

SOCIOLOGY III

2025: FOURTH TERM

SOCIOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION



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MODULE DESCRIPTION AND READINGS

In this module, we will use the university as our institutional case study to explore South Africa's history, the transition to democracy, social movements, the evolving relationship between capitalism and knowledge production, and questions of social and academic identity. This exploration of the university will unfold in four parts:

Section One: The national and historical context of transformation in South African higher education.

Section Two: A global trend: The influence of neoliberal ideology and policy on universities.

Section Three: Theories on the role of the humanities and social science intellectual in a changing society.

Section Four: Insider/Outsider/Other? Confronting standpoint theory and its arguments on race, gender and identity.

Universities will be centred in this module as unique social institutions, “which cluster in and around a family of characteristics that mark out higher education as a particular segment of education warranting [special] philosophical [and sociological] attention” (Barnett 2021: 2-3). Universities in every society in which they exist mirror that society's complexities, possibilities, and fault lines. But universities are not mere mirrors. They have distinct histories, rules and constituencies that shape their meaning. Therefore, understanding the distinctiveness of the university and its multiple interests can give us deeper insight into the academy's trajectory and the societies and publics through which they function and are formed.

As the final module of your third year, the Sociology of Higher Education invites you to practice *reflexive sociology* — turning the sociological lens inward to critically examine the university and the academic's position as a member of that very community in contemporary South African society.

Section One: The National Historical Context of Transformation in South African Higher Education

Section One explores how the national context shapes the trajectory of higher education in South Africa. In the introductory section of the module, we look at how South Africa's social history connects with and has shaped the development of its educational institutions. We will examine how higher education has evolved in South Africa from its exclusionary past by tracing present continuities and discontinuities with its complex origins. We will unpack transformational shifts as well as enduring patterns of stratification that mark the present. Central to this section is Soudien's (2015) provocation that the ‘perverse ambivalence’ which marks the university's beginnings in South Africa, while constitutive, is not ‘totalising’ in determining its future. Within the temporal (not always substantive) context of post-colonial

and post-Apartheid South Africa, the university continues to hold great potential as a mechanism for social transformation. This section explores the history, policies, and movements that have marked significant moments in the development of South African universities, as it intertwines with broader social turns.

Agbedahin, K. (2019). South African university history: Challenges and the danger of a masquerade of transformation. In: K. G. Fomunyan (ed.) *Decolonising higher education in the era of globalisation and internationalisation*, pp. 207-230. Bloemfontein: SUN Press.

Badat, S. (2016). Deciphering the meanings and explaining the South African higher education student protests of 2015-16, *South African History Online*. Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/deciphering-meanings-and-explaining-south-african-higher-education-student-protests-2015-16>

Badat, S. (2023). Colonialism shaped modern universities in Africa. How they can become truly African. *The Conversation*, 18 October. [online] Available at: <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-shaped-modern-universities-in-africa-how-theycan-become-truly-african-214494>

Moloi, K.C., Makgoba, M.W. and Miruka, C.O. (2017). (De)constructing the #FeesMustFall campaign in South African higher education. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, Vol. 14 (2), pp. 211-223.

Council on Higher Education (2022). *Review of higher education in South Africa twenty-five years into democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Magubane, Z. (2004). A pigment of the imagination? Race, subjectivity, knowledge and the image of the Black intellectual. In: R. O. Mabokela & Z. Magubane (eds.) *Hear our voices: Race, gender and the status of black South African women in the academy*, pp. 41-58. Pretoria: Unisa Press.

Mandela, N. (n.d). Bantu education goes to university, *South African History Online*. Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/bantu-education-goes-university>

Maphalala, M., Ralarala, M. & Mpofu, N. (2023). The staffing situation in public higher education institutions. In: *Review of Higher Education in South Africa 25 years into democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education (CHE). Available at: https://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/flipbooks/2023/che_review/index.html

Soudien, C. (2015). Looking backwards: How to be a South African university. *Education Research for Social Change*, Vol. 4 (2), pp. 8-21.

Soudien, C. (2020). Continuing inequalities in South African higher education: The changing complexities of race and class. In: A. Wiseman, E. Anderson and H. You (eds.) *A better future: The role of higher education for displaced and marginalised people*, pp. 106-128. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Section Two: Neoliberal Ideology and Policy

As we move from Section One, we expand the scope of our discussion to consider that while the development of any university is shaped by its national context, it is also the result of its interaction with the global environment. We will look at how capitalism's market logic has shaped universities' development worldwide. In particular, Section Two focuses on a global trend: the rise of the 'neoliberalising' university, marked by growing competition, measurement through rankings and metrics, and the treatment of knowledge as a commodity.

