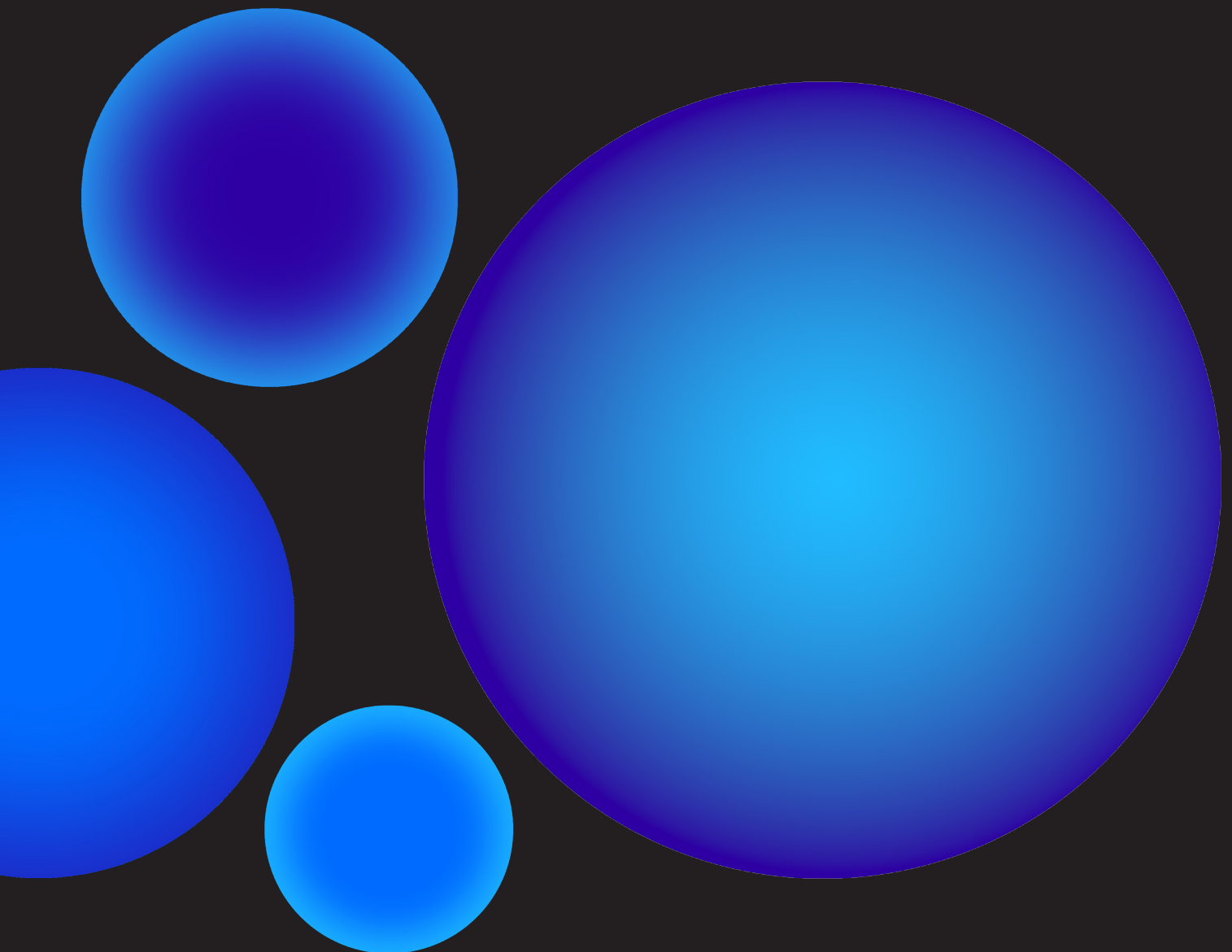


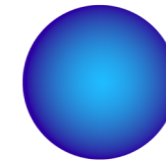
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Decolonising the Essay in the Arts Institution

Debates, Models, and Transformations

Dr Royce Mahawatte





Decolonising the Essay in the Arts Institution: Debates, Models, and Transformations

**A report produced by the Decolonising Arts Institute and the Teaching,
Learning and Employability Exchange**

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Glossary

Minoritized: I adopt the term ‘minoritized’ here from Gillborn (2008: 2)¹. The term highlights the ‘constructed nature of the minority/majority relations that are taken for granted in many societies.’ In this research I open out this term to include students who may require learning accommodations or who might encounter obstacles to learning through their use of English as an additional language.

Belonging: How identities engage with each other, and the institution (due to power hierarchies, or colonial histories etc.), impact on the way students experience belonging, which in turn can influence outcomes. Belonging can be affected by course content, modes of assessment, a sense of value, and by the discourses of taste that students perceive.

Writing: This word is used as a catch all for numerous disciplines and assessment or modes of practice that involve the written word. This use of writing has implications for decolonial thinking and teaching and it is a general term, distinct from the ‘Cultural Studies essay’ below.

Cultural Studies essay: This is a compositional form aligned with Cultural Studies and with Arts and Humanities disciplines, and also in some Social Sciences. It forms the basis of the summative assessment for Unit 5. This is an Anglo-western form, that opens with a thesis which is subsequently explored and debated via reference to secondary material and application to a primary set of sources (visual, literary, material or digital culture).

Visual/video/film essay: This assignment format or mode offers audio-visual material as the exponent of intellectual inquiry and is very much in its infancy. Whether it is an appropriate mode for decolonial teaching at undergraduate level requires dedicated and systematic research beyond the scope of this report.

Counterstorytelling: A written and verbal method of academic expression derived from Critical Race Theory and Legal Studies. When applied to the learning environment, individual stories, and personal experiences, counterstorytelling can reveal the racisms and the structural inequalities that inflect the teaching and learning environment. While there are various forms of spelling of this word (as separate or compound words) I have used the single word form after Stevenson (2015).

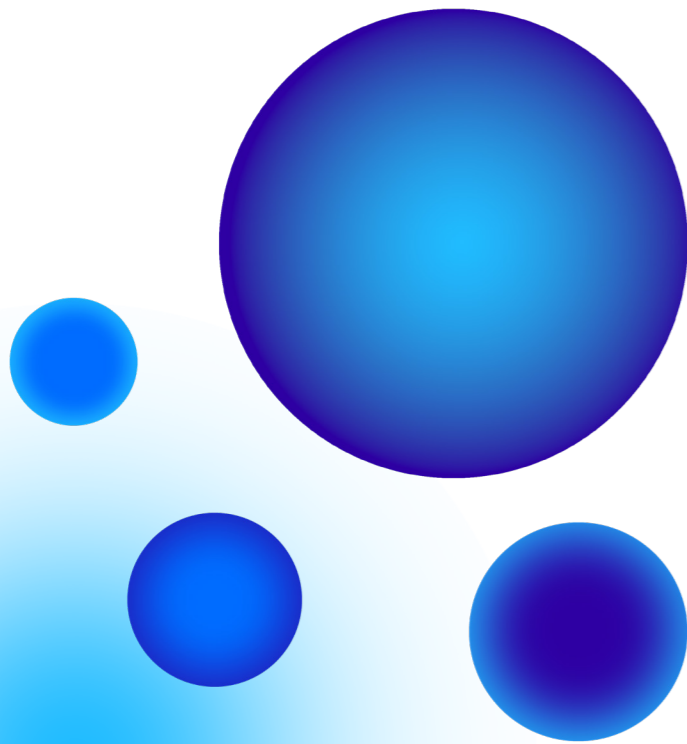
¹ Here ‘minoritized’ is a general descriptor for ‘people of colour’ or ‘BAME’ (which I have not used in this report).

Overview

This study which was a part of the Decolonising Arts Education Fellowship Scheme (DAEFS) looks at the experience of students on the Fashion BA, Textiles BA, Jewellery BA, and the Fashion Communication BA, as they write Cultural Studies essays and Reflective Pieces for Unit 5: Research Methods and Approaches. It aims to locate the unit within the discussion of decolonial teaching, whilst also looking at what the Cultural Studies essay allows students to explore in terms of ideas, practice, and where relevant, their identities, with a view to understanding the course as a whole.

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Understand the Cultural Studies essay within current debates around writing.
2. Locate the Cultural Studies essay (Unit 5) within the broader pedagogic climate of anti-racism and decoloniality on the degree.
3. Look at current practices with the assessment modes of Unit 5, using a mixed methods approach, in order to further develop essay writing as a part of the decolonial teaching offer (All research has been carried out in accordance with UAL's research ethics provisions).





The Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between decolonial pedagogies and the Cultural Studies essay?
2. How do Fashion, Fashion Communication, Textile, and Jewellery Design students experience Unit 5 as a part of a decolonial pedagogy?
3. How do the experiences of minoritized students find expression or relate to the essay format?
4. How can Unit 5 be further adapted to enhance a decolonial pedagogy, especially for minoritized students writing essays?

The Main Findings

1. The decolonised Cultural Studies essay allows students to engage with decolonial theory and their written expression particularly as counterstorytelling. It enables them to move towards and depart from the essay format associated with Anglo-western rhetoric (the thesis driven essay). This engagement is often informal.
2. On Unit 5, students found the set reading the biggest challenge whilst also finding it applied to what they were doing in their practice courses. A more systematic approach to the teaching of set texts is required, maybe with further engagement to practice units.
3. The Four Blocks Method of essay writing used in Unit 5 teaching was viewed by students as effective overall and allows a way of linking decolonial knowledge with the discussion of practice.
4. Some students expressed an interest in writing about their own practice on Unit 5. While this already happens informally, this area could be developed more formally within the course. Counterstorytelling emerged as a compelling theme for minoritized students taking Unit 5, here they could explore issues of identity, or explore alternative sources.
5. More connection between practice and Cultural Studies units could very much support a decolonising agenda. Staff could benefit with more reflection and understanding of systemic biases that pervades both the way that essays are understood within the degree programmes and how minoritized students are positioned within this conversation.

Recommendations

1. **For Level 5 students taking Unit 5, develop the writing pedagogy within seminars so that students can confidently use a critical practice form (see 2 below), and a more traditional essay (e.g. using the Four Blocks Method) to explore decolonial, anti-racist and social purpose approaches to culture and practice.** To this end, I recommend that we:
2. **Offer a 'Critical Practice Assignment' as a part of assessment** and pilot it in the 2024/25 session (Appendix 1). This will replace the current Reflective Piece.
3. **Further support for reading on Unit 5.** Confidence in writing is linked to reading agility. Develop a focused reading task to seminar teaching so all tutors explore the same passages in the set readings each week. Create Moodle content to develop reading techniques.
4. For Level 4 (first year students) **institute a writing programme that allows students to explore their own practice in relation to decolonial knowledge. This could be for other degree courses at CSM, and eventually for the university as a whole.** The programme could take the form of a liberal arts format 'writing seminar' and could be embedded or separate depending on the course.
5. **Tutor training: train staff in anti-racist or decolonial themes of counterstorytelling and how they link to the essay, and to the writing of creative practice.** This could be embedded into Academic Practice and Academic Enhancement. Starting at CSM, this training could be delivered in collaboration with the CSM Fashion, Textiles, Jewellery Cultural Studies team, drawing on their expertise in (doctoral qualifications, teaching, and research activity). Practice tutors should be given the space to explore their own relationship to essay writing and counterstorytelling.
6. **Create a clear mission statement that outlines how UAL understands and delivers decolonial pedagogies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.** This would complement the University's Social Purpose and Climate Justice remits.
7. **Nurture a postgraduate research culture that advances decolonial themes, practices, and specialisms that can feed into undergraduate teaching.**
8. **Undertake further research to develop a video essay toolkit as a decolonial education support resource, and as an alternative form of assessment.**
9. **Undertake further research into English as an additional language and essay writing assessment.** Approaches to translinguistic teaching for Cultural Studies essays at undergraduate level could be an exciting development for the institution. Dedicated and systematic research, possibly in partnership with UAL's Language Centre and EAP specialists, where essays could be an object of ethnographic study would open possibilities for how English as an additional language is assessed and how the essay format can be taught.
10. **With respect to the Decolonising Arts Education Fellowship Scheme, I recommend the extension and enhancement of the scheme, alongside further integration with Academic Practice, Teaching and Learning, and UAL Research in order to fully implement Recommendation 7.**

1. Introduction

This report is an output from the Decolonising Arts Fellowship Scheme 2022-23, run in partnership between the UAL Decolonising Arts Institute and the Teaching, Learning and Employability Exchange. It explores the debates around university writing, and how the Cultural Studies essay engages with decolonial teaching practices in the arts university. The research focuses on a second-year course module: Unit 5 Research Methods and Approaches on four degree courses: Fashion Design BA, Textile Design BA, Jewellery Design BA, and the Fashion Communication BA degrees at Central Saint Martins. This is a full report which looks at some of the pedagogic literature on the subject, and the myths and assumptions around 'writing'. The project uses a social research method, interviews with students (taking Unit 5 in the 2022//23 year) and stakeholders about their experiences of essay writing and decolonial pedagogies.

