
  • Change the norms

• It’s difficult to change norms without changing incentives.

• Arum’s final insight: We can let others impose standards on us, or we can do it ourselves.