Section Two will introduce the neoliberalisation of universities as a trend connecting education and knowledge production globally. This section presents a key challenge we face today in the struggle to determine the meaning of the university in South Africa and beyond— that is — how do we reconcile global neoliberal trends such as state austerity policies, and the commodification and market enclosure of social life, with the demands of democratic inclusion and the 'massification' of the university? How do we respond to Stewart's (2007:141) claim that neoliberal processes, which encourage individualism, managerialism, and commodification, mean South African academics and learners are "swapping one alienation for another" in the post-Apartheid period? In Section Two, we consider the contradictions of neoliberalism and the implications this has for how we broadly reflect on the meaning of freedom in society.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2010). The university in the twenty-first century: Towards a democratic and emancipatory university reform. *Eurozine*, 1 July. Available at: <https://www.eurozine.com/theuniversity-in-the-twenty-first-century>

Dlamini, R. (2018). Corporatisation of universities deepens inequalities by ignoring social injustices and restricting access to higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 32 (5), pp. 54-65.

Giroux, H.A. (2009). Democracy's nemesis: The rise of the corporate university. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, Vol. 9 (5), pp. 669-695.

Heleta, S. (2023). Long road to decolonisation of neoliberal and Eurocentric South African higher education. In: T. Hodgson and B. Bozalek (eds.) *Colonization and Epistemic Injustice in Higher Education*, pp. 40-55. London: Routledge.

Lynch, K. (2013). New managerialism, neoliberalism, and ranking. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, Vol. 13, pp. 1-12.

McKenna, S. (2023). Opting out of the rankings game in Sub-Saharan Africa. *University World News, Africa Edition*, 4 May. Available at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230503180617294>

- McKenna, S. (2024). The resilience of rankings in the neoliberal academy. *Transformation in Higher Education*, Vol. 9 (0), pp. 1-8.
- Ntshoe, I., Higgs, P., Higgs, L.G. & Wolhuter, C. (2008). The changing academic profession in higher education and new managerialism and corporatism in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 22 (2), pp. 391-403.
- Swartz, R., Ivancheva, M. & Morris, N.P. (2019). Between a rock and a hard place: Dilemmas regarding the purpose of public universities in South Africa. *Higher Education*, Vol. 77 (4), pp. 567-583.
- Tomaselli, K.G. (2015). Hacking Through Academedia: Autoethnography, Data and Social Change. *Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)*, Vol. 4 (2), pp. 61-74.
- Troiani, I. & Dutson, C. (2021). The neoliberal university as a space to learn/think/work in higher education. *Architecture and Culture*, Vol. 9 (1), pp. 5-23.
- Vally, S. (2007). Higher education in South Africa: Market mill or public good? *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, Vol. 5 (1), pp. 17-28.

Section Three: The Role of the Humanities and Social Sciences in a Changing Society

As you near the completion of your undergraduate studies and contemplate a future in academia, Section Three invites you into debates on the role of the humanities and social science intellectual in society. These debates will be contextualised through the lens of public sociology — what it means, how we can understand different interpretations of terms such as ‘the public’ and ‘scholar-activism’, and their relevance in South Africa. The humanities carry a certain status and expectation as a ‘public good’ and site of activism. However, the reality of the university is more complex and contradictory than this. As Stuart Hall (2020: 831) notes, “the idea or symbolism of the University can be contested, and this symbolism often bears little resemblance to how the University is experienced by those who labour inside it.” In other words, the universities’ symbolism of being a public good is continuously in contest with other competing interests. Building on this, Section Three begins with the premise that universities reproduce the status quo (as depicted in the first two sections) and strive to create the agents seeking to revolutionise and transform society. As Kempner and Tierney (1996: 7) observe, universities “are capable of creating change, yet they also must function within [institutional] cultural webs that constrict and define options for change.” This section, therefore, explores theories on the role of the humanities and social sciences in a rapidly changing society, focusing on theories of public sociology and the public intellectual as critical points of reference.

- Bezuidenhout, A., Mnwana, S. & von Holdt, K. (2022). Introduction: Critical engagement in South Africa and the global south. In: A. Bezuidenhout, S. Mnwana & K. von Holdt (eds.) *Critical engagement with public sociology: A perspective from the global south*, pp. 1-19. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 70 (1), pp. 4–28.
- Chesters, G. (2012). Social movements and the ethics of knowledge production. *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 11 (2), pp. 145-160.
- Claassens, A. & Sihlali, N. (2022). Dilemmas and Issues Confronting Socially Engaged Research within Universities. In: A. Bezuidenhout, S. Mnwana & K. von Holdt (eds.) *Critical engagement with public sociology: A perspective from the global south*, pp. 192-215. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Mahadeo, R. (2024). A call for counter-public sociology. *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 50 (3), pp. 391-411.
- Reddy, V., Bohler-Müller, N., Houston, G., Schoeman, M. & Thuynsma, H. (eds.) (2020). *The Fabric of Dissent: Public Intellectuals in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Said, E. (1994). *Representations of the intellectual: The 1993 Reith lectures*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sawchuk, P.H. (2017). Parsing and re-constituting human practice as mind-in-activity. In: J. Lynch, J. Rowlands, T. Gale & A. Skourdoumbis (eds.) *Practice Theory and Education: Diffractive readings in professional practice*. London: Routledge.
- Shear, B.W. (2008). Gramsci, intellectuals, and academic practice today. *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 20 (1), pp. 55-67.
- Steyn, I. (2016). Intellectual representations of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa: A critical reflection. *Politikon*, Vol. 43 (2), pp. 271-285.
- Watermeyer, R. (2016). Public intellectuals vs. new public management: The defeat of public engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 41 (12), pp. 2271-2285.

