

RMST 202 Focus Group

Transcript

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With Jon Beasley-Murray, Jennifer Nagtegaal, and Patricio Robles

(Student names have been changed, to preserve privacy)

1. Flipped Classroom

JON: The first topic is the flipped classroom: the idea that we're trying to reserve class time for discussion and interaction, and that the lectures and conversations and other materials are available online beforehand. We would love to hear from you as to what you thought of that, and whether that worked for you? How did you feel about the flipped classroom, the materials that were online, the lectures? Did you consult them? I also want to know if you didn't... that's fine, you can say so, but why didn't you?

TONY: I actually prefer the flipped classroom format, because in my home university that's the standard for everything, so I'm more used to that. When I attended lectures for other courses here, I don't think I really absorbed anything, I just kind of fell asleep during the lectures. So I did watch the lectures for this course, but I think it was the same scenario: I don't really have a very good attention span, so half-way I just forget what's going on... but when I was listening, it was actually very helpful, and I usually like to look at it before doing the reading to get an idea of what's going on... some of the books are really difficult if you don't have context.

LEO: The fact that the lectures were recorded but there was also a written transcript provided... I really appreciated that. Speaking from my experience, the more different ways you can deliver lecture information and material, the better. There would be some instances where watching the lecture would be better, because sometimes it's easy to glaze over written material. But there'd also be other times where I would find that maybe I didn't have time, for whatever reason, to watch the entire lecture, if they were 25-30 minutes, but being able to read it, it expedites that process. So having both options available, I thought that was really helpful in terms of being able to provide the same material, the same information, but have it in multiple formats so that people can... It breaks the barrier down, so that you can still have access to all the lecture information, but it's presented in a greater variety of ways, so that people have more opportunity to absorb that information, if they'd rather read it or watch the lecture or what have you.

JON: Did anyone not watch the lectures, or not watch some of them at least, and want to say why they didn't? Again, there's no shame: we'd like to know why not, if you're in that position.

MIRIAM: I watched all the lectures, but when courses were forced to go online with COVID, in some of some of my classes we were quizzed on the lectures, and we had to watch them to do well in the course. And some of these lectures were two hours long, so when you said your lectures were 17-25 minutes I thought "Thank God, that's nothing."

That's totally doable." So I watched the lectures, and if I needed to go back I would go to the transcripts, because it was more convenient to go back and review something that I missed in the lecture. So I liked how you gave us options: you gave us the option of reading the transcripts or watching the video, and it really helped provide context for the texts that we're reading. So this is why I made sure to watch the lectures before doing the readings and it made a difference.

JUNO: I didn't watch all the lectures. I mostly wanted to get my own read on the readings, and I wanted to focus on maybe the emotional part of it rather than the context, and then if I wanted to further my understanding of the world that the author was in then I would watch the lectures or do some research besides the lectures. I watched the lectures beforehand in the beginning, and I felt for me personally that it stifled my understanding of the author's emotions, whereas when I watched it afterwards it helped a lot more, just for me personally, so I could get my own grip on the readings before I was influenced by anything else. But that was just my routine.

ALI: Something that I really enjoyed from the lectures was that they were split up in parts, based on the theme. So it helped clarify what were the important themes and takeaways from the book, which helped formulate my perspective on what I was reading and helped solidify some thoughts that I was having. Some of the books were a bit confusing to me, and then I re-watched the lectures to solidify my understanding, and definitely the fact that the lectures were split up into sections was really helpful. I haven't seen that done before, and I don't know how you do it, but it's good, I like it.

JON: One thing I was going to do, but never really got around to doing, was also to do audio-only versions, like podcasts. I didn't do it because I didn't have enough time, but I also didn't do it because I wasn't sure if anyone would be interested in that. Is that the kind of thing that you think people would be interested in: an audio-only version?

