

PHIL 323H1 F: Social and Cultural Theory (Topic: The Neoliberal University)

Fall Term 2023/ University of Toronto St. George Campus (3 credits)

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Instructor:	Natalie Helberg (Lecturer, Department of Philosophy)
Office:	TBA
Email:	natalie.helberg@mail.utoronto.ca (email is my preferred contact method)
Office hours:	Thursday 12:00-1400 (or by appointment) *There will be no office hours the first week of class
TA:	Dominic Pizzolito (email: dominic.pizzolitto@mail.utoronto.ca) *Note: Dominic is our grader; he will not hold regular office hours but will respond to grade-related queries by email and schedule meetings with you about grades and assignments if this is needed.
Class schedule:	We 15:00-18:00 in person; location: BA 1190

Course description: We will engage in a philosophical consideration of the contemporary university, the ‘neoliberal’ university. We will consider the features of this iteration of the university and their relation to the injunctions of neoliberal capitalism as well as alternative historical configurations of the university which will serve to highlight the contingency of these features. The class will be self-reflexive in various ways: It will be an occasion to reflect on our own positions and possibilities within the institution that houses the class (we will also reflect in a more general way on the different positions available within the neoliberal university—that of student, professor, administrator, etc.—and the possibilities that attend them). We will also reflect on what philosophy in particular has to offer to practices of resisting or mindfully navigating the negative dimensions of the neoliberal university. Our readings will be drawn from Bill Readings’ *The University in Ruins*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons*, Derrida’s *The Eyes of the University*, Sara Ahmed’s *On Being Included*, Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and will also include essay-length texts by Kant, Humboldt, Schiller, Schleiermacher, Adorno, Benjamin, Adrienne Rich, Foucault, and Bourdieu.

Required texts: The texts below must be purchased through the UofT Bookstore. Electronic versions of our other readings will be available on Quercus. Consult the reading schedule for a comprehensive list of our readings.

Readings, Bill. 1999. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP.

Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included*. Durham; London: Duke UP.

Rancière, Jacques. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

*Note: I recommend additionally purchasing the following text, because it is astonishing and contains some of the required and optional readings for our class, but you are not obligated to purchase it:

Derrida, Jacques. 2004. *Eyes of the University*. Stanford: Stanford UP. (The readings from this text that are required will also be available in electronic form via Quercus.)

How the course will run and expectations:

We will meet at our scheduled times in the room that has been assigned to us. Make sure that you monitor Quercus for any announcements and keep apprised of any email communications from me. If ever an emergency constrains me to cancel class, I will notify you using Quercus.

Do your very best to complete the readings for the week in advance. We have quite a few readings and at least a subset of our readings are difficult texts. You will be learning how to read the more linguistically challenging texts on our reading list during lectures (I will give you the frameworks you need for the texts to become intelligible to you) and while engaged in your own reading practice (you do have to grapple with the texts on your own, too, to start to unlock them).

Informal reading policy: I will be working with an informal ‘reading policy’ as I run the course. The policy is partly an attempt to embed the ‘mindful resistance to the negative dimensions of the neoliberal university’ that is one of our themes in the design of the course itself. The policy is designed to alleviate some of the anxiety students who have a limited amount of time (because they are also obliged to work, or are taking a number of other heavy courses, or for other reasons) often experience as they attempt to complete their coursework. I want the class to be maximally enriching, and so I’ve loaded it up with fantastic texts. I realize, though, that this can set students up to feel overwhelmed by the course and perhaps unable to rise to its challenges; it can set students up to feel as if they are up against the impossible, or even to feel like abject failures. These feelings are among the worst the contemporary university can foster. How, then, to strike a balance between the desire to teach generously—to give students everything it is possible, as an instructor, to give them—while also refraining from subjecting them to the abuses of finitude that the contemporary university is already so primed and prone to inflict (e.g., acting like dense texts can be processed instantly, or in no time at all, or even acting as if ‘time,’ that precious resource, is evenly distributed across the student body, when the truth is that some students have more than others)? How, too, to offer resistance to a post-literate culture (another spawn of neoliberal capitalism)? Many students struggle with reading itself and with attention. I believe in the value of the activity that is reading, so the solution to the problem of stressing students out with more reading than they can do *cannot* be that of having no required readings or even a scanty number of them. I view the class as partly an opportunity for students to develop the reading muscles whose atrophy our culture encourages. It is imperative, then, for students in the class to read, and not only read, but read as much as they can—to exercise those muscles, in other words, and transform their limits by pushing them. What I would like students in the class

to do, then, is to use the texts on our reading list to cultivate a reading practice guided by the following principles. (Note that the ‘Reading and Reflection Log’ assignment will function as a record of your reading practice.)