In this research, I focus on the relationship between decolonial pedagogies and the Cultural Studies essay, as a mode of both learning and as assessment for minoritized students. Unit 5 is examined by an essay and other written assignments. It is currently a part of the Fashion Design BA, Fashion Communication BA, Textile Design BA and Jewellery Design BA degree courses taken in Stage 2 by 320 students approximately per year (365 students in 2023). This report is a research output completed during my Decolonising Arts Education Fellowship. The title of this work arises from the central themes that my teaching practice, research and fellowship work which have inhabited: decoloniality, academic writing, and the opportunity for transformation that they offer. As a part of the wider project of the Decolonising Arts Education Fellowship Scheme, I hope to offer insights and recommendations to staff, the curriculum, and ultimately to the institution and sector.

The research questions:

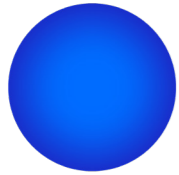
1. What is the relationship between decolonial pedagogies and the Cultural Studies essay?
2. How do Fashion, Fashion Communication, Textile, and Jewellery Design students experience Unit 5 as a part of a decolonial pedagogy?
3. Does the Cultural Studies essay have a particular relationship with minoritized students' relationship to the way they research, and to how they express themselves in writing?
4. How can the Unit 5 be further adapted to enhance a decolonial pedagogy, especially for minoritized students writing essays? (See Objective 3 below.)

While there has been some research into decolonial themes in relation to design practice education and the role or success of essays and composition (Ahmed 2022; Lumley 2018; Linley 2017; Pritchard et al 2005, Turner 2018), there is little scholarship on this topic that aligns decolonial teaching practice in the arts sector with the role of the academic essay. So, with some caveats, this is the rationale for this research. What is the connection between the Cultural Studies essay and a decolonial teaching practice? Can a Cultural Studies programme (aimed at Fashion, Textile, and Jewellery Design, and Fashion Communication students for example) advance a decolonial agenda? How does this question stand in the face of the strong feeling and professional experience of many tutors and stakeholders in the sector, that essay writing is both difficult for, and unpopular with certain undergraduates (Lockheart, 2014)? Can this tension be understood, historicised, and even reconciled?

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Understand the Cultural Studies essay within current debates around academic writing in the Arts and Design sector.
2. Locate the Cultural Studies essay (Unit 5) within the broader pedagogic climate of anti-racism and decoloniality on the degree programme.
3. Look at current practices with the assessment modes of Unit 5, using a mixed methods approach, in order to further develop essay writing as a part of the decolonial teaching offer. (All research has been carried out in accordance with UAL's research ethics provisions.)

The report makes recommendations for both Unit 5 and some with broader applicability to the University.



Context and the Case Study: Unit 5 Research Methods and Approaches

The Cultural Studies Essay

The Cultural Studies essay belongs broadly in the discipline of Cultural Studies, an Arts and Humanities discipline that has evolved since the 1960s out of the Birmingham School, and which offers students, scholars, and practitioners alike, a cultural and historical critique of power, canonicity, and politics. With its roots in English Literature, History, Social Science, Art History, and Modern Languages, Linguistics, and Media and Communication Studies, it should not be confused or interchanged with Contextual Studies for example, which has a different lineage. Cultural Studies essays follow an Anglo form of rhetoric, which opens with a thesis (that might articulate issues of power); delivers a critical or historical framework, and is followed by an analysis of a cultural text or artefact.

In its purest form, as a function of the Birmingham School, Cultural Studies is undoubtedly western-focused, even when trying to uproot its own cannon. Rashmy Sawney points out that the discipline does not engage with the multiplicity of popular culture in non-western countries, especially those with a history of colonisation. From his perspective Cultural Studies scholars 'are at a loss for a better understanding of the intersections between the local and the transnational, at least in a pedagogic sense' (2019, p. 37). This is, of course, undoubtedly problematic and there is certainly more work to be done along transnational lines.

Conversely, and particularly with respect to Unit 5 essays at CSM, it is also possible to see Cultural Studies as a discipline, which has had a significant impact on decolonial pedagogies in British institutions, mainly due to the theoretical models which are taught (in the work of Edward Said and Stuart Hall for example), and also in the way that it has adopted theories and methods from other disciplines. A social theorist like Michel Foucault and philosopher Judith Butler have offered critiques of power that have enabled scholars to adapt their work in the discussion of race theories, power, gender, and queerness, and how they can be used as tools for the analysis of cultural artefacts. An example would be Alexander Weheliye's discussion of an MIA music video in relation to Foucault's concept of biopolitics as a theory of racism (2014). Cultural Studies, currently has a particular relationship to a decolonised curriculum in that its history, intellectual lineage, and conceptual agility it offers all levels of study can facilitate a critique of colonial inheritance, discourses of coloniality and modernity, the discussion of enslavement, the construction of race, gender, ability and forms of embodiment (Stevenson, 2017).

Overview of Unit 5

The unit (see Appendix 1) offers a range of research methods and approaches to equip second years with the skills for self-directed study in the dissertation unit taken in the third year. It deploys cultural and historical concepts to critically analyse objects, images, spaces, and practices in art, design or popular culture. The unit builds on the basic skills (reading, note-taking, academic writing) acquired in Unit 4 taken in the first year. In this section I will discuss the unit and locate it within Joan Turner's (2018) work on essay writing.

Methodologically, the unit is multidisciplinary and draws from literary and media studies, material culture, design history, art history, theory and ethnographic approaches to the interpretation of images, artworks, artefacts, spaces, cultural practices, traditional and digital media forms. The unit develops critical thinking around fashion, textiles and jewellery design, as well as visual material and popular culture more broadly. Each lecture and seminar session is based on key texts and theoretical foundations relating to creative practice within the structures of western capitalism, and how cultures, areas, and nations have responded to legacies of colonialism whether it be on the body or via making. The four Learning Outcomes for this unit cover how to research from a variety of appropriate sources of information; how to engage in structured debate; and how to present your ideas in written format in the Harvard referencing style. The unit is assessed holistically by a portfolio consisting of a Reflective Piece, and a final academic essay, plus the essay plan. The Reflective Piece is formatively assessed during the term so that students can rework this for the summative assessment. It is a reflective response to a set reading, which students can view in relation to a piece of practice made by themselves or by someone else. The final grade is holistically awarded for the Reflective Piece, the Summative Essay, and the Essay plan. With regards to staffing, in 2022-23 there is the equivalent of three full time posts (fractioned across five members of staff: 1 full-time, 1 x 0.6, 2 x 0.5, and 1 x 0.4). Unit 5 has one full time Senior Lecturer, two Senior Lecturers on 0.5/6 fractions respectively, two Lecturers on 0.5 fractions and, one Associate Lecturer.

The Cultural Studies units across the three years (Units 4, 5, and 10) are organised through Cultural Studies principles centred around the critique of power. Some of the lecture titles in the 2022-23 period are: 'Post-Industrial Culture Industries, Creative Labour and Craft Consumption', 'The Unsustainable Fashion System in the Capitalocene', 'Ornamental Being: Post-colonialism, Orientalism & Material Culture'. Subjects linked to post-colonial theory and decolonial approaches to critical thinking are embedded into the teaching and learning programme as the subject matter requires. At the most immediate level this means that students can centre their own choice of primary materials as a part of their learning, and they can select the theoretical models with which they can analyse them. Cultural Studies can offer scholars vocabulary and research skills, and it can also critique ways in which culture responds to labour relations and the Anthropocene or climate change. One aspect that needs to be made clear is that Unit 5 is advancing the student journey through the discipline with writing support integrated into the course.

Unit 5 also teaches students how to write an academic essay. The mechanics of writing are delivered in balance with the realisation of their ideas and interpretations of their secondary reading and primary research. Students are given the Four Blocks Method, developed by Dr Nathaniel Weiner, Cultural Studies Coordinator for the programme, and the wider team, and is as follows in the excerpt below ('LO' = Learning Outcomes):

Block 1: Opening (LO4, LO2) argument (what you learned), signposts, mention examples, case study etc. Concentrate on this part last.

Block 2: Set up (LO4, LO1, LO2) histories, theories, (terminology), larger number of secondary material citations.

Block 3: Analysis (LO4, LO3, LO2, LO1) analysis of primary material/example, case study. Draft this first.

Block 4: Conclusion (LO4, LO2) summary, conclusion, final example if a 'crescendo essay'².

Blocks can have one or more paragraphs depending on what you are saying...

This is a functional approach to essay writing commonly used in liberal arts institutions, particularly in the Anglo tradition. It is 'power invested' with classroom and institutional hierarchies and privilege (Turner, 2018, p. 54). Although there is some room for variation and nuance within this form of academic writing, the format we teach for both written submissions overall fits into the western model of composition and rhetoric. In her research, Joan Turner (2018, pp. 240-241) has researched the responses to the form of composition that presents a thesis at the beginning (block 1); followed by the discussion of it via the engagement of secondary (block 2) and primary material (block 3). In her work, international students must learn about this new form as they take their assignments, and this requires some adjustment. Arguably, many home students also have to familiarise (or re-familiarise) themselves with this format when they start the unit. Such a formal method does have its drawbacks in that some students might overuse the format and produce rigid or disjointed essays. Alternatively, other students, by reason of their educational journey, which does not always map onto privilege, might have familiarity with this form of rhetoric and can produce it with a level of confidence and with very little support. The Four Blocks Method we use is flexible and student-led in that students can experiment with it in seminars, though at the moment, this experimentation is informal and student-led.

Whether this model is suitable to the Arts degree in absolute terms is beyond the scope of this project. In its purist form, the Four Blocks Method clearly makes assumptions about the educational experience of the students writing it. It is prescriptive, but it also offers opportunities for resistance and decolonised learning. The Cultural Studies team are preparing students to progress through a system (whether at UAL or beyond) where the western academic essay is a dominant form. As a way of diversifying the experience, Unit 5 asks that students write the Reflective Piece (which is formatively and summatively assessed). Ideally Unit 5 offers them a degree of mobility, and an awareness of forms of writing, as different students will use the method in different ways after graduation.

So, Unit 5 is an exercise in academic writing, but it is primarily a content-driven course that introduces students to a body of theoretical knowledge, analytical skills, and the 'Anglo-academic essay' (via the Four Blocks Method of essay writing). I should note that if a student did not use the method, and yet achieved the learning outcomes, and 'gets there in the end', then they would be successful in the unit. The team and I regularly mark

essays like this, particularly if the student has experience of a different composition style. Four Blocks is not a requirement for a high mark, though it is arguably the most direct way of getting one.

Decolonising, Writing, Essays: Literature and Debates



The literature that connects the topics of decolonial teaching, essay writing, and minoritized students is extensive. It ranges from decolonial and Critical Race Theory to pedagogic theory as evidenced in the work of Bhabra (2018) and Tran (2021). Rather than outline it in a way that is more suited to an academic article, I have organised a discussion of some of the key debates around questions or provocations in order to advance the reasoning behind the methodology and recommendations.

How Do You Decolonise a Curriculum?

Bhabra (2018), Kapuya (2019), Tran (2021) and Gopal (2021), among others, point out that there is no unified definition of how a curriculum might be decolonised. This is as true for Cultural Studies for Fashion, Textiles, Jewellery Design, and Fashion Communication, as it is for the practice elements of these degree courses. This lack of definition is both a benefit, for the scope and intellectual opportunity that study offers, and admittedly, problematic for a teaching programme, where key concepts are necessary, and a systematic approach is required. In addition, how students perceive their learning programme (metacognition) is vitally important as is a key feature of degree-level learning. Giroux and McLaren (1992), in their discussion of writing and radical pedagogies, articulate that critical discussions of pedagogy 'need to acknowledge that the pedagogical process itself represents an important aspect of the production of knowledge'. The challenge for lecturers lies in the preparation for a systematic decolonial approach within an undergraduate teaching programme. Does decolonising a curriculum mean updating reading lists with authors/practitioners from the global south (this would happen anyway, particularly with a research active teaching team)? Might it mean changing modes of delivery and assessment or making subject matter more mindful of histories of imperialism, resource exploitation, and the construction of race categories that accompany designing and making? Where is the room on the course for making then? It is this backdrop against which Unit 5 sits.