LEO: I find with the audio-only version... I prefer the video because all it takes is you turn your screen off and then the audio can still play, so it is still audio-only but if you do want the video... unless it was in the same way that there was the video lecture and the transcript? If there was the video posted on the site, a transcript, and then an mp3 file with just the audio, so that maybe if you don't have internet access, like if you're on a bus, and you just want to catch the lecture while you have downtime, like on a bus ride, you can download the mp3 file beforehand and just listen to the audio portion... Because I do find that having visuals can help me focus if I'm watching a lecture. So I think if there was that same lecture format, but with an audio-only format, that would also be useful.

JON: Great. I was actually thinking about people on the bus.

SALMAN: I was going to say the same thing: I think it would have helped me if I could just listen to those lectures on the bus, on the commute in the morning, or just walking while on campus and I don't have to stare at a screen. Because that's part of my day where I'm usually listening to something anyway, and so instead of listening to songs or something, if it's fitting in 20 minutes of quality lecture it could be useful. To quickly also answer your initial question, I did not watch the lectures, for two reasons: initially I did not realize that we had this flipped system; but then when I did realize, I didn't watch them because I did not really have the time. My approach to this course was to do the

bare minimum I had to do, because that was just my goal for this course: I wasn't looking for a 90%, I was looking to pass. At the same time, I did find the transcripts useful while writing the blogs and just to get a sense of, you know, what does Proust mean? And so I do appreciate the transcripts, again for similar reasons: it's quicker to read, and for some people just reading is a lot easier than watching an entire video.

JON: It's perfectly fine that you did the bare minimum... the course is designed for people who want to do that, too.

MIRIAM: If a student, for example, is exercising and they want to listen to it in podcast format that's fine, but I only listen to podcasts when I'm doing an activity like cooking or cleaning and passively listening and not taking notes, but for a course like this—or any course—I like taking notes, so that would not work for me.

JON: The idea would be to offer many different formats, but to know that at least some people would do audio-only, that's great.

2. Choose Your Own Adventure

JON: We haven't found a good way to describe this... the "choose your own adventure" aspect, the series of pathways... the fact that everyone's doing different things, that you may not go one week, or you may go on a Tuesday and be doing one book, or on the Thursday and be doing another book... I'd read all the books, and Jennifer and Patricio had read most of them, but I wonder whether you felt, when you come in and then go out for a couple of weeks, and come out and come in again, how it affected your sense of the course's coherence? Also I wonder how it affected your sense of engagement and community, if you're not seeing the same people every week? Or again, any other comments or thoughts you had about being able to tailor your own syllabus or your own curriculum?

LEO: For me, the contract format, the fact that you pick your grade in advance and then adhere to a schedule to get the grade, was a very good motivator, because it meant that you immediately know exactly what you need to do. And it's freeing in that you get to pick which books you want to read, so that even if you're reading a ton of books you still have some sense of flexibility, where if there's one you prefer over another or maybe one's shorter or what have you. But it's rigid enough that you know that if you do X, Y, Z consistently every week you'll get an A or a B+ or whatever you contract for. In a lot of other courses, where because you basically won't know what grade you're getting until the end, I find at least for me personally there's this feeling of... if I'm doing an assignment and I'll just have that feeling of "Ah well, whatever..." it almost feels less motivating, because of how ambiguous it might feel that your grade will be by the end.

So I did appreciate the fact that right at the beginning, up front: "Tell us what grade you want, and we'll tell you what you need to do to get there," instead of what's almost like a "Will they, won't they?" for grades, where it creates that anxiety where you think "Oh I want to do well, but what if I mess it up?" or whatever. With this format, if you mess it up, you have all the opportunity in the world not to. With the traditional system it's more "one slip up and now your grade is doomed," versus with this, you can fully plan everything out accordingly, such that whatever goal you set out for yourself you can get

to that goal, and even, with the way the midterm and the final are structured, if you do mess up your contract for whatever reason, you still have a chance to get a decent grade, a better grade, so it's not that if you break your contract because maybe you forgot to comment on someone's blog one week, and it completely slipped your mind, and now you fail or something like that. You do have that chance to mount a "comeback."