1. View the reading list as a challenge to push your reading capacities beyond their own bounds. Everyone will come to the class with different capacities. The point is not to feel that you’re competing with your peers; the point is to gauge where you as an individual are and to try to use the class, and the work you do in it, to move past that particular point. If, after the course ends, you’ve done this (your own reading limits have budged and you find yourself able to productively read more than you were able to before), then you’ve succeeded.
2. Make time every week to look at the readings for the following week. If we’re looking at a particularly long reading the next week, then try to tackle it over the course of a few days, instead of all at once. Even when I’m not ‘sitting down to read,’ I enjoy keeping the things I’m reading close to me and glancing at them in the little intervals of time I’m afforded throughout the day. When I’m reading this way (intermittently glancing at a text), I find it changes the way I focus on and process the text. The smaller units of the text stand out to me more. I might only be looking at a sentence or a paragraph while I’m nibbling on some breakfast. The sentence, or the paragraph, isn’t as prone to being swallowed up into the larger ocean of text it’s a part of and I myself am more liable to remember it. Anyway: you’re not obliged to fill every second of free time you find yourself with with our readings. Here, I’m just highlighting one technique among several that you might embrace as you develop your own reading practice.
3. Make a concerted effort to do all of the readings assigned for a given week, BUT don’t think you’ve ‘failed’ (or are not meeting expectations) if you don’t manage to. *Try* to tackle our mountain of texts and then observe how far you were able to go. This is a way of learning about where your limits stand now. Track how they change over time (that is, track how they change during the time of the course and after the course is over).
4. If you don’t have time to get to a given text on our reading list while the course is running, consider saving it for a rainy day in the future. The course is pointing you to interesting resources. We act as if learning can transpire in 12 weeks, but often it takes far more time. Don’t be afraid to let the course exceed its own bounds and spill over into your post-course life.
5. You do have to read the texts you work with to produce your written assignments carefully. If you find yourself having to make hard choices about what to read and what to save for another day, prioritize the texts you think you might want to write on.
6. Do attend lecture. If you haven’t had a chance to read a given text, you can still learn about it by listening to me discourse on it while taking notes. The midterm (see

assignments below) will test students on lecture-content, so if you missed out on reading a given text but still attended the lecture on it, you will nevertheless have all the resources you need to succeed on the midterm.

I will provide notes which indicate the core ideas I've discussed during a given lecture after the lecture via Quercus, as students often find them useful to have while studying the readings independently and while working on written assignments. Please also take your own notes (creating a personalized set of notes while engaged in a learning process is a special, enriching activity!). The lectures themselves will contain more detail than typed-up lecture notes can convey and you may want to capture some of it.

I will invite questions, comments, and some discussion during my lectures. You're free to jump in with questions and comments at any time—just raise your hand.

Evaluation/Assignments:

1) 'Testing the Waters' Essay: 1500 words (20%; due Oct. 12 via Quercus by 11:59pm)

*This first, short essay will test the same skills you will need to exercise to complete the final essay. Keep the feedback you receive from our TA in mind and put it to use while completing the final essay assignment, which will be worth more of the overall grade. The first paper is worth a smaller percentage of your total grade than the second not only because it is slightly shorter, but also so that, if you do make mistakes with it, it will be possible to correct for them before completing the last essay.

*Instructions for the essay will be posted on Quercus two weeks before the deadline.