Section Four: Insider/Outsider/Other? Confronting Race, Gender, and Identity

Section Four defines, explores, and critiques *standpoint theory* and its claim that people's historical positioning within systems of power shapes how they see and take part in producing knowledge. Central to Section Four's discussion is exploring the influence of Black feminist thought on critical university studies. As our concluding section of the module, section four examines suggestions that the social group(s) we belong to shape our positionality within the academy in significant ways. Here we ask: What do we mean by academic identity and citizenship? How do these phenomena intersect with race, class, and gender? This section invites you to reflect on what academic identity, historically and in the present, in South Africa and globally, might signify across different racial and gendered subject positions. We also contrast and detail the views of theorists who resist such identitarian approaches as a counterpoint to those

who emphasise understanding academic life through standpoint thinking, collective subjectivity, and identity. As emerging sociologists, this section allows you to reflect on your positionality.

Angervall, P. (2018). The academic career: A study of subjectivity, gender and movement among women university lecturers. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 30 (1), pp. 105-118.

Bhambra, G.K. (2015). Black thought matters: Patricia Hill Collins and the long tradition of African-American sociology. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 38 (13), pp. 2315-2321.

Collins, P.H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, Vol. 33 (6), pp. 14-32.

Collins, P.H. (1999). Reflections on the outsider within. *Journal of Career Development*, Vol. 26 (1), pp. 85-88.

Collins, P.H. (2022). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment (30th Anniversary edition)*. London: Routledge.

hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*. London: Routledge.

Itzigsohn, J. & Brown, K. (2015). Sociology and the theory of double consciousness: W.E.B Du Bois's phenomenology of racialised subjectivity. *Du Bois Review*, Vol. 12 (2), pp. 231-248.

Khunou, G., Phaswana, E., Khoza-Shangase, K. & Canham, H. (eds.) (2019). *Black academic voices: The South African experience*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Lewis, D. & Baderoon, G. (eds.) (2021). *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Magubane, Z. (2004). A pigment of the imagination? Race, subjectivity, knowledge and the image of the Black intellectual. In: R. O. Mabokela & Z. Magubane (eds.) *Hear our voices: Race, gender and the status of black South African women in the academy*, pp. 41-58. Pretoria: Unisa Press.

Lecture Times

Tuesday: 08:40 – 09:25

Wednesday: 09:35 – 10:20

Thursday: 10:30 – 11:15

Friday: 11:25 – 12:10 and 12:20 – 13:05

This module is reading-intensive and requires you to read broadly on the topics outlined. *Daily class attendance and note-taking are essential to passing this course*. Core readings are presented in this course outline, and additional readings will be posted periodically on RUconnected.

Guest Lectures

Professor Sioux McKenna: On Thursday, 2 October and Friday, 3 October, Professor Sioux McKenna, a leading international researcher in higher education studies and former director for the Centre of Postgraduate Studies at Rhodes, will present two lectures. The first guest lecture will be on the impacts of Artificial Intelligence on Higher Education. The second lecture will be on the politics behind university rankings.

One or two additional guest speakers in relevant areas of higher education studies are to be confirmed and announced during the course of the module.

Coursework Assignments and Deadlines

Test 1:

In week 4 of the course, you will write one essay on one of the first two sections of the course. The essay topics will be given to you before the test. The test will be written in the double period on Friday, 19 September from 11:25am - 13:05pm (1.5 hours duration) in the Arts Major Lecture Venue. The test will count for 50% of your class mark.

Test 2:

In week 7, on the evening of Tuesday, 7 October you will write a second class test. This test will take place in Eden Grove Red Lecture Theatre from 17:30pm - 19:00 pm (1.5 hours duration). The test will be based on the last two sections of the course. The test will require you to scrutinise an AI-generated answer by providing revisions and corrections for its inaccuracies based on your prescribed academic texts for these sections. This test will count 50% of your class mark.

Examination

November examination: You will be expected to write three essays out of four options in a three-hour exam. The examination will count for 60% of your overall mark, while the two coursework assignments together will count for 40%.

Leave of Absence

If you cannot write a test or examination, you will need a Leave of Absence (LOA) to meet the module's Duly Performed (DP) requirement. LOA forms are available in the department – please consult with the departmental secretary (noluvuyo.sakata@ru.ac.za) in this regard. An application for an LOA must be accompanied by relevant supporting documentation (doctor's note, letter from a warden, letter from a psychologist, etc.). You must find out if your application has been approved, as granting an LOA by the Head of Department is not automatic (see the *Sociology Handbook* on RUconnected for details).

Consultations

If you are unsure about any of the material or want to check that you are on the right track, you are welcome to schedule a consultation. Please email me at t.alexander@ru.ac.za to make an appointment.