So I feel it's open enough that you have a bit more freedom in terms of picking your books and what have you, but there's enough of that consistency, and you understand right from the outset exactly what you need to do, so there's less of that anxiety-producing ambiguity that other courses might have, where they just give you the percentages of each exam or each assignment you have to do, but you can always just mess it up and it's not necessarily as clear as with this format, where it's "OK, every week do these things do them well and you'll get an A, easy." So I really appreciated that.

JON: We'll be talking more about the grades as well in a minute, though that's really great. I'm trying to focus here not so much on the grades but on the fact that even people who were going for the same grades might have read completely, or almost completely, different books, and what you felt about that.

FINN: I really enjoyed the amount of choice. It was nice. It was a good balance between safety and excitement. I would show up not knowing exactly what to expect, but I would know that I'd done the right things and that certain things were always going to happen. So that was quite nice, I thought.

JODI: The question about whether it affected the sense of community: each week you're still commenting on people's blogs and stuff, so I honestly didn't really notice, and in most classes you're not going to see the same people anyways, that's what I've noticed. So getting to comment on other people's posts, and then you call on them in class the next day, so you think "Oh that's who that is." I don't think it really affected community, because we're still communicating literally every week.

MIRIAM: I don't believe that it affected my engagement, because everyone chose to work at their own pace with this contract grading, which is like an honor system, as you need to honor the contract. It allowed me to work at my own pace and choose texts according to what suits my schedule and what does not clash with assignments for other classes. I liked that people who only read a certain text got to meet, rather than the whole class having to meet, whether they had read the text or not, and then you get to lecture them and fill them in on what they missed out on. I like that. And this is similar to what they do in seminars in fourth and fifth year at university, and I like that.

JON: For me it was sometimes a bit tricky because I'd never know what people had heard, I never knew which classes people had been in, but it's great that you didn't feel the sensation that you missed out on something.

TONY: I really like the contract system. I think it really did give a lot of flexibility to go with some of the texts that you were more interested in. Also having the predictability of the grade is a huge plus. But I would kind of disagree in the sense that I felt that I didn't really get to know a lot of people in the course, but that's partly because I contracted for a lower grade, so I didn't come for a lot of the lessons to begin with. But I didn't really

get to know anyone through the course. Also I felt that some texts didn't have as much time to get into, compared to others, since some were only for one lesson, while others had two.

JON: Thanks, and it's good to hear... we wanted a range of students, some who had gone for the A+ and been much more consistent, and some like you and Salman who had gone for fewer: we really want to hear what things are like for you as well.

ALI: I thought that since I was able to choose what I got to read, and when I got to do so, that sparked my engagement. That ability to choose allowed me to focus my interest into what I chose to read. For example, last week I read *My Brilliant Friend* and I really liked that book and I felt that I really had a good time in the classroom setting when we were discussing it, and that was a piece of engagement that... maybe I didn't show up to each class with that sense of engagement, but I feel it would have been different had we been required to read all sorts of books. Maybe I would have felt like some of them are, "Hmm, OK," but the ability to choose changed that a bit. And also having other people able to choose what they were reading acted like a common interest, so maybe that was a little bit of community that I felt.

JON: Salman, I wonder, as someone who came in for the fewest of anyone, how did you feel... Did it make you feel you weren't fully part of the course?

SALMAN: The first thing I liked was that I didn't have to even choose the bare minimum: you defined what the bare minimum is, and you defined which texts that meant and so that was a great plus where I just had to sign the contract and get on with it. In terms of the course coherence, I think I still got a sense of what you were trying to communicate through the course, which is what do authors in Romance Studies talk about, which has a lot to do with issues of memory and nostalgia and all that stuff. So I'm still taking away a sense of what Romance Studies is, and if I'm ever looking for some fiction to read, I know this is something that will come to my mind, and so I'm still taking away something. How did this flexibility affect the sense of engagement and community? Again, because I just attended the four weeks, I did not have a sense of community and engagement, but that was my personal choice and I was fine with that.