2) Midterm Exam: multiple choice, short answer questions (a few sentences per question) and a short essay question (500-600 words) testing all lecture material presented before the date of the midterm. (30%; scheduled to run in class on Nov. 15—please bring a pen or pencil)

3) Reading and Reflection Log: 10 entries (300 words each; each entry for a different week's readings). (The collection of entries will be worth 20% of the final grade; due on Dec. 6th via Quercus by 11:59pm)

*In each entry, you should be summarizing portions of the week's readings while connecting the ideas, claims, or arguments you are summarizing to your own experience within the university. You may do this in a number of ways: you could use your experience to pose a critical question about one of the readings; you could use your experience to develop a given philosopher's ideas; you could juxtapose the claims made by different thinkers and reflect on how synthesizing their ideas might be productive when it comes to thinking about the contemporary university; you may find that the ideas offered by different theorists are in tension with one another and offer a consideration

that suggests (or considerations that suggest) we should favour some of these ideas over others; there are other ways you could approach these entries as well.

The entries in this ‘reading and reflection’ log should be taken as seriously as any other writing assignment (it’s not an assignment for ‘giveaway’ marks): the logs which score the highest will be made up of entries which contain crisp, clear, accurate, rich, and philosophically sharp summaries and which connect the summarized content with the student’s lived experience in ways that are plausible, interesting, and perhaps even critical and illuminating. No one will be checking to ensure that you do complete an entry every week, but you should work at the pace of writing one nearly every week so that you can produce a collection of thoughtful, strong entries by the end of the course. It will not be possible to do this assignment well if you wait until the last minute. You need to develop it over time in tandem with your reading practice. All of this being said: do have fun with the assignment! It’s a chance for you to think about the university that exists at your historical moment, an institution that you find yourself in, and that is shaping your life, in critical and creative ways.

*Note: Which portions of the week’s readings you summarize for an entry are up to you—it goes without saying that you will be writing on parts of the readings for a given week that you did manage to get through; you can still create an entry if you haven’t managed to read everything.

*Note: You will only be submitting the log on the last day of class. If you’re worried about whether your entries are on the right track, you can bring a few to show me during office hours and I can give you some feedback.

4) Final Paper: 2000-2300 words (30%; due on Dec. 15th via Quercus by 11:59pm)

*Instructions for the essay will be posted on Quercus prior to the final two weeks of class.

Assignment Submission: All assignments should be submitted via Quercus by 11:59pm on the day they are due.

Extensions: Extensions may be permitted for valid reasons (emergencies, severe illnesses, etc.). Please request an extension before the day the assignment you are requesting an extension for is due. Retroactive extensions may be possible, depending on a person’s reasons for requesting them. Getting in touch with me to explain your situation and see what accommodations are possible never hurts! Do reach out to me to request extensions (don’t reach out to our TA about extensions).

Late Policy: Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will be penalized

(2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted).

Email Policy: If you have questions that require elaborate philosophical responses or detailed explanations, please come to my office hours or schedule a meeting with me to pose them (I won't have time to write up a treatise for you by email, but I'm happy to speak with you and help you that way—I can answer questions much more efficiently using spoken language). For practical questions: First, make sure I haven't already answered the question (e.g., on the syllabus or on Quercus), then, if I haven't, feel free to reach out. You can email me to ask for extensions or to set up meetings. Email: natalie.helberg@mail.utoronto.ca.

Re-marking Policy: When a graded assignment is returned to you, please consider the feedback provided on it carefully. If, after careful consideration of this feedback, you feel that your grade is unfair, you can reach out to Dominic and request a re-evaluation. In the email you send him, you must explain your reasons for thinking the initial grade is unfair. Dominic can then decide whether a re-evaluation is warranted. There are three possible outcomes of a re-evaluation: the grade may remain the same, the grade may be adjusted upwards, or, in cases where the TA feels they were initially too generous, the initial grade may be lowered. I will support Dominic's judgement. I will only step in if there are assignments that are particularly difficult to re-assess and Dominic requests my assistance.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is not mandatory, and you will not lose marks if there are some lectures you must miss. As I mentioned above, however, genuine success in the course is in a number of ways contingent on attending lectures.