What is a Decolonial Pedagogy? Overview and Perspectives

In this section I want to outline what decolonial pedagogy is and link it to the design of Unit 5. A decolonial pedagogy has to offer a balance of two areas. The first is relevant subject matter about past and present colonial and imperial practices: teaching *about* colonialism and decolonisation. The second has to offer students *ways* of expressing and deploying knowledge via writing skills, that allow rigour, innovation and creativity outside of received values or 'wisdom'. Both areas require quite different teaching programmes, assessment, time, and resources. The second area would necessitate the space to experiment. This is particularly important to the Arts institution and needs to be suited to each level.

² A 'crescendo essay' ends with the last block concluding the essay with the most important example that also summarises the essay. This type of essay depends on the nature of the sources and how the student wants to write about them.

Decoloniality is both a theory and a praxis developed, in part, from post-colonial theory, Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Delgado, 2001) and the work of other scholars, including Walter Dignolo (2018). It seeks to imagine a world that is culturally, socially, and economically free from the historical structures and legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and enslavement. It disputes forms of knowledge production originating in the European Enlightenment, capitalism, and, most importantly for this study, the idea of modernity as a function of 'advancement'. For arts and culture in the west, modernity, Modernism, and coloniality and their cultural artefacts are invisibly linked and quite problematically associated with good taste, discernment, moderation, and cultural capital. Decoloniality is also a practical application and deployment of strategies and techniques that can help to 'explain and resist pervasive forms of racism' (Chakrabarty, Roberts and Preston, 2012; Taylor, Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2009).

One of the strategies emphasised by Gillborn (2008) is the use of counterstorytelling that might reveal the racisms, and the structural inequalities that inflect the teaching and learning environment. To quote Caroline Stevenson:

Crucially, methods of counterstorytelling have the power to expose both the fluidity of experiences of reality and the frameworks through which hierarchies and systems of order are imposed on experience. With regard to the student experience, counterstorytelling therefore offers the potential to unpick truths and frameworks of knowledge that have, in essence, become 'naturalised' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

(Stevenson, 2015)

The unpicking that Stevenson presents here takes place with not just the analysis of cultural forms or practice within the Cultural Studies essay (such as the analysis of a garment, social media post, novel, or advertising campaign) but also with the types of culture that are deemed fit for academic discussion and the way, or the voice, in which such discussion takes place. So, although it may not always have been so, the academic essay has the potential to address the specific perspectives of minoritized students by allowing them to discuss aspects of culture that they have chosen, and that they think is worth discussing at university.

Of course, the perspectives of minoritized students raises questions and contradictions about how a decolonial pedagogy might be reconciled with the university in the United Kingdom. If a student is being taught the history of the cotton trade, and enslavement, in relation to the design of the suit, can they not extend their analysis to the history of their university in relation to its investments? What if the mode of expression, the counterstorytelling becomes a part of a protest, such as with the Rhodes Must Fall campaign (see below)? Institutions are largely imperial structures, with histories, legacies, and contemporary practices rooted in enslavement, colonialism, and forms of extraction. Minoritized students can be very aware of this and become a part of movements that challenge university fee structures and large teaching cohorts, the reliance on overseas students, and poor wages and working conditions for teaching and service staff. They may feel alienated by the fact that multilingual experience is rarely integrated into teaching and assessment methods (Odeniyi, 2023). The 'decolonise the curriculum' movement that arose in the mid-noughties and which gained traction particularly after the protests against the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College, Oxford and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 has been appropriated into one of the most visible aspects of higher

education management with varying and sometimes problematic results. Within this lived context, students are asked to write essays that can rarely be divorced from the institutional environment where they learn.

Decolonial teaching and learning has developed over decades from sustained intellectual work, across different disciplines often within the context of violence, white-raced supremacy, and Anglo-normative biases within the academy. How can this wealth of learning be systematised for undergraduates who might have enrolled at university in order only to design and make (Patton, 2016; Cooks, 2008)?

Are students taught about what 'decolonising' is in their Cultural Studies units? The simple answer here is 'not definitively', and there is a reason for this. The Cultural Studies units (4, 5, and 10) are organised through Cultural Studies principles centred around the critique of power (Lectures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 of Unit 5). Subjects linked to decoloniality are embedded into the teaching and learning programme across lectures, readings, and seminar discussion where relevant definitions were given as the themes and material required. Postcolonial theory and 'ornamentalism', using Anna Cheng's (2018) work, was the subject of Lecture 4. Hybridity through the case study of African textiles featured in Lecture 6. Constructions of race had already been covered in Unit 4. While the term 'decolonising' might be used in lectures and seminars, it is not something students are assessed on directly. 'Decolonisation' as a historical process is more widely used and examined, most notably by Franz Fanon, and it does not map directly onto the word used in institutions, far from it in fact. The word, when used in this new context, is metaphorical, and linked to education management and training. The work of Fanon does have a place in Unit 5, whereas the metaphorical aspects of curriculum design and pedagogy, are issues for the course team.

A decolonial pedagogy, for the purposes of a course like Unit 5, allows students a learning space, in lecture, seminars, and on Moodle, to integrate their own narratives, embodiment, and creative perspectives into the body of Cultural Studies literature and the analytical skills that are offered as a part of this. At the same time, it offers modes of written expression, and an awareness of how they can be used and how they might take ownership of them.

In seminars this happens incrementally, with exercises based around the use of keywords or the selection of key passages from the readings; with group work on students' own examples; writing specific blocks of the essay in class and then having group feedback. For example, certain blocks of the essay are not as rigid as they might appear and students can experiment in class with them.

The process is slow, but it allows students to use their own perspectives, and challenge dominant modes of thought, or aesthetics (such as minimalism) etc., and build their submission for assessment over the course.

2. How the Research was Done

Participant Interviews

For this research I sought to further develop the way Cultural Studies essay writing is taught in Unit 5. Overall, my research questions were designed to help me understand how minoritized students might understand a decolonising agenda in relation to their Unit 5 work and the final essay. I decided to talk to students who were taking Unit 5 and offer them two interviews:

Interview 1

An interview concerning the broader issues around their university learning experience in relation to their sense of decolonial teaching and learning, and their experience of Unit 5 and the written assessment.

Interview 2

A discussion of the final essay submitted for Unit 5. Interview 2 was influenced by Roz Ivanić's (2018) work on the essay portfolio as a written object or text for analysis. Here, both interviewer and participants could engage with the research themes via an 'object' of study – in this case the Unit 5 final essay. In this interview students were invited to discuss their summative essays for Unit 5, along with the feedback, and any other issues they wanted to explore.

After gaining ethics approval from the Education sub-ethics committee, in September 2022, I put out a call via Moodle, asking second-year students doing Unit 5, who might want to be interviewed for the project. Drawing categories from Gillborn (2008), I sought out students who would especially self-identify as 'minoritized'. On balance, this was the best way to find participants. Personal data for individual students is obviously protected, so self-selection and self-identification is the only ethical method. The answers students give could add more depth to the experience of marginalisation.

All interviews were conducted via Teams, and in confidence. All identifying details were removed. I prepared an ethics and release form, which I then sent to the responders. Interviewees were paid for one hour per interview via Arts Temps. All data were gathered, held, and used in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations.

The answers to the interview questions would help me to develop the course content, seminar exercises, and further develop the way that the essays will be taught.

From these answers I produced interventions (Appendix 3) for Unit 5. In addition, I was able to draw up a broader picture of the institution, which is how I was able to develop recommendations for the university as a whole, ones that touched on essay writing and

decolonial pedagogy, though in some cases the recommendations were not restricted to these areas.

Interim Review of Contextual and Critical Studies Provision, CSM and Course Reapproval

In the 2022/23 academic year, CSM undertook an internal review of the Cultural Studies units for Fashion, Textiles and Jewellery degree courses. The overview read as follows:

Where a course has been identified as 'at risk' in relation to quality and standards (recruitment patterns, complaint and/ or grievance, student and staff experience or other relevant indicators), the College Executive Group may propose an urgent Interim Review outside of the normal cycle of course monitoring to be undertaken within no more than 4 weeks to identify appropriate support and action to make immediate improvements in the performance of the course.

(CSM Interim Review policy)

Alongside this review, the BA courses that Unit 5 are a part of were also under reapproval. While I was, of course, aware that this was taking place, the Review of Cultural Studies, particularly in terms of 'risk', was relatively unexpected and required robust defence. Both processes involved interviews and preparation from the Cultural Studies team and the course leads. Some of the discussions held were about the future of the Cultural Studies programme in relation to the Fashion Communication degree. This was a complex environment for the team to operate in, the extent of which I had not anticipated when beginning the Fellowship. I decided, in order to avoid a conflict of interests, and extra workload for the respective teams, I would not interview stakeholders from the course.

Student Survey

Students were also invited to answer anonymously a '3-minute survey' via MS Forms about Unit 5. They were asked to respond to statements that covered essay writing skills, critical thinking around themes linked to a decolonised learning programme, and their overall opinion of the unit in relation to their practice and degree more broadly (Appendix 2).

The full list of statements is below. Students were given the options ranging from to 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly':

1. The course was broad and covered a range of ideas and approaches
2. Unit 5 was a valuable part of my degree course
3. The most challenging part of the unit was...

4. I was able to understand the readings by the end of the unit
5. I developed my research skills on Unit 5
6. Unit 5 offered me some knowledge about history of colonialism in relation to fashion, textiles, or jewellery
7. In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about sustainability
8. In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about aspects of gender and sexuality in culture or artistic practice
9. I feel I developed my writing skills in this unit (using the Four Blocks Method for example)
10. After doing Unit 5 I know how to develop an argument in writing
11. After completing Unit 5, I think I know how to write analytically about an aspect of cultural or artistic practice
12. For my final essay in Unit 5, I wanted to write about my own practice
13. After completing the assignments for Unit 5, I am more confident in using citations or references
14. In seminars and out of class I was able to discuss ideas from this unit with other students
15. I was satisfied with my final grade for Unit 5
16. I would recommend Unit 5 to first year students
17. Unit 5 made me engage with my course/practice in a positive way

Limitations of the Project

The sampling methods (using grades, postcodes, Quality Assurance data for example) need to be explored, in the conjunction with the Ethics Panel, for any future research (e.g. pilot of Recommendation 3). Bearing in mind any participation bias, the short questionnaire aimed to involve as many perspectives as possible. The focused study of the experience of students who use English as an additional language requires dedicated study, especially in relation to undergraduate teaching, and how students might integrate aspects of their first or preferred language into their essays. To this end, the Recommendations point to the further research that needs to be done.



Participants

Out of the 325 cohort

Number of students	Type of engagement	Percentage
30	expressions of interest	9%
23	students were sent info packs, registration and ethics forms	7%
15	completed registration	5%
8	did not complete Arts Temps checks or registration	2%
9	students interviewed, 3 students had 2 interviews	3%
70	students took part in the survey	22%
1	student withdrew during the interview period	0.3%

3. Results and Discussion



Discussion

Student Responses³ - What Did Students Say about Essay Writing?

Summary

Students were able to articulate both the benefits that essay writing brought them as well as the challenges that they experienced whilst carrying out the assessment tasks.

The main challenges on the unit were managing the reading and planning the final essay.

Some noted the challenge of working in English as an additional language, whilst also being aware of the language services that were available to them.

Students who were interviewed mentioned that the essay assignment allowed them to express and write about their identity and interests in vital ways.

In both the questionnaires and interviews, participants mentioned that doing the assigned reading was the biggest challenge. 30% of the students surveyed answered that 'understanding the readings' was the most challenging part of the unit.

52% of students surveyed agreed with the statement:

→ **'I was able to understand the readings by the end of the unit'.**

45% of students surveyed agreed with the statement:

→ **'I feel I developed my writing skills in this unit (using the Four Blocks Method for example).'**

45% of students surveyed agreed with the statement:

→ **'After doing Unit 5 I know how to develop an argument in writing'.**

48% of students surveyed agreed with the statement:

→ **'After completing the assignments for Unit 5, I am more confident in using citations or references'.**

Across the interviews and surveys, the majority of students engaged with the course content and to the writing of Cultural Studies essays. At the most positive end were comments such as:

'During Unit 5 I learned vital context and history related to my creative practice. It provided the groundwork for me to analyse my own work and its relation to social and cultural issues'

The more negative comments were about anxiety towards the course:

'Unit 5 sent me into a series of panic attacks as I felt under prepared to write and structure the essays completely overwhelming me with stress and anxiety'

and

'[t]oo much added work and pressure and no care or consideration for neurodivergent or disabled people'

At the end of the interview I reminded students of the range of services UAL offers to students requiring accommodations. Another concern in the survey was about remote lectures:

'lectures shouldn't have been online, I do feel like the engagement with topics can get lost a bit'

One student remarked on the lack of an academic course:

'I think we should have more Cultural Studies as context is integral to image making. This is the only academic class we had all year, and it was for one term. We need more'

From the survey and also the interviews, the most challenging aspect of an academic course at UAL appears to be academic reading. Conversely, interviewees were explicit in saying that they felt that they were 'being taught' on Unit 5, and this was viewed positively. Reducing reading from the unit does not benefit students, however, as they will need reading synthesis skills in their professional lives. As a part of a decolonial teaching and learning practice, students will need to learn the context of the key ideas and vocabulary they encounter, using a wide range of excerpts. Students appear to require more support and instructive 'teaching' in this area.