JON: And that's cool, too! But I also have this sense that UBC is such a big place and people often feel lost... If there's a chance for getting a sense of community then that's great, but I know that not everyone is necessarily looking for that.

3. *Contract Grading*

This has been touched upon already, but this is the strangest thing about this course, for me and for all of us. It's in some ways the most experimental thing: the grading system. We've got three questions here, but you've already started talking about some of the things that struck you about it. Again, please say negative things... so far you've been very positive on most things and we'd love to hear negative things...

How did you pick which grade you aim for? Should we be offering A+? There's something in me that feels that maybe that was a mistake, but maybe this is not what you think is a mistake, some of you at least. And then how did it affect your engagement,

your workload, your interest, your stress? These are some of the questions we want to open up about the grading system, but also anything else that struck you.

ALI: Originally I contracted for an A+, and then getting into the course I thought “Uh maybe, maybe not,” so I decided to change the grade that I got. What changed my idea of what grade I wanted was how much work I wanted to put in to getting the grade, and it was getting a bit busier, so I thought it’s OK just to change it, because I feel the grade that I contracted for afterwards is still a very good grade and something that I was happy to put the effort in to getting. But it’s nice to be able to choose, because it helps... it’s a nice thing to manage, because you know what exactly you have to do and when you have to do it. In other courses you get the syllabus, and so you know what’s happening when, however this seems quite routine and it’s the same thing every week, with different books obviously so it spices things up a bit, but the system is still the same, which was really nice... I don’t know if “a weight lifted off my shoulders” is the right expression, because I knew what I was signing up for, but it just felt nice.

FINN: OK, for the first question... I picked all but the last week, because I thought I was going to be more stressed and tired by that time, and also because I was doing note-taking work, and I felt like that went pretty well. Definitely, going to the class more often made me feel more engaged, and so I’m sure if I’d picked fewer books maybe I would have been less stressed, but I also would have been less engaged. And I think it also helped to maintain my interest in the course, because I knew I was going to keep going back.

MIRIAM: I settled for an A-, but it wasn’t about the grade. I looked over the reading list and I chose works that I thought were interesting, and so I wasn’t really obsessing about the grade. I like the contract grading because it’s not emphasizing competitiveness, you’re not competing with other students to do well, you’re not pushing yourself to achieve a certain grade. I mean, I do want good grades in my courses, but I also wanted to be realistic. There’s no way I can read all these texts and do well in my other courses, so it helped me progress at my own pace, and also it helped me build habits, it really did, because I know for example that if I don’t read a certain amount of pages every day of the week, then I’m not going to finish this text. So it helped me instill habits, which I hope that I can apply to other courses that have that assigned readings in the future.

LEO: For me I know, in terms of the grade that I picked, and at the risk of sounding cynical, I aimed high because how I understand the education system is largely that it values nominal success. So if your transcript is “Oh pretty, look, an A+, wow!” it makes it look better if you’re applying for post-graduate stuff or what have you. Which isn’t to say I didn’t enjoy the course, because I very much did and I loved all the readings, but in terms of picking the grade I was like “Oh OK, if I can get an A+ then I’ll just do that.”

Which isn’t to say that I don’t think the work correlated to an A+... and obviously I’m clearly a bit biased, but the idea of “Should we be offering an A+ in the contract?”... I think, depending on what you guys mean, but if it wasn’t possible to get an A+ in the course I’d feel a little ripped off, personally. Because it would mean that... obviously, an A+ in any course is going to be hard to achieve for most people, myself included, but I’d feel that not being able to aim for it at all would be a little frustrating. But I assume what you meant by not offering A+ would be: the highest you can contract for is an A, but if you do something extra or what have you then that would get you an A+? I think as long

as there's a reasonable... like, if you do all the readings and then write a paper or something like that to put you over the edge to an A+, that would make sense to me more than just not offering one at all.