Missed Test Policy: You will only complete one timed exam for the course, our midterm. If you miss the midterm for a valid reason (an emergency, a severe illness, a death in your family), I will allow you to write the midterm on an alternative date in my office. You will have 3 hours to write—as much time as the other students in the class will have. I will ask you to supply documentation, so have that ready. If you do miss the midterm, you must reach out to me as soon as possible to inform me about your situation and re-request a make-up exam.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities; competition in the academic environment should be fair). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the following resources: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai> (the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations)

and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>. Reach out to me or your TA for advice on anything you find unclear.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accessibility-related concerns should be communicated to me. I will do my best to accommodate students who require accommodations. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services: www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

Reading Schedule

*Note: Our reading schedule isn't set in stone and we will be free to adjust it as the course progresses if we need to. Some topics may require slightly more time to cover than our reading schedule indicates, in which case we will allow them to spill over into subsequent weeks. Think of the course, of our thinking in the course, as an organism developing, rather than as a body of pre-partitioned information whose delivery is rigidly determined in advance. The metaphor of a 'developing organism' suggests that you can think of the course as a unified entity as well: the links between the readings will ramify as we move through them, so we will be calling back to past readings as the course progresses, refreshing and transforming them in the context of the newer readings.

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Readings</i>
<p>1</p> <p><i>Sept. 13/2023</i></p> <p><i>The 'Neoliberal' University and Neoliberal Capitalism; Performativity and The Empty Idea of 'Excellence'</i></p>	<p>Introduction to the class and first lecture.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. "Introduction" and "The Idea of Excellence." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 1-43.</p> <p>Jacques Derrida. 1983. "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils." In <i>Diacritics</i> 13(1): 3-20. (Link available on Quercus).</p> <p>*This essay by Derrida is also available in <i>The Eyes of the University</i>, if you've purchased it: Jacques Derrida. 2004. "The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils." In <i>Eyes of the University</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 129-174.</p>
<p>2</p> <p><i>Sept. 20/2023</i></p>	<p>Michel Foucault. 1995. "Docile Bodies." In <i>Discipline and Punish</i>. New York: Vintage. 135-169. (Available via Quercus)</p>

<p><i>Training and Time in the Neoliberal University</i></p>	<p>Cressida Heyes. 2020. "Down and Out: Temporality After Discipline." In <i>Anaesthetics of Existence</i>. Durham: Duke UP. 75-96. (Link available via Quercus)</p> <p>Optional/Recommended: Jacques Derrida. 2004. "Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis." In <i>Eyes of the University</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 113-128.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Sept. 27/2023</p> <p><i>Diversity, Public Relations and Non-Performatives in the Neoliberal University</i></p>	<p>Sara Ahmed. 2012. "Institutional Life." In <i>On Being Included</i>. Durham; London: Duke University Press. 19-50.</p> <p>Sara Ahmed. 2012. "Equality and Performance Culture." In <i>On Being Included</i>. Durham; London: Duke University Press. 83-111.</p> <p>Sara Ahmed. 2012. "Commitment as a Non-Performative." In <i>On Being Included</i>. Durham; London: Duke University Press. 113-140.</p> <p>*Instructions distributed via Quercus for 'Testing the Waters' Essay</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Oct. 4/2023</p> <p><i>Historical Alternatives to the Neoliberal University: University Founded on Reason</i></p>	<p>Bill Readings. 1999. "The Decline of the Nation State." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 44-53.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. "The University within the Limits of Reason." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 54-61.</p> <p>Immanuel Kant. 1970. "The Contest of the Faculties." In <i>Kant's Political Writings</i>. Ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 176-190. (Available on Quercus)</p> <p>Jacques Derrida. 2004. "Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties." In <i>Eyes of the University</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 83-112.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Oct. 11/2023</p> <p>Historical Alternatives to</p>	<p>Bill Readings. 1999. "The University and the Idea of Culture." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 62-69.</p>