³ In the discussion of students' responses I have not identified the minoritized status of the speaker. Some courses are small, and students raced as Black or with South Asian or South East Asian origins, or with different ability can be easily identified. Instead, I have allowed the spoken voice to convey status, via context, where necessary and have used 's0', 's1' and 's2' so on, for each person interviewed.

More broadly, on encountering Cultural Studies students were aware of the approach to the subject. One student, for example said:

‘Hmm, I think I was surprised, but once Cultural Studies was introduced, I was like “Of course there’s an essay-like aspect... The only thing that I thought I was “ohh, maybe the essay is just gonna be about our work and no one’s actually gonna teach us... But when we first started doing Cultural Studies, I was actually surprised because the first few lectures I went to, I was shocked at how deep they were...”’ (s3)

The theme of ‘we are being taught’ came up a few times in the interviews and this was one of the most developed comments. The interviews pointed to how the different modes of course delivery appear to students.

Managing the Writing Process

When asked about what their process was for writing their essays, one participant discussed structure:

‘First of all, I think they [students] should know about the essay structure ‘cause without that it’s kind of impossible, you know, to know what you’re doing and what you’re writing about. Even if you get the question, it’s not enough. Like you need some sort of structure. Some people, I mean they don’t need that, like they’re fine, but it depends on the person. I feel like the majority would say the essay structure is the most important...’ (s0)

To follow on from this, it became apparent to me from the interviews that working through the formal aspects of essay writing was a struggle, but this is a part of the process. As mentioned before on Unit 5 we offer the Four Blocks Method of teaching essay form and in some cases the interviewees found it helpful.

‘Yeah, I do remember the four blocks. And I did use it for sure because I was so scared. I didn’t know what I was doing. So I definitely followed it. It’s like I had it, you know, next to my essay that I was writing. I don’t know if I followed it completely, but that was definitely the base of everything I kept on looking at it every second. It’s kind of like a guide just to make sure.’ (s3)

Another student had a different approach that did not follow the teaching on the unit, but used their own process of whittling down ideas and material.

‘So without structure I just write down my thoughts. Almost like journaling. I’ll just write and write and write, and then I will take pieces of those and form it into a paragraph. And then at this point, it’s just pages of unstructured writing. But then I’ll refer to the structure that we’re given and then make it more concise into like an essay format.

And this is actually the part that I struggle with the most because I struggle to put down my thoughts if that makes sense. So that always takes me the longest and I’m always way over the word count. And I’m just trying to cut things down and make it more concise and flow from one idea to another.’ (s5)

Overall, students are learning to write in a genre of argument and analysis, the academic essay, and their journey involved moving from a lack of structure to increasing levels of organisation. The ‘top down’ structure was valuable to some, but s5 above used a more spontaneous and individualistic approach to essay writing.

Essays and Identity: Forms of Counterstorytelling

Participants talked about how their choice of subject matter connected to their identity and special interests. I would identify these choices as counterstorytelling, sometimes this was personal and at other times it was explicitly linked to decolonial themes. In many ways they were ‘writing themselves’ into their essays.

‘Well, let’s see. I have the freedom to write about whatever I want, and I already feel like that says something about your identity, your personality. Because I guess I always write about the same kind of things or, like, my opinion is very evident. Like, I remember when we wrote about femininity and ornament or something. That was something I really loved because I love this particular artist.’ (s3)

A scenario above is an ideal one where s3 was able to make links between their interests and the course content. Ivanić’s (1998) reading of Chase (1992) is particularly helpful in that rather than seeing essay discourse as being oppositional to the personal, as if the two were monolithic, students often find ways of blending ‘topics’, here decolonial themes (‘racial background’), with their own interests and motivations. In the extract below, the participant linked their ‘racial background’ to the choice of subject matter they made.

‘Because of these topics, I chose things that like were quite personal to me, to do with my racial background and things like that. So when I was writing I chose a more emotional approach. You can see my expression like for what it is authentically, and not trying to like mould it into something that’s more palatable to like a western taste, if that makes sense.’ (s5)

Here the student was aware of dominant thinking ‘a western taste’, and how they might write against it in their essays, and in their own voice. These acts of writing themselves into their essays, or working against dominant thinking is explored in the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Delgado (1989). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, p. 21) write that the “voice” component of Critical Race Theory becomes a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed’.

Conversely, a student was also aware of how their more traditional educational experience might play a role in essay writing success.

‘I did English and History for an A level where essay writing is super important. And I definitely get some of that [experience from A Levels] in and that’s why maybe my essays are good. That’s why other people like my friends who put in the same amount of work in or even like talk about the same exact example, don’t get the same grades.’ (s2)

Again, as an interviewer, my role was not to correct this, as the Cultural Studies essay is not marked in accordance with familiarity with the essay genre, but rather the delivery of organised ideas, via the Four Blocks Method or any other organisational structure that would satisfy the learning outcomes. This student saw the essay as a continuation of the A Level learning programme, which in their view gave them an advantage.

Another student had a different approach to their experience of writing:

‘I’ve always been quite fond of writing. It’s a form of expression that I’ve used, even though, I have not always been the best at it. But grades are not really a system that I use to rate myself to be honest. I think it’s nice to have like a platform where you’re given like this assignment and it’s like as part of your course. You have to write about these important topics. I appreciate that because it gives me reason to do it because it is contributing towards my qualifications and to other people around me to learn as well.’ (s5)

Here they were able to position themselves in relation to grading, assignments, group learning, ‘important topics’, and their own expression. This relatively autonomous form of self-evaluation allowed them a degree of confidence and overview. These comments about the organisation of the essay showed that the Four Blocks Method was interpreted broadly, with some students opting for a more individualistic approach. Whether in terms of writing skills or subject matter, especially with issues connected to race and identity, students were not in conflict with the way essay writing was taught. The student who had a personal approach to their essay, chose to do this and perhaps teaching could be developed in a way that would encourage this further.

Key Theme: ‘Decoloniality’

As stated in Objective 2, I wanted to situate students’ experience of writing Cultural Studies essays against the theme of ‘decoloniality’. I wanted the participants to offer their ideas and definitions as a foundation for the interview.

Participants were asked:

Q5. ‘You probably have heard a lot about “decolonising the curriculum” and ‘decoloniality’ at CSM. It is the theme of many initiatives in higher education. Have you heard these phrases? What do they mean to you?’

There was also a follow up question, that developed out of responses to Q5: ‘Where and how on your course have you learned about anything connected to ‘decoloniality?’

What Did the Participants Understand by ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ and ‘Decoloniality’?

As they demonstrated in their answers, many of the participants in this study had tools for discussing what a decolonised learning programme was, and also, what it was not. Students would have acquired this knowledge, not just from Unit 5, but also from previous units and, undoubtedly, from their wider and informal learning experiences. In Unit 5, rather than give an oversimplified summary of what a decolonised curriculum might mean, students were invited in the final lecture to ‘decolonialise the Culture of the Capitalocene’, a reference to the third lecture on sustainability, as a way of revising the course and to prepare of the final submission. The questions on this topic allowed students to locate their discussions about essays against a backdrop of ideas linked to issues of power and histories of decolonialisation.

Moving onto the responses, students who took part in this study had wide, and informed, answers to Question 5. There were no respondents who were not at least familiar with the concept of ‘decolonising the curriculum’ or ‘decolonial’ teaching. Some answers were rudimentary:

‘It’s like colonisation ... it’s probably like really a specific term, that I’m learning a lot [about]...’

or it was defined as to ‘be aware of the social and political and cultural issues that are happening in the world’.

One respondent answered:

‘I feel like we all used this word but we don’t know exactly...because it can have so many approaches, but I think to an extent it could be colonial to like certain practices and cannons’

Others had a particularly assured approach and covered areas, from course content to broader systemic and structural ideas of politics, or an awareness of historical themes.

‘decolonialising is the prevention of almost like repeating the past...that there were like exploitative in different ways... replicating models of like exploitation or that could be also, just not economic exploitation, but also like cultural, like setting a standard of like cultural dominance. I think that’s also like saying like “oh no, this is a culture that is worth preserving and that culture isn’t”. I think that’s what it’s trying to prevent those mechanisms and those power dynamics. So I think decolonising that’s kind of like the objective of that.’ (s5)

This student was aware of history, exploitation and hegemony, and demonstrated a future vision via ‘prevention’.

Further responses understood the question purely as topics that were of clear concern in their practice. The main one was ‘cultural appropriation’. In the terms of the courses we teach, this can be defined as when an embodied or textile practice of a minoritized group (often raced as non-white, and in many examples as Black) is adopted by a group of higher statuses (often raced as white), who do not experience the social penalties that the minoritized group did for their participation in that practice (Green and Kaiser 2017). So understanding of a decolonial pedagogy was expressed via not wanting their designs ‘to be criticised’.

‘there’s something about cultural appropriation that I can go on about...When I genuinely appreciate a culture...I have to, like research the hell out of it and know everything about the culture to be able to 100% appreciate it because ... I don’t know everything about my culture, so if someone was to come and wear something from my culture... I would love that, you know...’ (s1)

The idea that research and knowledge can offset cultural appropriation as a practice was common in the interviews.

A student identified unit themes, and their chosen essay topics as being decolonial: ‘women of colour and like how they’ve explored their own identities in [film etc.]’. This need for representation was echoed with other participants:

‘Like [this theme] kind of invokes a lot of emotion in me, and I kind of just boil it down to like the very fact that like I wanna see more people from all different types of backgrounds, not just like these rich white folk.... more in a more detailed sense...I think is one of those things that I view as like really useful tools to get towards that, more like inclusive future.’ (s5)

This was echoed by another student when discussing their choice of essay subject.

‘But like when I was writing about East Asian womanhood in film, I was learning a lot about things I never would otherwise have explored. So it was really interesting to find out things [that are not usually mentioned].’ (s4)

Themes of injustice and exclusion alongside those of representations and belonging became a part of the conversation about decolonial teaching in later parts of the interviews. Some of the participants wanted to talk about their experiences of white supremacy and racial injustice within their courses, and sought to state their critiques and awareness of, to quote Matthias and Boucher:

‘[t]his valorisation of what it means to be white [and how it] represents an embodied politics in which one actively invests so to reap material, institutional, and societal benefits, often times at the expense of people of Colour’ (2021, p. 6).

One could also add that a critical race theoretical approach to competition bears particularly on this kind of comment. Dixon and Anderson (2018, p. 122) argue that racial inequity in education is the logical outcome of a system premised on competition’, cited in Tran (2021). This competition is not just about degree classification though, but also about how knowledge is aligned and ordered towards ‘these rich white folk’, through the biases of marking criteria. The idea of a hierarchy of perspectives that students experienced on their whole degree, and not just via Cultural Studies thinking, especially in marking or feedback, emerged as a running theme in these interviews.

Decolonial teaching was also viewed from the opposite perspective, as not having a social role, but instead in relation to individual personhood within the teaching programme and the institution. One student had a lateral approach to how they saw coloniality in relation to their own ethnic background.

‘While I say I actually don’t feel like a strong, strong sense of colonising or decolonising, but because I’m from East Asia and I can [...] tell I’m somehow still a part of... a group that is being marginalised. So I think I can somehow relate to this topic. It’s for me. It’s more like being culturally marginalised, for example.’ (s7)

As a researcher here, it was not my role to evaluate the historical veracity of the participants assertions, for example the coloniality of East Asian countries with an imperial past. What is interesting here is that the student located, and othered, ‘decoloniality’ as a part of a western narrative and from that, understood the themes in relation to their own personhood in a western cultural context. The personal and the pedagogic at times connect for certain students. A decolonial pedagogy allowed students to discuss their own minoritized status.

