

Social Mobility and Failure in Higher Education
Project Description
Dr. Rowe

This project takes as its archive a series of long-form oral history interviews from soon to be and recent LGBTQA+ college graduates. These graduates are all first-generation college students who grew up poor. Following Brim's (2020) declaration of the emergent field of poor queer studies, *Social Mobility and Failure in Higher Education* looks to unpack the cultural scripts of higher education that poor queer college students must learn in order to navigate the university. Specifically, this project takes up the class-inflected heuristic of "compete-speak" as a framework for analysis.

Compete-speak is the language of the university, one that marks the speaker as full of potential. If you are worthy of attention, scholarships, and have intellect to compete you will be well-versed in compete-speak. For those who aren't poor, compete-speak is learned growing up in a middle class (or higher) socioeconomic or cultural capital status. Using the participants narratives as a guide, I work to unpack the performances of belonging within compete-speak that poor queer students work to learn and master. These performances, or cultural scripts, are multi-faceted linguistic and embodied subversions of social class within the classroom, advisor's office, or at the registrar's desk that poor queers must quickly learn in order to mask their poor roots. Through these interviews, I am looking to find the performative cues of compete-speak within the university setting.