

IP206: Utopia: Text, Theory, Practice



Assessment 3: 3000-word (or equivalent output) research project¹

Due: Monday 17th May, 12 noon

Produce a response to ONE of the research questions listed at the end of this document. You may devise an alternative question in consultation with me.

- You should identify and explore a specific “problem.”
- You must think carefully about the **output, methodology** and **focus** of your research project.
- You are expected to refer to secondary criticism and/or theorizations of utopia.
- Assessments will be marked according to the University of Warwick 20-point scale. Please consult the Undergraduate Handbook for [General University and Liberal Arts Descriptors](#)

Output

Written responses should be **3000** words; e.g. an essay, a report, a briefing, etc. Oral responses should be **20-25 minutes**; e.g. a podcast, a presentation, a film. Other formats will be discussed on a case-by-case basis; e.g. digital projects, creative expressions, participatory activism (these kinds of projects would usually consist of the thing you “do” and a shorter research-informed reflection).

All outputs apart from essays must be agreed in advance. This is to ensure that you can produce a piece of work which allows you to achieve critical depth and showcase your analytical skills. We also need to book rooms for presentations/some creative projects.

Final deadline for contacting me to discuss non-essay outputs or writing your own question: **Friday 26 March, 5pm.**

Methodology

You are encouraged to think carefully about methodology. This is an opportunity for you to conduct your own original primary research, in addition to the standard secondary research that you would usually undertake.

To achieve the highest grades, the Liberal Arts descriptor states that “work will provide a clearly-defined methodology that draws together multiple disciplinary areas to strong effect.” Consider the disciplinary perspectives and techniques that you wish to draw on, and how you may develop such a methodology.

What kind of primary source material would add depth to your discussion? Some examples might include: utopian creative expressions (fiction, poetry, film, TV, music, art, etc.); land, town or architectural plans; manifestos, flyers, posters and other publicity; data gathered from human

¹ Visiting students (Term 2/Term 1 and 2) will produce a 1500 word essay in response to one of the research questions, due Monday Week 10.

participants through observation or interviews; historical sources in online or physical archives; photographs or other visual images.

Depending on your project, you may wish to employ research methodologies that are not text-based. For example, you may wish to visit intentional communities or co-operatives; you could consider museums, galleries or other exhibition spaces; you may choose to conduct mapping exercises; you could interview or observe activists, artists, architects, etc. You may employ ethnographic methodologies to study a movement, organisation or community. You may research by “doing”: e.g. participatory activism or community work.

Liberal Arts students were introduced to a range of methodologies in IP108 Qualitative Methods for Undergraduate Research.² This project gives you an opportunity to use and develop these skills. We are here to help. If you would like further guidance (e.g. on conducting interviews, using archives, using observational methods, accessing historical databases) please arrange an appointment with me.

If you intend to use human participants in any way you must receive ethical approval before undertaking your research. There are clear departmental guidelines on this process, but please ask me if you’re unsure. Please remember that ethical approval can take some time. We recommend leaving at least a month before you wish to start conducting research. This allows time for the two-step process and revisions. You can help speed this process along by making sure that your proposal is written professionally and comprehensively (use full sentences, capital letters, spell check, etc.).

Focus

The questions are deliberately broad in order to allow you to focus on problems and approaches which interest you. There is no one way to answer any question, and the same starter question will prompt a range of different responses.

To achieve the highest grades, the Liberal Arts descriptor states that work will “demonstrate excellent knowledge and interpretation of a well-defined problem.” The best responses will narrow the focus of the question and generate a specific problem to explore. They will move beyond classroom discussion. Ask yourself, how can you make a unique contribution to the academic conversations that you join?

You may wish to apply and explore ideas that were introduced in seminars to contexts that you have encountered in other modules or developed an independent interest in. You may wish to develop the research you did for one of the weekly problems. Your “angle” could be to examine particular ideas, communities, places, cultural expressions, theories or movements, or it might be to explore connections across time, space, ideas and cultures.

² Year 1 core Liberal Arts module that introduces students to different kinds of historical, social and cultural research. If you are not a Liberal Arts student and would like help/advice about different primary research methodologies, just book an appointment in my office hour.

You are advised to consider focus, methodology and output together. Different research methods and outputs may be appropriate for different research projects. You should aim to produce a coherent, individual project that presents communicates your research effectively.