Some readily identified the parts of their course where they saw ‘decoloniality’. These were Cultural Studies lectures.

‘it was a lecture to do with [cultural] appropriation in like media and fashion’

or

‘I think it hasn’t been really talked about in school or in projects [practice]. I think it’s mostly talked about in Cultural Studies’

They identified decolonial pedagogy in parts of their design/practice teaching, particularly in relation to ideas of sustainability:

‘we think about the sustainability parts of our projects’

and

‘we don’t really discuss it apart from sustainability because we are trying to be more sustainable, but the social and cultural issue not that much’ (s0)

‘from the design part, we get the idea from sustainability’ and ‘a [Cultural Studies] lecturer mentioned African textiles and how they work around it by not making many cuts. So that was a project that could be decolonial’ (s9)

Moreover, students used the question to discuss where they perceived they had not experienced it:

‘we don’t get that in [practice units] of my course, like it’s very rare to even see non-European influences in my course, let alone women of colour, that’s rare and like the implications of design and appropriation and ornamentation, it’s like something that [I] think is really important that we study.’ (s2)

and also

‘...these topics are not really brought up in the design course - it is never really brought up.’ (s9)

Although students might not have identified decolonial pedagogy in some of their units, this does not necessarily mean that it did not take place. The evaluation of decoloniality in practice units requires further study and is a part of an ongoing process (Ahmed, 2022). What emerged at this point of the interview process is that students would use the questions to discuss other areas of their course and university experience more broadly. As a researcher, this presented a challenge as to the relevance of answers but also it indicated that respondents were ‘multiple’ in their approach to the interview scenario.

‘Well, at first it was kind of difficult to actually find a way to merge ideas about colonialism. All of those ideas merge all of them together because it doesn’t seem cohesive when you first try it. At least that was the process for me, so I did find it a bit hard, but then once I actually did more research, went to the library and found other digital resources, then was easier for me to actually compile everything in one place and make it make sense and actually learn how to explain myself in order for other people to understand my ideas.’ (s0)

The overall picture of how students understood decolonial content in their courses was that they saw the importance of it, and also understood how broad the ideas were. They were able to make choices about their learning.

Summary

- Students understood ‘decolonising the curriculum’ and ‘decoloniality’ in wide terms:
 - from ‘like colonisation’, to informed and precise ways of achieving an ‘inclusive’ future;
 - as a way of providing an alternative to a culture of ‘rich white folk’;
 - as a source of guidance for ethical research and practice;
 - in terms of their own personhood or through individual scholarly and creative interests.
- Decolonial pedagogy was identified in Cultural Studies and in practice units related to sustainability.
- Some students suggested that parts of their practice units were not decolonial in the terms we discussed.
- There were no respondents who were not at least familiar with the concept of ‘decolonising the curriculum’ or ‘decolonial’ teaching.
- The majority of students interviewed identified Cultural Studies as having a decolonial element to its pedagogy.
- 47% of students surveyed agreed with the statement: ‘Unit 5 offered me some knowledge about history of colonialism in relation to fashion, textiles, or jewellery’. 9% disagreed.
- In the interviews minoritized students mentioned that they saw themselves represented in the subject matter of Unit 5. The unit was also identified as exploring social issues.
- 40% of students surveyed agreed with the statement: ‘In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about sustainability’. 41% were neutral. These figures are very much in keeping with the controversy around the critiques of sustainability.
- 45% of surveyed students agreed with the statement: ‘In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about aspects of gender and sexuality in culture or artistic practice’.

Essay Stories

In this section I will explore short excerpts from two 'essay stories' taken from Interview 2. I have used Ivanić's (2018) approach to the written assignment as the object of analysis. These interviews covered a lot of ground, but here I focus on how counterstorytelling might allow opportunities for pedagogic development. In this interview students were invited to discuss their summative essays for Unit 5, along with the feedback, and any other issues they wanted to explore.

Student 0

This student embarked on a complex creative journey with both their Unit 5 essay (about an artist who uses religious images in their work) and also with their practice where both evolved together. They received a B- overall and were disappointed with this mark:

'I thought I actually did much better job than that, although I had been really ill at the time'

Why do you think it got the grade it did?
You said you were not happy with it.

'In the essay I did not quite explain the context of the controversial images in the artist's photographs. I just assumed that everyone knew what they were. But it didn't even cross my mind to be honest, because I thought it's fairly obvious what it all is and everyone knows what it is... In the feedback the tutor liked the essay but made a suggestion that for my final year for the dissertation I should maybe write a clear paragraph explaining the history and context of the images... because I do agree with it was at times chaotic.'

At times they agreed with the feedback: 'I do agree with it was at times chaotic', at others they disputed the academic judgement about the number of references they had used as can be seen below.

'The feedback said I should maybe spend more time on my essay plan and that might help my structure little better. So, I do agree with that. But I don't really agree with explaining something that is so obvious, but maybe that's what Cultural Studies is.'

This final sentence has some truth in it. Here the student began to understand how definitions of what might be taken for granted might help advance an argument.

Despite not being happy with the grade, the student talked about the process by which the summative essay, about an artist who worked on religious themes, and their practice came into being:

'Like the photograph was still in my mind and I just felt really inspired by it. So I just thought I really need to continue the, you know, the research and maybe make it like a physical outcome for that... Religious people can be hypocritical at times. I made a piece that was like that - under the layers.'

At the same time Student 0 expressed reservations about how they might be perceived in that they did not want to be associated with religious controversy, and the essay for Unit 5 played a role in this.

'My designs show my relationship with my religious upbringing sometimes, but it is something I am considering at the moment. It's not what I want to be known for. This is why I did the essay in this way.'

It seems that the essay played a role in expressing the controversy, even allowing them a way of exploring their limitations.

'My friend who is from the same type of Christianity said that "there needs to be a little bit of a change in the society, so it's good that you are raising these questions, even if they don't like your project." So, I just thought I'm going to stick with this no matter what for now.'

This essay story raises important questions about the value of the learning process, in relation to grades. In the interview I acknowledged the vital and invaluable impact of the creative and intellectual journey that the student embarked on here. The essay process played a role in how controversy might be managed professionally.

Student 7

This participant, who shared their essay on screen with me, did a question about post-modernity and digital culture. This interview had many interesting exchanges, which I have included below. They scored an A- in their final submission on Anime and video gaming:

'I wanted an A+ though. I think I couldn't get the focus point of my topic. But the person who marked it said after reading the conclusion my idea was quite clear. So I was thinking after I wrote I read my feedback. I was thinking if I want to improve this essay, maybe there is something I could do.'

The student had a clear intention about the topic and wanted to link it to the intellectual framework they were exploring. They did not talk about their practice at all, but aimed to enlarge the scope of what they thought could be studied.

‘Nowadays, video games are becoming very serious, and people should get a different feeling about them. And I think the video I mentioned is a very good example like because it is talking about very some serious ideas, deep thoughts that actually can help people.’

‘I talked about the how they designed this game, like the structure. The story - the storyline in this video game and the story itself is very post-modern - the background of the game is.’

They also, like Student 1, put their experience into the essay:

I can see that you talk about yourself at the bottom of the page. Could you talk a little bit about the experience of writing in different styles?

‘You mean different style in like for example writing in introduction and writing in the main body part?’

In part, but you also talk about your day - ‘spent gaming’ here.

‘Oh right...I spend quite much effort and time on this game, so it’s kind of it was kind of related to my life at that time in my flat in lockdown. I had motivation to deeply explore it. That’s not purely, um myself being reflected, but I think like my interest is part of my personality. I think putting myself into the essay was right but just with different things. I was not so happy with the essay before [Unit 4]. So with this one I was interested in edgy culture and some Anime. So, I automatically research, explore more of more and the fields I was interested in.’

Interestingly the student changed their approach from the previous Cultural Studies unit and went for what they called ‘edgy culture’ and the engagement with a culture they considered marginal. This added to the personal value and purpose of the project. We discussed the specifics of their essay, especially how they set out their territory. This led to an interesting exchange about grammar.

How did you explain your ideas?

‘I think it is definitely necessary to define some terminology cause different people have different understanding of terms, so I paid much attention on describing the terms in the essay. I did describe post modern...I mean this this term itself is more complex than digital so.’

Well, I can see that you have defined postmodernity with Morgado. I can see you’ve also defined modernity, which is good. Then later down you’ve also talked about digital. Did you experience any obstacles when you were putting the essay together?

‘Mainly about the reference but it was okay in the end. My grammar is not so good, I think.’

Well, it’s good to have confidence in using grammatical language but this is not the object of the Unit 5 assessment. We just need to understand what you are aiming to say. So we only give feedback on grammar. The language won’t affect the mark. Do you remember your tutors mentioning this?

‘No...OK.’

Grammar/grammatical language was clearly a source of concern to the student, as it was to many others. As both Odeniyi (2023) and Turner point out, Standard English and ‘eloquent prose’ are often connected to high cultural capital: ‘English is effectively cocooned in a bubble of monolingual and monocultural assumptions’ (2018, p. 24). During the delivery of the unit, the marking strategy concerning language is explained, but often not retained by students. Social concerns about English are sometimes brought to the specific learning process.

These two stories I have selected spoke to two quite different experiences of the unit incorporating practice on one side and a commitment to a topic and field of Cultural Studies on the other. Despite the difference in grades the students wanted to improve, engage with the feedback, and also work with structures of the essay format. Through their essay stories, these students demonstrated a complex relationship to the Cultural Studies essay. On the one hand, it allowed them to explore topics, connections, and issues in both contemporary culture, and also in their own work. There was also the potential for these students to be challenged or confronted by the rigor, and structural requirements of the essay format, and the skills required to do this. The journey that the students went on with their work brought about outcomes where practice was developed, as in Story 1, and an appreciation of gaming culture was understood in academic terms. I have taken some of the findings into the Recommendations.

4. Conclusion: Debating, Remodelling, Transforming

The main findings are:

1. The decolonised Cultural Studies essay allows students to engage with decolonial theory and their written expression particularly as counterstorytelling. It enables them to move towards and depart from the essay format associated with Anglo-western rhetoric (the thesis driven essay). This engagement is often informal.
2. On Unit 5 students found the set reading the biggest challenge whilst also finding it applied to what they were doing in their practice courses. A more systematic approach to the teaching of set texts is required, maybe with further engagement to practice units.
3. The Four Block Method of essay writing used in Unit 5 teaching was viewed by students as effective overall and allows a way of linking decolonial knowledge with the discussion of practice.
4. Some students expressed an interest in writing about their own practice on Unit 5. While this already happens informally, this area could be developed more formally within the course. Counterstorytelling emerged as a compelling theme for minoritized students taking Unit 5, here they could explore issues of identity, or explore alternative sources.
5. More connection between practice and Cultural Studies units could very much support a decolonising agenda. Staff could benefit with more reflection and understanding of systemic biases that pervades both the way that essays are understood within the degree programmes and how minoritized students are positioned within this conversation.

Decolonising any established undergraduate programme of learning is a challenging endeavour. Development, however, and the consolidation of principles should be a part of any pedagogic project. Though this needs to happen, change should be incremental, considered, and ethically-delivered, rather than reactive and for the appearance of anti-racism.

In this research my aim has been to understand one of the contentious areas of an arts curriculum – the Cultural Studies essay and how it might play a role in a decolonial pedagogy. Writing and essays are a mode that have been used for reinforcing political domination as well as for overturning it. For those who work inside Cultural Studies, or in Arts and Humanities disciplines adjacent to the discipline, the critique of power structures including coloniality and Modernism has increasingly become almost a given. In designing and making disciplines with their roots in Modernist principles, attention to form and function, both essay writing and decolonial aesthetics can seem ill-fitting.

A key question in this research was ‘how do the experiences of minoritized students relate to the essay format?’ and the answer is that in certain ways the Cultural Studies discipline can offer a rigorous training when engaging with minoritized experience and the corresponding essay offers ways of writing about it. Counterstorytelling emerged as a compelling theme in the interviews and surveys.

After this research a revised pedagogy for decolonising the Cultural Studies essay can be understood as follows:

- A Cultural Studies essay allows students to engage in counterstorytelling (by inviting the use of sources that relate to their own experiences) whilst being able to **move towards and depart from the essay format associated with Anglo-western rhetoric (for example by incorporating creative or personal writing into the form)**.
- Research for the essay premised on engagement with set readings (from minoritized scholars and bodies of knowledge that critique power) and the **proposal** of the Four Blocks Method plays a role here.
- For teaching the unit, we can create an environment where students can **develop** their examples and primary materials (from their own practice or otherwise) and explore key concepts associated with decoloniality in a vital way that is relevant to them. This will advance **confidence in their own stories, and the analysis of the culture, history, and politics relevant to the creative arts**.