But I do think that with the blogs and the comments, the way the course is structured around that, it made it such that you couldn't just read... provided your blog wasn't as lazy as possible... it really required you to think about and engage with the text you're reading, because if you're going to write an insightful blog post, which from the ones I've read... I don't think I read any where it felt like people didn't read the book, so I didn't feel that how open it was in terms of not being graded for content specifically, I don't necessarily think that detracted from people's blog quality. So I do think, provided that the quality of the blogs was of high standard, I think that in terms of engagement and workload, interest, and being relatively low stress, at least for me I think it hit most of those boxes.

JON: Yes, I thought the quality of the blogs was great, and certainly no worse than other courses, in which I don't have this kind of grading. I think I mentioned in one class that I have some friends who are also professors, and they said "You're crazy, because people will just write nonsense"... and it didn't happen, it didn't happen. I saw people doing their best. That's my feeling anyway; you may tell me otherwise.

JUNO: I felt that the system that you put out in front of us was very fair. There's a lot of transparency in this course that I really, really appreciated in comparison to my other courses. And I'm speaking from a perspective that I actually left school and then I decided to come back, and taking a course like this... it's really nice and refreshing to have a course like this, because once you get out in the real world, grades don't really matter, at least for me they didn't. And I really enjoyed the subject matter and I enjoyed the transparency, and it didn't feel like my work was trying to aim for an A. I just did my work the best that I could, and then in return I would get the mark that I wanted or that I contracted for. To be very honest, if you guys didn't offer an A+ I feel like that would have been absolute bullshit, because then it just becomes like other courses where the A+ is some kind of illusion where you can never reach 100%, which I think is utter BS. But I like the transparency, and I picked a lot of the books and I picked my grade because of the subject matter and not because of the grade that I wanted. I looked at all the books and I chose the ones that I felt I was interested in, and it just so happened to be an A, and I feel like that's the way that ratings should be a lot more of the time, so I think this is a good system and it's fair and it's transparent, which is unlike a lot of other courses.

ALI: When we were talking, it reminded me of a conversation that I was having with my friend's mom, who is a professor, not here but she teaches university level, and I was telling her about this class and she was very confused about why it was set up like this. Some of the points that she was making were: "Well, how do you know that people are actually learning stuff in this course? They can just sign up to get a good mark and that's it and you don't know if they're actually doing the work properly or if they actually retain anything, and they're just doing it for the number." And I think that's like a lot of things that I've heard against the idea of contract grading. I personally think that it's an interesting system and it definitely has lots of benefits, and I think it fits well specifically in a course like Romance Studies, because you learn about concepts and themes and you further enrich your understanding of what Romance Studies is, even in the last class

when we were asked “What is Romance Studies?” You’re able to learn what that is through all of our readings, but I’m thinking would it be applicable in other classes, maybe like English or something else? I’ve just been thinking about that.

JON: Again, my friends who are professors react like your friend’s mom, and that’s partly why we want to talk to you guys and see how you felt and so on. And I expected many more people to contract for low grades, because I thought people are doing this for a requirement, they’re not really interested, and if we tell them “You can get through this with a minimum of effort and you can pass... you’re not going to get a great grade but you’ll pass, you’ll fulfill the requirement, and we won’t chase after you, that’s our deal” ... I thought there would be more people in that situation.

SALMAN: I think I touched on the first and the third question here and I don’t really have an opinion on the second one, but I did have two tangential points of feedback. The first was that having a syllabus in a PDF or a Word format would still be very useful, instead of having like the important information on different pages on the website. I think it makes it easy, especially if you’re expecting students to struggle with using a website anyway. instead of Canvas. I didn’t mind using the website, but I think getting the most important information in a PDF is useful, and maybe you can also post that on Canvas where you post the web link. So that was the first point: the PDF for the syllabus would be super helpful.