Research questions

1. Design your own “Imaginary Reconstitution of Society” (Levitas). Consider content, form and function.
2. EITHER, Critically analyse a project, community or movement that you consider to be utopian. OR, Interrogate the relationship between utopia and activism.
3. What does it mean to live well?
4. EITHER, “And the cigarette trees / The lemonade springs / Where the bluebird sings / In the Big Rock Candy Mountain” (“Big Rock Candy Mountain”). Consider the role of abundance, prosperity and/or sufficiency in utopia. OR, Is “sustainable prosperity” a utopian dream?
5. EITHER, What is the future of work? OR, What is the future of food? OR, What is the future of clothing?
6. EITHER, How might utopia be mapped? OR, How might utopia be planned? OR, How might utopia be built?
7. EITHER, In an age of ecological emergency, “utopia is no longer a nice idea but, rather, a survival necessity” (Robinson). Discuss. OR, What is the relationship between ecology and the utopian enterprise?
8. “In a modern Utopia there will, indeed, be no perfection” (Wells). Explore.
9. Should utopia be understood as a “method” (Levitas)?
10. “In a utopia real people cannot exist, for the very obvious reason that real people are what constitute the world we know, and it is that world that every utopia is designed to replace” (Carey). EITHER, Do you agree? OR, To what extent can utopianism be understood as an attempt to change human beings?
11. How do utopias engage with systems, models, processes and/or simulations?
12. How useful is the idea that utopianism may function as the “education of desire” (Abensour)?
13. Can technology bring about utopia?
14. What is the relationship between utopia and political theory? (You may wish to focus on socialist, communist, anarchist, liberal, conservative, neoliberal, green or any other positions)
15. “Knowledge is power.” Can a utopian pedagogy or system of education facilitate resistance to and liberation from oppression and social control?
16. “Space is the place.” Is it?
17. Interrogate the relationship between spirituality OR religion and utopia.

18. EITHER, In what ways and to what extent can utopia be mapped onto the internal landscape? OR, Interrogate the relationship between consciousness AND/OR psyche and utopia.
19. “Not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but [...] it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it” (Fisher). Discuss.
20. “We don’t consider it good manners to discuss our fathers, Stavvy. It has no relevance in Women’s Country. You know that” (Tepper, *Gate to Women’s Country*). EITHER, Critically examine the gendering of space in utopian discourse and/or practice. OR, Is utopian separatism necessary? You may answer with reference to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion or any other identity marker.
21. Explore the relationship between imagined utopias and historic or contemporary prefigurative practices.
22. “The good life [...] depends on our *social awakening*, more than our *social dreaming*” (Paravantes). Do you agree?
- 23. In consultation with me, you may devise your own research question. (Remember that these may be written for creative projects, projects based on participatory activism, etc.)**

Assessments are marked on the [20-point University marking scale](#). Please read the information about marking criteria in the Liberal Arts Undergraduate handbook carefully, paying particular attention to the [Liberal Arts grade descriptors](#).

When completing university work, it is expected that students uphold the highest standards of academic practice. This includes both general writing (spelling, punctuation, grammar), and correct attribution of sources (proper quotation, citation, and referencing style). If your work fails to exhibit any aspect of proper academic practice, then, irrespective of content, it will not be awarded as high a mark as it might potentially have achieved had best-practice been followed.

If you are in doubt about any aspect of good academic practice, you should, in the first instance, consult the [University guidance on academic integrity](#) and the [Liberal Arts Undergraduate Handbook](#). You may also contact your personal tutor or the Director of Student Experience

Work that is up to 10% under or over word count is allowed without penalty. Work that is over/under this limit will be highly likely to be marked down because you have failed to adequately frame, plan, research, or edit your assessment. **Please include a word count.**

Please consult the [Liberal Arts Undergraduate Handbook](#) for:

- Style and presentation guidelines
- Information about extensions (e.g. how to make a request and under what circumstances)
- Work should be uploaded to Tabula by the date and time specified on the system and following the online instructions. Please note that since this is an electronic system it is very accurate, so even if you submit your work just one minute after the deadline, it will be marked as late and penalties will be imposed accordingly. Make sure you allow yourself plenty of time to upload your work and try not to leave this until the deadline day itself. Technical problems cannot be accepted as a valid reason for late or non-submission and penalties will be imposed accordingly.
- Please do not write your name on any pages of your work or use it as a file name – we mark anonymously! Put your Student ID number on the header of each page of your work. Add page numbers in the footer.