What I have outlined here broadly follows Mbembe’s (2019, pp. 77-78) outline of how an educational institution can decolonise. To quote him, a decolonial pedagogy of writing for undergraduates can offer students an appropriate and analytical mode of written expression:

... premised on the idea that social worlds are multiple, fractured, and contested. Thus the need to embrace multivocality and translation as a way to avoid perpetuating the knowledge/power asymmetries that currently fracture global humanity. In this model, knowledge of the empirical world is thought to be gained through the embrace of multiplicity, of a plurality of narratives from silenced voices and invisible places.

(Mbembe, 2019, p. 79)

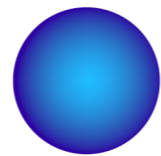
Of course, it goes without saying that this needs to be offered within resourcing levels and timetabling, but this is a perspective that can be taken to Cultural Studies teaching and beyond.

The Recommendations offer some precise and beneficial developments in this area.

A systemic approach to a decolonial pedagogy depends on coherence and alignment across units. How can first principles be broken down for undergraduate teaching? Can creative principles based in Modernism be 'delinked' from colonialism – and *where* on the course should this happen?

Decolonising practice is an ongoing process. It is part of a bigger vision about how UAL staff and courses develop and how they might adopt critique of colonial histories, traditions of violence, exploitation, and racialisation in creative disciplines. How does this play out in the education environment? A Cultural Studies discipline can advance a decolonial agenda and the academic skills fitting to a degree level education, but the experience can be enriched by a level of complementarity between units.

The recommendations that follow span from developments from Unit 5, and hopefully these can be used as a template and scaled for other units. The broader recommendations are aimed at UAL. Developing and enhancing decolonial pedagogy in practice units is a slower, innovative, and a more ongoing process that requires a clearly systematic approach that could be very ambitious across the institution.



5. Recommendations

1. Develop the writing pedagogy within Unit 5 seminars so that students can confidently use a critical practice form, and a more traditional essay (e.g. using the Four Blocks Method) to explore decolonial, anti-racist and social purpose approaches to culture and practice. To this end, I recommend that we:

2. Offer a ‘Critical Practice Assignment’ as a part of Unit 5 assessment and pilot it in the 2024/25 session (Appendix 1).

→ I recommend that the Reflective Writing assignment currently a part of the Unit 5 assessment be replaced by the Critical Practice Assignment. When asked about whether they wanted to write about their own practice the most given answer was ‘agree’, the next most frequent was ‘neutral’. In the spirit of experimentation, and the promotion of counterstorytelling, a Cultural Studies approach can combine with the analysis of creative practice.

3. Increase support for reading on Unit 5.

→ Confidence in writing is linked to reading agility. Develop a focused reading task to seminar teaching so all tutors explore the same passages in the set readings each week. Create Moodle content to develop reading techniques.

4. Institute a writing programme for Level 4 students that allows them to explore their own practice in relation to decolonial knowledge. This could be for other degree courses at CSM, and eventually for the university as a whole.

→ This liberal arts format ‘writing seminar’ could be embedded or separate depending on course, and could engage Cultural Studies approaches to Arts and Design, e.g. delinking of Modernism from practice.

5. Train staff in anti-racist or decolonial themes of counterstorytelling and how they link to the essay, and to the writing of creative practice.

→ This could be embedded into Academic Practice and Academic Enhancement. Starting at CSM, this training could be delivered in collaboration with the CSM Fashion, Textiles, Jewellery Cultural Studies team, drawing on their expertise in (doctoral qualifications, teaching, and research activity). Practice tutors should be given the space to explore their own relationship to essay writing and counterstorytelling.

6. Outline in a clear mission statement how UAL understands and delivers decolonial pedagogies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

→ This would complement the University’s Social Purpose and Climate Justice remits.

7. Nurture a postgraduate research culture that advances decolonial themes, practices, and specialisms.

→ A coherent practice pedagogy necessarily should draw inspiration and talent from a thriving postgraduate research culture where research ideas and processes are systematised into undergraduate teaching. This would be a long process built via small changes through grant bids and PhD research. Ideally each UAL degree programme should have an appropriate link to ‘decolonial research’ that is taking place at the university. What this means is that an increasing number of teaching staff could have access to postgraduate, doctoral training, or its equivalent, via UAL’s doctoral school. The goal would be the development of systematic decolonial pedagogy in practice units, across all course offers, that is clear and consistent to students.

8. Conduct further research to develop a video essay toolkit as a decolonial education support resource.

→ Members of the Academic Enhancement team have suggested ‘visual essays’ as a viable assessment method for second-year Cultural Studies units. The evidence of this study did not support this connection so specialised research into visual essays needs to be carried out. ‘Visual’ essays are distinct formats with their own scholarly and practice led lineages. Linking ‘visual essays’ to decolonial teaching adds an additional layer of complexity for undergraduate teaching.

Should UAL want to implement visual or digital forms, as a way to developing academic writing and research skills, then a systematic scoping and development project (maybe linked to PhD or grant-led research) would help define and integrate them into teaching, learning, and assessment. Opting for visual formats because they seem ‘easy’ or better aimed at ‘visual learners’ is problematic pedagogically and repeats colonial dynamics within the institution. A video essay toolkit and learning support resource for course and unit leaders would allow exploration and development for specific courses. Incorporating visual essays with decolonial pedagogies presents an interesting opportunity, but it needs to be developed carefully.

9. Conduct further research into English as an additional language and essay writing assessment.

→ Approaches to translinguistic teaching for Cultural Studies essays at undergraduate level could be an exciting development for the institution. Dedicated and systematic research, possibly in partnership with UAL’s Language Centre and EAP specialists, where essays could be an object of ethnographic study would open up possibilities for how English as an additional language is assessed and how the essay format can be taught.

10. Extend and enhance Decolonising Arts Education Fellowship Scheme, alongside further integration with Academic Practice, Teaching and Learning, and UAL Research in order to fully implement Recommendation 7.

6. Next Steps: Implementation and Evaluation

Short Term

2024/25

The next iteration of Unit 5 will incorporate supplementary writing and reading support via Moodle. Seminars will include set passages from set readings. These will cover basic summaries, reading techniques, anchor passages, key words etc.⁴

Mid Term

This will be evaluated at the end of the unit via a survey.

The Critical Practice Assignment will be piloted in the 2025 session outside of the Unit 5 assessment process. My proposal is to run a 3-4 hour focus group assignment:

- 1 hour group session introducing the assignment.
- 1-2 hours for students to formulate a plan with images and preliminary discussion. They will be encouraged to use material from their Unit 5 essay (which will have been returned to them by this point in the year).
- 1 hour recorded feedback/focus group with other participants where students can discuss their impressions of the assignment. Transcripts will be used to develop the format with course team.

These sessions would be run in accordance with UAL ethics practices, and it will require funding for payment via Arts Temps. I would also like to work with a new way of sampling students in order to move away from a purely self-selection mode. This can be discussed with the ethics team.

In the light of Recommendation 5, I and the Cultural Studies team would also like to run these sessions for staff members, as a way of sharing practice and expertise.

Long Term

Integrate the new option into the revalidated Unit 5 2025/6 and explore evaluation strategies that cover both qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to the unit.

Explore Learning Outcomes and Marking Criteria with the course team and Quality Assurance as findings about the new option emerge.

Over the course of the secondment, I gathered research and data that has not been used in this report. While any interview data cannot be used for different purposes, it can set the tone for new studies.

- See Recommendations 8 and 9.
- Run a study into reading practices for students taking the Cultural Studies units.
- Run a cross-discipline study into CSM tutors' experiences of essay writing as a part of a decolonial agenda.

Ultimately the findings could be used to understand what 'decolonising the essay' might mean across other UAL degree course offers. What this research advances is that the features of 'the essay' are in fact too broad to be generalised as being colonial – it is the teaching structures, and the institutional culture that reinforces colonial dynamics. The essay can be adapted to include counterstorytelling elements while retaining university level reading, analysis, and writing skills.



⁴ Unit 5 lectures for this academic year were moved online at the beginning of the autumn term at very short notice. There was a great deal of disruption while both staff and students tried to have this decision reversed. We eventually returned to in person lectures on Week 6. The planned short-term changes for the unit were postponed for implementation next year.

Afterword: On Positionality

As a part of my application for this scheme, I was asked to discuss my positionality as researcher. I have brought some of the ideas I wrote about here as a way of framing this report. I am a Cultural Historian with an undergraduate and postgraduate training in English Literature and Language. I work on embodiment, social and political models of fashion, and the construction of gender, queerness, and race. My current work engages with histories and enslavement and colonialism in nineteenth-century British constructions of the fashioned male body and 'whiteness'. For that reason, although I would not use the word myself, both my teaching and research practice could be described as 'decolonial'. I am British Sri Lankan, born in London. My parents came to the UK from a country that had 'decolonised' in 1949, so the meaning of this word is in my experience highly contested. I attended state schools in London and Oxfordshire. My educational route was largely academic and traditional in that I left school with four A Levels and went to university to study for a degree in English Literature and Language. My university career started in the months following the issue of the fatwa against author Salman Rushdie, an event which to me informed the way I was spoken to, both at university and within the discipline of Literary Studies. From my experience of higher education, as student and as an educator, I realise that academic institutions are often problematic, and even psychologically violent spaces for minoritized staff and students alike. I come to this project not as a social scientist, but as a pedagogic scholar with a Cultural Studies approach and perspectives. The way I describe my work is necessarily in permanent flux: to be a 'historian of whiteness', or even simply 'a cultural historian' is to engage with histories of imperialism and violence. No other word is necessary. My concern with the word 'decolonial' is that, after the murder of George Floyd, it has become fashionable and institutional (as someone who works on fashion culture, the irony is not lost on me). It is also being used a metaphorical way in the management of universities that obscures literal violence and complicity. At the time of writing, the conflict and genocide in Gaza, and the reluctance of many universities to condemn colonial expansion, renders what was fashionable predictably obsolete.

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Appendix 1: Unit 5

Date	Online Lectures
	<p>A pre-recorded lecture will be released online on Mondays at 12:00 noon. You must watch this and read the set reading before your seminar.</p> <p>In-Person Seminars - Tuesday Afternoons</p> <p>Groups 1-5 (1-2pm) Groups 6-10 (2.15-3.15pm) Groups 11-15 (3.30-4.30pm)</p>
Week 1 27 Sept	<p>Unit Introduction & Briefing (Dr Michelle Jones)</p> <p>Lecture 1 - Post-modernism: The Culture of Late Capitalism (Dr Michelle Jones)</p> <p>Seminar Reading - Morgado, M. (1996) 'Coming to Terms with Postmodern: Theories and Concepts of Contemporary Culture and Their Implications for Apparel Scholars,' <i>Clothing and Textile Research Journal</i>, 14 (1)</p> <p>Seminar Task - Reflective Writing Briefing</p>
Week 2 04 Oct	<p>Lecture 2 - Post-Industrial Culture Industries, Creative Labour and Craft Consumption (Dr Nathaniel Weiner)</p> <p>Seminar 2 Reading - 'Clubs to companies: Notes on the decline of political culture in speeded up creative worlds' in McRobbie, A. (2015) <i>Be creative: Making a living in the new culture industries</i>. Chicester: Polity Press, pp.17-32</p>
Week 3 11 Oct	<p>Lecture 3 - The Unsustainable Fashion System in the Capitalocene (Dr Michelle Jones)</p> <p>Seminar 3 Reading - Niessen, S. (2020) 'Fashion, its Sacrifice Zone and Sustainability', <i>Fashion Theory</i>, 24:6 pp. 859 - 877</p>