The second point was on how the midterm and the final affect your grade, so if you’re contracting for a 70 to 75 and you’re saying that if you break the contract... what would be the effect of that? If you don’t... do I only need “meeting expectations” to get a 75, or is “meeting expectations” going to give me a 72? I imagine you already have a system for that, but letting us know would also be helpful in terms of that calculus that we do as students, of when to put in the effort and how much effort to put across assignments and courses.

JON: I should tell you that some of this we didn’t always know: we’ve been working it out through the semester. One of the things is the role of the exams. We had to have an exam—all UBC courses at 100 and 200 level have to have an exam anyway—and we’re trying to figure out how to fit the exam into the system that we’re trying to use. In part it is as a backup, as Leo was saying, but not only.

LEO: As a counterpoint to Ali’s friend’s mom and, Jon, to your professor friends, and if you want to use this quote as a random student example when they talk about engagement and learning in the course... At least anecdotally, I believe that the entire way that we structure education right now is based on vapid, frivolous... it feels as though nobody learns anything, because it’s structured around exams, midterms, finals, and the way people strategically study for those exams isn’t “OK, how do I learn this long-term as effectively as possible?” it’s “How do I cram the information, and how do I figure out strategies to enhance retrieval and recall for the exam period?” And then people lose that information over time, in part because if you’re not using information regularly you lose it, but I know I’ve experienced myself... I know tons of my friends, I’m sure a ton of the people in this call right now, have experienced that feeling of taking a course, studying for the exams, doing well in the course, and then come next semester you don’t remember anything from the course because you structured your learning

around “How do I get the biggest number on this test that I’m not going to care about later?” because the university structure is so rigidly designed around “How do we quantify people’s learning?” instead of “OK, how do we incentivize people to actually learn the information and encode it in a way that ...?”

I know in this course specifically, and obviously with different subject matter it’s... I’m not trying to kind of generalize all of learning... but with this course I know I’m going to remember a lot more about it, because of the way it was structured and how it was designed to engage us as a class, rather than a Statistics course that I took where I learned everything I could for the exams, and now I could barely do the statistics required if someone were to put a book in front of me right now, because it wasn’t structured around engaging you and having you learn in a way that’s comfortable for you, it’s “OK get as high a number on this stupid test that’s possible so that you can get a pretty little letter on your transcript.”

So I think that a counterpoint to any professors or skeptics or whatever—and there are obviously flaws in any system, nothing’s perfect, I fully recognize that—but I think that a counter-argument to the idea that the structure of this course doesn’t facilitate learning is that no courses seemingly do, they facilitate quantifying learning which, in my opinion anyway, isn’t a good way of facilitating long-term sustained understanding and knowledge in a certain subject matter. It’s all about “OK, how do I get a high number on this exam so that my transcript can look pretty, so that I can apply to other things or whatever?” even though maybe when you apply in the future you’re kind of panicked because you realize you didn’t understand the things you were meant to well enough, because you formatted your studying around getting a high number, not really deeply engaging and consolidating information, versus this course where, because of the nature of the course and the way it was structured, and how deep you have to read and think about the novels for class and for your blog posts, it allows you to remember and learn a lot better than in other courses.

Obviously a lot of this is clearly based in personal frustration with the university system, but I think experimenting with it is inherently valuable because of how rigid and shitty I think the current structure is. I think there’s a lot of value in experimenting with the style of class delivery.

MIRIAM: Leo captured everything I wanted to say about exams and how they really fail to reflect student learning. I know that they’re mandatory for courses in the hundreds and two hundreds, I understand that, but I just want to say that this course isn’t the first course that I’ve taken that has given students options of opting out of certain things. I did take a course in Archaeology and we had the choice between doing a final exam or a paper, because the instructor really hated exams, and so most students ended up doing the paper, and doing very well because they got to choose their topic. And I’ve had other classes too where they didn’t assign any exam, no midterm—they were forced to give us a final but they gave us a study guide of what to expect because they knew that there’s no real point in in the exam, and that it’s unfair to students to attend and put in attendance and participation, and then have an exam account for 30% of your grade... it’s not fair and then if you don’t do well, then “That’s it.”

