Problem Set #4: Sociology 110A (Stovel)
Due in Lecture Tuesday, May 31, 2005

Please type your answers on a separate piece of paper. Include your name, your TA’s name, and your section on your answer sheet. Be sure to answer all parts of each question. You should be able to complete this problem set after attending lecture and reading the assigned readings. Cite all sources appropriately.

1. What is the difference between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome?

2. The American school system is organized around the notion that education can function as a sort of “great equalizer”, helping children overcome the accident of birth (i.e., the accident of being born into a poor, middle class, or wealthy family). Drawing on lecture material and at least one course reading, answer the following two questions:
   a) Provide an example of at least one way in which the American school system is organized to help children overcome the accident of birth. In what way might the schools sometimes succeed in equalizing students?
   b) Provide an example of how the American school system in practice may in fact fail to reduce the impact of the accident of birth. In what way might the schools sometimes fail in equalizing students?

3. Some people account for inequality in outcomes by pointing to differences in individual characteristics (ability, motivation, etc.), while others emphasize the differences in the structural conditions or contexts that individuals experience. Based on the content of the Jonathan Kozol reading, on what side of this debate do you think Kozol falls? Provide specific examples from the article to support your answer.

4. To what extent does Andrew Delbanco’s depiction of SAT preparation courses and the early admissions process exemplify a tragedy of the commons? For whom is the outcome sub-optimal? A good answer will list the key components of a tragedy of commons situation as well as provide direct examples or cites from the article.

5. How well does the college admissions process (described by Delbanco or as you experienced it) promote equality of opportunity? What might we
change it to create more equality of opportunity? If you think the status quo is pretty good, explain how it offers opportunity to all. (In your answer, you might consider what people who didn’t get into the UIW might say about this question.)