Week 4 18 Oct	<p>Lecture 4 – Ornamental Being: Post-colonialism, Orientalism & Material Culture (Christin Yu)</p> <p>Seminar 4 Reading - Cheang, S. (2013) 'To the ends of the earth: Fashion and ethnicity in the Vogue fashion shoot', in D. Barlett, S. Cole, and A. Rocamora (eds) <i>Fashion Media Past and Present</i>. London: Bloomsbury</p> <p>Formative Assessment – Reflective Writing: to be Submitted by 4pm via Moodle for Formative Assessment</p>
Week 5 25 Oct	<p>Lecture 5 - Provocative Art (Dr Nicola McCartney)</p> <p>Seminar 5 Reading - McCartney, Nicola (2022), 'In light of #MeToo: reconsidering the art/artist relationship for better futures' in <i>Visual Studies</i></p>
Week 6 01 Nov	<p>Lecture 6 – African Diasporic Hybridity and Textiles (Krys Osei)</p> <p>Seminar 6 Reading - Bruggeman, D. (2017) 'Visco: Made in Holland, Adorned in West Africa, (Re)Appropriated as Dutch Design', <i>Fashion, Style & Popular Culture</i>, Volume 4, Number 2, pp. 197-214</p>
Week 7 08 Nov	<p>Lecture 7 - Masculinities: Histories, Practices & Performance (Dr June Rowe)</p> <p>Seminar 7 Reading - McCauley Bowstead, J. (2015). 'Hedi Slimane and the Reinvention of Menswear', <i>Critical Studies in Men's Fashion</i>, 2, (1), pp. 23-42</p> <p>Formative Feedback delivered on Moodle for your Reflective Writing</p>
Week 8 15 Nov	<p>Lecture 8 - Queering Cultures (Dr Nicola McCartney)</p> <p>Lecture 8b - Essay Plan Briefing (Dr Michelle Jones)</p> <p>Seminar 8 Reading - Sullivan, N. (2003) 'Queering Popular Culture' in <i>A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory</i>. New York: New York University Press. pp. 189-206</p> <p>Seminar 8 Film Viewing - Jenny Livingston (1990), <i>Paris is Burning</i> (BBC), in the library and on Netflix and YouTube.</p> <p>Seminar Task – Essay Planning</p>

Week 9 22 Nov	<p>Lecture 9 - Digital Culture: Prosumers and Surveillance Capitalism (Dr Nathaniel Weiner)</p> <p>Lecture 9b - 'Library Resources for Cultural Studies' (Antonis Sideras)</p> <p>Seminar 9 Reading - Perthuis, K. de and Findlay, R. (2019) 'How Fashion Travels: The Fashionable Ideal in the Age of Instagram', <i>Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture</i>, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 219–242</p>
Week 10 29 Nov	<p>Lecture Summary: Decolonialising the Culture of the Capitalocene & Preparing your Summative Submission (Dr Michelle Jones)</p> <p>Essay Tutorials Group tutorials based on essay question (with regular tutor)</p> <p>Question 1. (Activism) 1 - 1:45pm Question 2. (Identity) 1 - 2:45pm Question 3. (Labour) 3 - 3:45pm</p>
Week 11 06 Dec	<p>Final Submission: Tuesday 6th December 2022 Submit to Turnitin via Moodle by 4pm GM Reflective Writing (500 – 800 words) Essay Plan Essay (2000 – 2300 words)</p> <p>NOTE: Work submitted within 24 hours of the deadline, will incur a penalty of one Increment. Work submitted more than 24 hours after the deadline, without valid Extenuating Circumstances, will be considered as a non-submission.</p>

Formative Assessment: REFLECTIVE WRITING (500-800 words)

For the formative assessment component, you will be required to submit your **500 – 800** word piece of **reflective writing** via Moodle.

_____ This activity will be set for you in class in **Week 1** on **27 Sept 2022**.

_____ You will submit a rough version via Moodle in **Week 4** on **18 Oct 2022** for your seminar tutor to provide formative feedback.

_____ Feedback on this piece of work will be published to the assessment feedback system in **Week 7** on **08 Nov 2021**.

You will not receive a grade but you will receive feedback for you to act on when you resubmit the **reflective writing** as part of your summative assessment.

Assessment Brief: REFLECTIVE WRITING

Write a **500 - 800 word** piece of reflective writing based on the question

Reflective Writing Question
<p>Do aspects of post-modernism continue to influence creative practice?</p> <p>You must analyse the Morgado Seminar Reading from Week 1 ('Coming to Terms with Postmodern Theories and Concepts of Contemporary Culture and Their Implications for Apparel Scholars'). Then apply it to a specific example of your choice that allows you to answer the question. Your example can be from your own work or any aspect of visual and material culture (e.g. film, photography, art, fashion, literature, design or architecture).</p>

For the Reflective Writing assignment, you must think about the Morgado reading's significance and what the author is trying to do with the article. This is about more than whether you like the reading. The idea is that you critically analyse the reading and then apply it to the visual example of your choice.

Assessment Brief: REFLECTIVE WRITING

You are required to write an essay of 2000 - 2300 words in length. This must answer ONE of the following questions:

Question 1
<p>How can creative practice operate as a form of activism in response to social, ecological or cultural injustices? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.</p>
Question 2
<p>How do creative practitioners use visual and/or material culture to produce, perform and/or subvert identity? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.</p>
Question 3
<p>What is 'immaterial labour' and how is it exploited by both the creative industries and social media platforms? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.</p>

Summative Assessment: The 3 Assessment Components

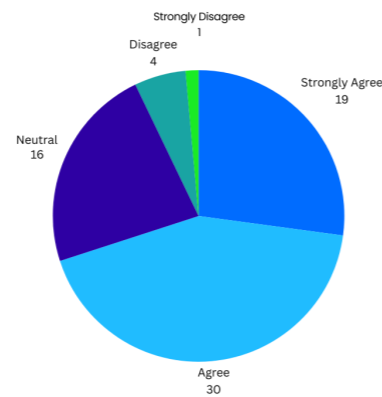
To evidence your achievement of the learning outcomes of this unit, you are expected to submit:

1. REFLECTIVE WRITING (500 - 800 words) you will respond to the formative feedback and resubmit an updated version of the Reflective Writing submitted for formative assessment
2. ESSAY PLAN which follows the set brief
3. ESSAY (2000 - 2300 words), which answers one of the set questions

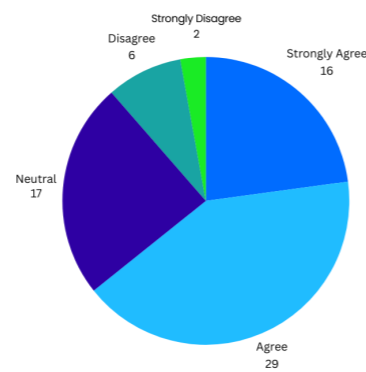
NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT SUBMIT ALL 3 COMPONENTS THIS WILL COUNT AS A 'NON-SUBMISSION' AND YOU WILL FAIL THE UNIT.

Appendix 2: Survey Data

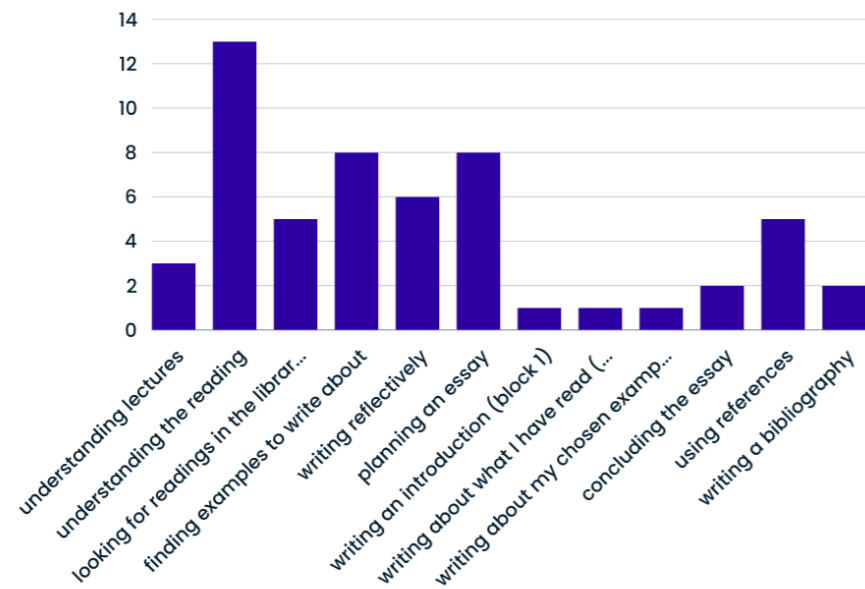
1. The course was broad and covered a range of ideas and approaches



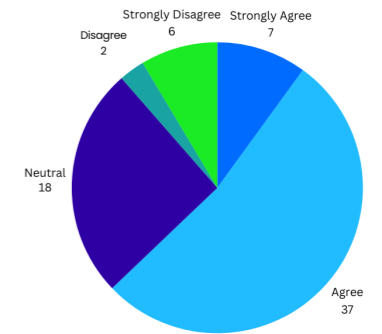
2. Unit 5 was a valuable part of my degree course



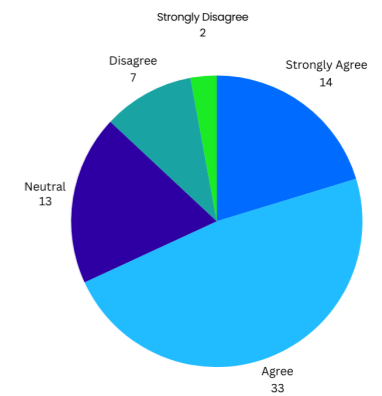
3. The most challenging part of the unit was



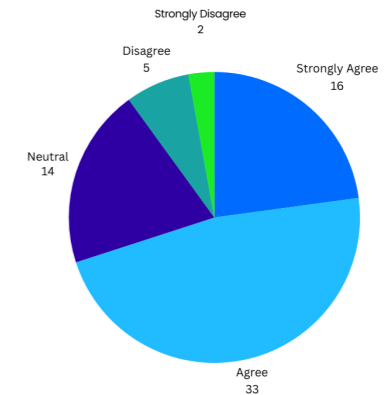
4. I was able to understand the readings by the end of the unit



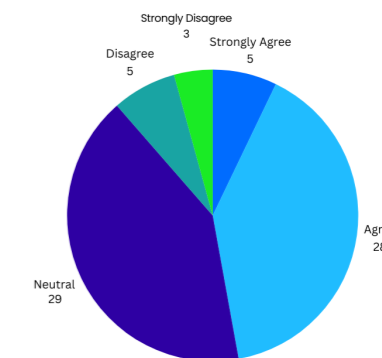
5. I developed my research skills on Unit 5



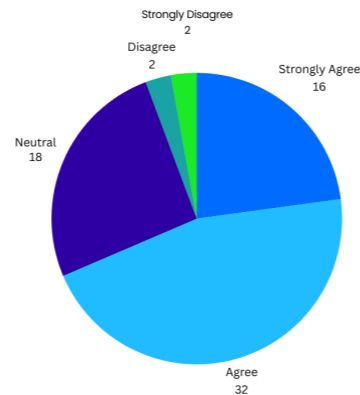
6. Unit 5 offered me some knowledge about history of colonialism in relation to fashion, textiles, or jewellery



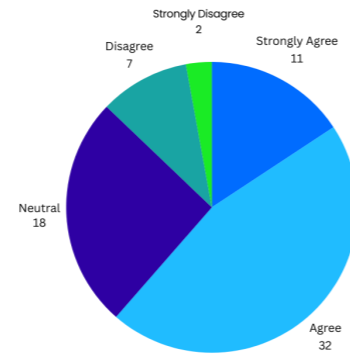
7. In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about sustainability



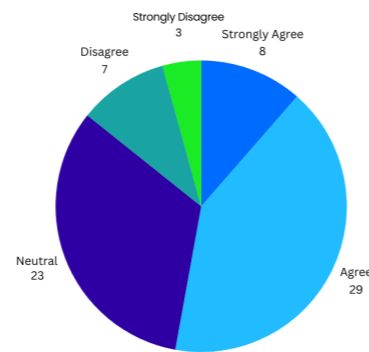
8. In Unit 5 I was able to think and/or write about aspects of gender and sexuality in culture and artistic practice



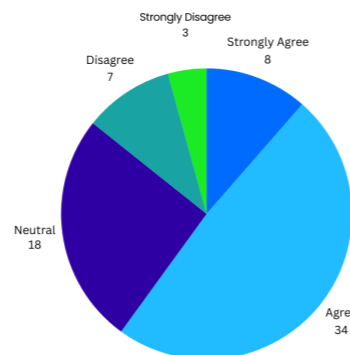
9. I feel I developed my writing skills in this unit (using the 4 blocks method for example)



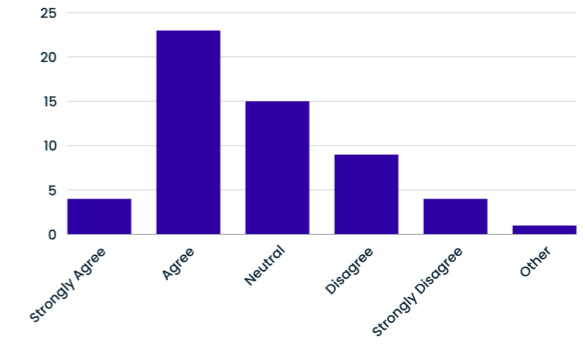
10. After doing Unit 5 I know how to develop an argument in writing