4. Putting it all Together

JON: Thank you so much. My goodness, this is great, but I want to hear some negative things about this course as well! Anyhow we're trying to wrap everything up here, so reflecting on... whether you learned less or more? Putting all this together, any other thoughts or any suggestions that you might have for how we could have done better, for things that we might have done differently, for things that you don't want us to change, or whatever?

ALI: This is not really a negative thing... I don't have much bad to say about this class... but one thing that could be a bit more engaging next year is, in terms of the flipped classroom style, maybe since not everyone's reading the same books each week you may not know some people in the class, so give them a bit more time to talk to each other and get to know each other. This sounds a bit minor, just because you have very limited time in the class as it is, and I don't really know if community building is the number one top priority in this class, but maybe it's something that could be a bit more enriching within the flipped classroom style, just so that if you go back another week, you may not know anyone in the class, or you might, because of that little time that you had to converse and get to know people in the class.

TONY: I don't really have anything to comment on the first question, because I can't really compare it to what I normally study, but I did have something that I thought of from something that Leo said earlier. Even though I didn't contract for the A+, and to get an A+ you just do more, but maybe if it could cut off in an A and have fewer texts, but then there can be some kind of extra credit that can get you that A+. It's probably also because, like I mentioned earlier, there's not really a lot of time for certain texts like I really liked Agualusa and Zobel but there was only one class for that, and we didn't really get very deeply into the text, so maybe there could be fewer texts and that could give more time for more close reading.

JON: That's great, although one of the ideas here was I wanted you guys to read a lot, partly on the "ten thousand hours" principle—it's a book by Malcolm Gladwell that says that the people who are great at things are people who've just put a lot of time in; in the end that's what it is, it's not about people being naturally geniuses, but that the more time you spend reading, the better the better you get at reading, for instance.

JUNO: In the very beginning of the course it was kind of confusing learning about the system, and I felt perhaps the website could have been a little bit more organized to make the accessibility issues a little bit better.

And I totally understand that university courses have this expectation that you buy your textbooks or your readings, but in this course I felt that, since it was an elective, and since it could have been for a lot of people just a requirement, it was a little bit heavy to ask your students to buy all of these books. Especially for me, I had a hard time reading Proust because I couldn't find the right version and I couldn't get the right translations, and it was very frustrating in the beginning. It obviously got better as I started buying books, but that also took a big chunk out of my wallet, because I couldn't focus anymore on just the PDFs so... I know that's a very normal thing in university, to be expected to buy your books, but that was one thing that I was thinking about.

LEO: In terms of suggestions or slight criticism... obviously the content itself should be challenging, so I think writing the blog posts and discussing in class is sufficient for that challenge. I think that extraneous challenges... I'm just not a fan. Obviously there are people who think that everything in education should be difficult, I'm not of that mindset.

With that being said, I know, Jon, you're very apprehensive towards Canvas, but I find that having a completely separate website outside of this hub that we have already... it's why in part I appreciate the fact that you guys are lenient with the comments, in terms of having them be a little bit later, because I'm so used to Canvas constantly telling me "You have an assignment, you have an assignment, you have to do this!" ... I've started to rely on it, so then having the outside website led me a little bit to be like "Oh shit, my comments, fuck, I gotta go write those!" So I am appreciative that you guys are lenient but I think if there was some way to... again, I'm not so sure with the website itself, but if there's a way to streamline the information on the website a little bit more, so that it's easier to parse and access.

JON: I do hate Canvas with a vengeance. I won't go into the reasons why, but I do. But I do understand that there are certain things that it makes more convenient and if we could find a way to get those notifications up on Canvas, even if we're not focusing on Canvas, I'd understand that.

So thank you so much you guys, thank you so much for everything over the semester, but especially thank you for taking the time here.