<p>Neoliberal University Continued: University-Education and Bildung; The Sculpting of Character and Citizens</p> <p>Oct. 12/2023</p>	<p>Wilhelm Von Humboldt. 1970. <i>On the Spirit and the Organisational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin</i>. Minerva 8: 242–250. (Available on Quercus)</p> <p>Friedrich Schleiermacher. 2020. “Occasional Thoughts on the University in the German Sense.” In <i>The Rise of the Research University</i>. Ed. Louis Menand, Paul Reitter, and Chad Wellmon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 45-66. (Available on Quercus)</p> <p>Friedrich Von Schiller. 1974. Selections from <i>Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education Of Man</i>. Available through the UofT Library System via EBSCOhost. *Precise selections TBA. (Link available on Quercus)</p> <p>* ‘Testing the Waters’ Essay due via Quercus by 11:59pm</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Oct. 18/2023</p> <p><i>The ‘Neoliberal’ University as the ‘Post-Historical’ University</i></p>	<p>Bill Readings. 1999. “Literary Culture.” In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 70-88.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. “Culture Wars and Cultural Studies.” In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 89-118.</p> <p>Adrienne Rich. 1979. “Toward a Woman-Centered University.” In <i>On Lies, Secrets, and Silence</i>. New York; London: Norton. 125-56.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. “The Posthistorical University” In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 119-134.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Oct. 25/2023</p> <p>Student Unrest and Revolt</p> <p>Oct. 28/2023</p>	<p>Theodor W. Adorno. “The Theory of Half-Education.” <i>Philosophy of Education</i> 20(1):128-152.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. “The Time of Study: 1968.” In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 135-149.</p> <p>Pierre Bourdieu. 1988. “Types of Capital and Forms of Power.” In <i>Homo Academicus</i>. 73-127. Stanford: Stanford UP. (Available on Quercus).</p> <p>* ‘Testing the Waters’ Essay returned.</p>

<p>8</p> <p><i>Nov. 1/2023</i></p> <p>Pedagogy and Learning in the Ruins</p>	<p>Bill Readings. 1999. "The Scene of Teaching." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 150-65.</p> <p>Bill Readings. 1999. "Dwelling in the Ruins." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 166-.179.</p> <p>Start reading Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. 2023. <i>The Undercommons</i>. "Fugitive Planning & Black Study." Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions. (Link on Quercus)</p> <p>*Try to look at the whole text, but, if you're shy of time, then focus on the chapter "The University and the Undercommons" (pp. 22-43.). We'll keep going with Moten and Harney after reading week and the week of our midterm exam.</p>
<p>9</p> <p><i>Nov. 6/2023</i></p> <p><i>Nov. 8/2023</i></p>	<p>Last day to drop classes.</p> <p>No class: Reading week Nov. 6-10.</p> <p>Keep reading Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. 2023. <i>The Undercommons</i>. "Fugitive Planning & Black Study." Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions. (Link on Quercus)</p>
<p>10</p> <p><i>Nov. 15/2023</i></p>	<p>Midterm Exam (come to class with a pen or pencil)</p>
<p>11</p> <p><i>Nov. 22/2023</i></p> <p><i>Thinking Resistance to the Neoliberal University</i></p>	<p>Finish reading Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. 2023. <i>The Undercommons</i>. "Fugitive Planning & Black Study." Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions. (Link on Quercus)</p> <p>Walter Benjamin. 2018. "Ends and Means of Student Pedagogic Groups in German Universities (with Particular Attention to the "Freiburg Direction")." Trans. Howard Eiland. <i>Boundary 2</i> 45:2 (2018): 15-21.</p>

<p>Nov. 24/2023</p>	<p>Bill Readings. 1999. "The Community of Dissensus." In <i>The University in Ruins</i>. Cambridge; London: Harvard UP. 180-194.</p> <p>*Instructions for final paper distributed via Quercus.</p> <p>*Midterm Exam returned</p>
<p>12</p> <p>Nov. 29/2023</p> <p><i>Thinking Resistance to the Neoliberal University Continued</i></p>	<p>Selections from Jacques Rancière. 1991. <i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 1-73.</p>
<p>13</p> <p>Dec. 6/2023</p> <p><i>Thinking Resistance to the Neoliberal University Continued</i></p>	<p>Selections from Jacques Rancière. 1991. <i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 74-142.</p> <p>*Last day of class.</p> <p>*Reading and Reflection Log due via Quercus by 11:59pm</p>
<p>14</p> <p>Dec. 9-20/2023</p> <p>Dec. 15/2023</p>	<p>Exam Period</p> <p>*Final Paper due via Quercus by 11:59pm</p>