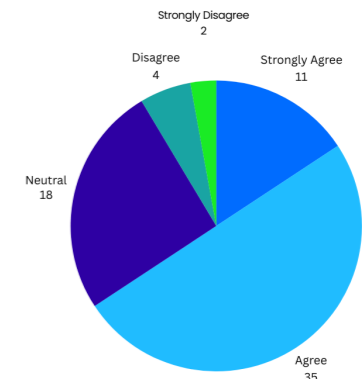
11. After completing Unit 5 I think I know how to write analytically about an aspect of culture or artistic practice



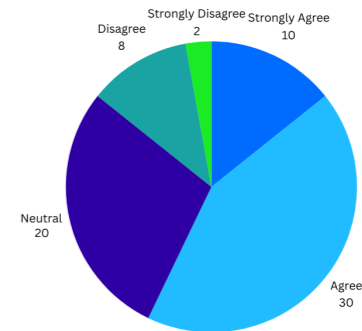
12. For my final essay in Unit 5, I wanted to write about my own practice



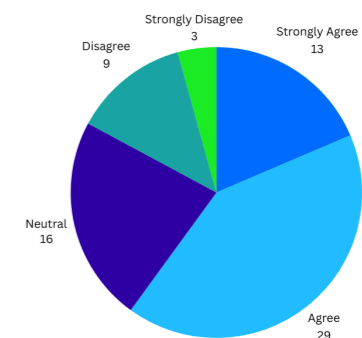
13. After completing the assignments for Unit 5, I am more confident in using citations or references



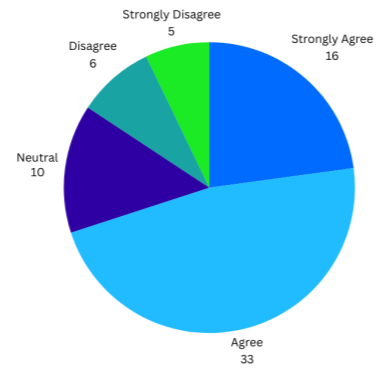
14. In seminars and out of class I was able to discuss ideas further from this unit with other students



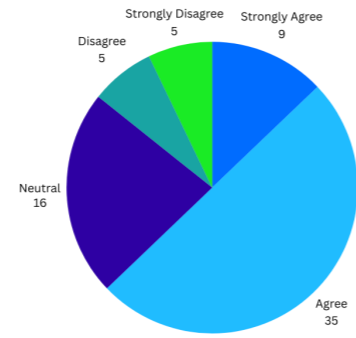
15. I was satisfied with my final grade for Unit 5



16. I would recommend Unit 5 to first year students



17. Unit 5 made me engage with my course/ practice in a positive way



Appendix 3: Sample Brief with Alternative Assessment

Summative Assessment: The Three Assessment Component

To evidence your achievement of the learning outcomes of this unit, you are expected to submit:

1. REFLECTIVE Writing (500 - 800 words)

You will respond to the formative feedback and resubmit an updated version of the Reflective Writing submitted for formative assessment.

2. ESSAY PLAN, which follows the set brief

3. ESSAY (2000 - 2300 words)

Option 1 or 2 which answers one of the set questions

Please read carefully as there are options for the kind of summative essay you can choose to write.

NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT SUBMIT ALL 3 COMPONENTS THIS WILL COUNT AS A 'NON-SUBMISSION' AND YOU WILL FAIL THE UNIT.

Assessment Brief: REFLECTIVE WRITING

You will respond to the formative feedback and resubmit an updated version of the Reflective Writing submitted for formative assessment. See the formative assessment brief for details.

Assessment Brief: ESSAY PLAN (for both Options 1 or 2)

For your final essay for either option you will be asked to write an essay plan to help you structure your ideas. See the guidelines for each option to help you.

You will be able to workshop this in seminar with your peers in Week 8.

Your seminar tutor will provide you with guidance.

Choose a question and write a plan which you will hand in with your essay.

Your plan should be between 500 - 800 words in length, and it should include the following:

- An outline of the essay structure
- What theoretical/critical sources will you use and what quotations you will incorporate.
- A description of your critical framework and key ideas.
- What citations you will use
- What primary texts you will analyse. Will you use images/screengrabs etc?
- How the analysis will link to the critical sources and to your examples (if you choose Option 2 these will be images of your own practice).
- Write an introductory paragraph that says what the argument is and where the essay will go (like a menu or signpost: 'In this essay I will argue or 'this essay will argue' etc).
- Answer the essay question directly here. This paragraph would go at the beginning of the essay.
- What you will put in the conclusion.
- Add some notes about what changes you made after the workshop took place. How did your ideas change after discussion?

Assessment Brief: ESSAY

You are required to write an essay of 2000 - 2300 words in length.

This must answer ONE of the following questions

Question 1

How can creative practice operate as a form of activism in response to social, ecological or cultural injustices? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.

Question 2

How do creative practitioners use visual and/or material culture to produce, perform and/or subvert identity? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.

Question 3

What is 'immaterial labour' and how is it exploited by both the creative industries and social media platforms? Discuss one or two examples and apply relevant theories in your response.

Each of these questions relates to themes from a number of lectures in Unit 5. You must discuss the content from at least two lectures and cite at least two of the seminar readings in your essay (note: a reading from the reading list will be considered an acceptable substitute for a seminar reading).

There are options for the kind of summative essay that you can submit.

OPTION 1: Essay

This is an academic essay with an introduction where you have a thesis statement and signposting sentences, saying what you will look at. It will analyse one or two examples from culture (not made by you), using ideas from the secondary reading you have done on the course. It can follow the 4 blocks method that we have covered in Units 4 and 5. There will be a special workshop session for this option.

Essay/Assignment Checklist (Assessment Requirements)

You must ensure that your essay

- Answers one of the above questions.
- Meets the word count of 2000 - 2300 words. Note, the word count applies to everything from the start of the introduction to the end of the conclusion, but you SHOULD NOT count the essay question, bibliography, illustration captions or list of illustrations.
- States your name, student number, course/pathway, seminar tutor name and word count clearly on the cover page.
- Starts with the question you are answering written out in full (this is not included in the word count for your essay).
- Is double-line spaced with generous margins, and simply and clearly presented. Pages should be numbered.
- Includes a bibliography formatted in Harvard style indicating the sources you have used in your research: see the Cite Them Right website (<https://citethemrighonline.com>).
- Where relevant include images/illustrations and captions these illustrations with their sources and dates stated clearly. Make sure you discuss the images as part of your argument.
- Addresses topics and themes from Unit 5.
- Cites two of the seminar readings (or cites alternative readings from the reading list provided instead).
- Cites two of the Unit 5 lectures.
- Cites academic books or journal articles accessed through the library (aim for at least four).

OPTION 2: Critical Practice Assignment

This is a more practice led option that combines academic writing skills with the analysis of your own creative work. It will answer one of the above questions where you will analyse one or two examples of your own work, using ideas from the secondary reading you will have presented as annotations. It will include an opening where you say how your own practice engages with the question you have chosen. and signposting sentences saying what you will look at. It can roughly follow the 4 blocks method that we have covered in Units 4 and 5 but you can let the images lead the discussion. Some guidelines are below. There will be a special workshop session for this option.

You must ensure that your critical practice assignment

- Answers one of the above questions

Your annotated visual essay should include all of the following (how you present your work is up to you, but here is a suggested order broken down into separate sections):

1. an opening (this can simply set out the overall answer to the question you have chosen and the practice you will discuss);
2. a summary and discussion of two seminar readings (more detail will follow in the briefing and workshop session);
3. a summary and discussion of four books/journal articles accessed through the library;
4. a summary and discussion of two Unit 5 lecture;
5. an analysis of **four** images of your own practice/work (in progress or finished). The discussion of your own work should help answer the question you have chosen, and it should link your practice with the reading and lectures you have summarised;
6. an analysis of 1-2 found images (not ones you have made eg. film stills/screen grabs/campaigns etc). These could be a part of your research used in the development of your work;
7. a conclusion: this can be a short summary and any final ideas you have.

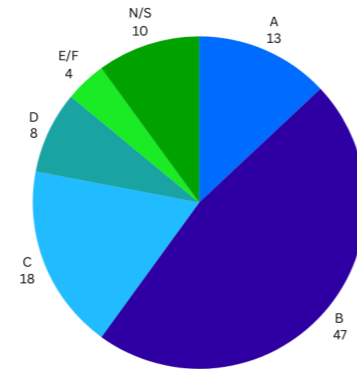
Assignment Checklist (Assessment Requirements)

Please check that this assignment:

- Meets the word count of 2000 - 2300 words. Note, the word count applies to everything from the start of the introduction to the end of the conclusion but you SHOULD NOT count the essay question, bibliography, illustration captions or list of illustrations.
- States your name, student number, course/pathway, seminar tutor name and word count clearly on the cover page.
- Starts with the question you are answering, written out in full (this is not included in the word count for your essay).
- Is double-line spaced with generous margins, and simply and clearly presented. Pages should be numbered, and images clearly labelled (see 5 above).
- Includes a bibliography formatted in Harvard style indicating the sources you have used in your research: see the Cite Them Right website (<https://citethemrighonline.com>).
- This must be submitted with your Reflective Piece, and the plan for this annotated visual essay.

Appendix 4: Unit 5 Grades 2022-23

347 Students	
46 in the A with 10 in A+.	13%
162 in B	47%
57 in C	18%
24 in D	8%
10 students in the E & F grades. (3 Academic Misconducts)	4%
32 Non-Submissions / Partial Submissions	10%



All Pathways: 60% A&B, 26% C&D, 4% Fail, 10% NS

Jewellery and Textiles (111 students): 70% A&B, 22% C&D, 0% Fail, 8% NS

- Jewellery (45 Students); 74% A&B, 17% C&D, 0% Fail, 9% NS
- Textiles (66 Students); 68% A&B, 25% C&D, 0% Fail, 8% NS

Fashion Pathways (140 students): 55% A&B, 32% C&D, 6% Fail, 7% NS

- Knit (20 students): 65%, 20%, 5%, 10%
- Print (23 Students): 70%, 17%, 4%, 9%
- Menswear (23 Students): **56%**, 19%, 4%, 9%
- FDwM (26 Students): **57%**, 23%, 12%, 8%
- Womenswear (48 students): **55%**, 48%, 4%, 11%

Fashion Communication (88 students); 75% A&B, 15% C&D, 2% Fail, 8% NS

- FHT: (18 Students) 83%, 11% C, 0% D&F, 6% NS
- Journalism (23 Students) 79%, 4%, 0%, 0%, **17%**
- FCP (47students) 70%, 21%, 4%, 4%

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

Students

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research. I will now turn on recording and transcription.

I would like to firstly thank you for taking the time to answer the questions I have prepared for you. By answering them you will be helping staff and students in the future. This is not a tutorial or anything formal. I would like you to answer as honestly as you can.

In the final research outputs, your answers will be anonymized and any identifying details that you say will be generalised.

Some questions will be general, others specific. When you have finished, you will shortly receive a time sheet from Arts Temps that you will need to fill in and return to them. Once you have done this, you will be paid for the time you spent (rounded up to an hour).

General Questions

- What is the most memorable moment of your course so far?
- What have you learned that has stuck with you?
- What is the most demanding part of your course and why?
- Let's talk about 'belonging'. What does that word mean to you in terms of Cultural Studies teaching/academic writing etc?
- What is the best skill your degree has given you so far? How did you get that skill?
- Where on your course have you learned about how ideas about 'race', gender, or sustainability (you can come up with more) might link to your learning and practice? Can you talk about your experiences here?

Cultural Studies Essays

- What skills have Cultural Studies given you?
- What did you think about the way the Cultural Studies assignments were graded? How did it compare with other parts of your course?
- What ideas from Cultural Studies have stayed with you? Can you remember? If you can't that's fine.

- What have you learned about essay writing? Can you talk me through your process of writing essays?
- How much of yourself do you put into your essays? (Your interests, ideas, interests).
- I want to show you a question from last year. How would you do it?
- I want to show you a sample question. How would you do it?
- In what ways can artistic, bodily or design practices subvert hierarchies? Make a 5-minute film that answers this question. Use one or two examples in your response.
- I want to show you a sample question. How would you do it? In what ways can artistic, bodily or design practices subvert hierarchies? Write a series of social media posts (2000 - 2300 words)/film that answers this question. Use one or two examples in your response.

