



Winter 2024

## Christopher Newfield: What are universities for?

Public disappointment with universities has reached epidemic proportions, and a common complaint is that they do a poor job of preparing students to find a job, especially given how much they cost. Christopher Newfield, today's leading scholar of Critical University Studies, will address this in his talk "Jobs and Universities: A Tale of Two Futures" on Thursday, March 7, 2024 at 4 p.m. in the Knight Library Browsing Room as the 2023–24 Cressman Lecturer.

Newfield agrees with the critics that universities are ineffective as job training programs—this is not what universities are meant to do. While a BA clearly helps graduates find good employment, the focus on jobs has perversely hurt the educational core that allows this—intensive learning of complex knowledge in a range of situations and fields. Newfield contends that business and government should be held responsible for employment, and universities held responsible for learning. The

partnership between society and higher education needs a radical overhaul, and Newfield suggests why universities need to focus on solving the world's enormously difficult problems, and how they can best educate people to do this.

[Christopher Newfield](#) is Director of Research at the Independent Social Research Foundation in London. Formerly, he was Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Critical University Studies brings deep analytical reflection to the conditions of higher education, to identify root causes and solutions, to feed academic experience into public policy, and to articulate sustainable forms of universities in all

their international diversity.

A central issue in Newfield's research in this field is the knowledge crisis in the

United States (and elsewhere), in which we seem not to know enough to solve our most dangerous problems, yet struggle to apply what we do know.

Newfield has recently published two books on the metrics of higher education: *Metrics That Matter: Counting What's Really*

*Important to College Students* (2023) and *The Limits of the Numerical: The Abuses and Uses of Quantification* (2022).

This lecture is free and open to the public and will be livestreamed: [youtube.com/@ISMediaServicesUO](https://youtube.com/@ISMediaServicesUO). Please register to attend in person: [ohc.uoregon.edu](https://ohc.uoregon.edu)



## Panel of UO scholars considers the implications of AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a field which combines computer science and robust datasets to enable problem solving. The sub-fields of machine learning and deep learning are frequently mentioned in conjunction with AI. These disciplines are comprised of AI algorithms that seek to create systems which make predictions or classifications based on input data.

Over the years, AI has gone through many cycles of hype, but the advent and rapid proliferation of Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence that can produce images and text, like ChatGPT) seems to mark a turning point. The applications for this technology are growing every day, and the possibilities are continually revealed. But as the hype around the use of AI takes off, conversations around ethics become critically important.

AI-generated text, images, and videos can be used to mislead and skew the truth. Algorithms are generally written by hu-

man beings. When writing code, the beliefs, values, and assumptions of that human are baked into the way the code is written and structured. AI picks up and replicates those biases.

How does this powerful technology impact truth, trust and democracy; safety and security; and privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties?

The Oregon Humanities Center will present a panel "AI and the Humanities" on Friday, March 1, 2024 at 3 p.m. in the Knight Library Browsing Room. Three UO humanities scholars with extensive expertise in the philosophy of AI, computation, digital humanities, information politics, and data ethics will engage, through perspectives rooted in the humanities, the challenges that AI

and other data-driven technologies increasingly present today.

The panel features Ramón Alvarado, assistant professor of Philosophy and Data Science Initiative, and the Data Ethics coordinator; Mattie Burkert, associate professor of English, director of the Minor in Digital Humanities, the interim director of the New Media and Culture Certificate, and the Principal Investigator and Project Director for the [London Stage Database](#); and Colin Koopman, professor of Philosophy, author of *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person* (2019), and the project lead of the [Our Data, Our Selves](#) web project.

This event will be livestreamed: [youtube.com/@ISMediaServiceUO](https://youtube.com/@ISMediaServiceUO). Please register for in-person attendance: [ohc.uoregon.edu](https://ohc.uoregon.edu)



# Three speakers offer insights about “Policing Justice”

In November 2022, the city of Portland reached a \$250,000 settlement in a federal lawsuit over its police bureau’s use of tear gas and other crowd control devices during the racial justice protests that rocked its streets in 2020. The extended protests, in reaction to the murder of George Floyd, lasted longer in Portland than in any other city in America. Protesters were met with over 6,000 instances of police use of force.

These incidents served as a point of departure for Nina Amstutz, associate professor of the History of Art and Architecture, to explore Portland’s history of policing in relation to racial, environmental, spatial, and juvenile justice in her curated exhibit “Policing Justice” at the [Portland Institute of Contemporary Art](#), February 23–May 12, 2024.

The Policing Justice exhibit examines police violence in Portland and its relationship to longer local and national histories of oppression. Local artists and activist groups will reflect on these situated histories through a series of commissioned installations, including work by Don’t Shoot Portland, Michael Bernard Stevenson in collaboration with Blue, and Cleo and Kayin Davis in collaboration with Robert Clarke and Kim Moreland. The exhibition will also showcase a recent investigation by the British research and arts organization, Forensic Architecture, into the Portland Police Bureau’s use of tear gas against protesters in 2020 and its environmental and health impacts.

Related to the exhibit and her winter term class ARH 407/507 Making the Exhibition: Policing Justice, Amstutz has organized a mini lecture series featuring three nationally and internationally recognized artists: Alfredo Jaar, Sandy Rodriguez, and Robert Trafford. These lectures will flank the exhibition opening on February 23,



*A scene from protests in Portland in 2020.*

which also includes a panel discussion with visiting and local artists in Portland, moderated by local journalist and activist Mac Smiff. The guest speakers will also meet with Amstutz’s students in class.

On Thursday, February 15, 2024 Sandy Rodriguez, whose work focuses on ongoing cycles of violence on communities of color in the Los Angeles area and along the southwest US-Mexico border, will give a talk titled “Codex Rodriguez-Mondragón.”

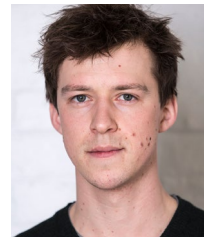
Alfredo Jaar, a Chilean-born artist who creates installation art that responds to socio-political issues and war, will give his talk “Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness” on Wednesday, February 21.

Robert Trafford is a research coordinator with Forensic

Architecture. His investigative work has spanned from police violence against U.S. protesters to the extrajudicial killing of civilians by Cameroon’s special forces. He will speak on “Forensic Architecture: Art and Activism against State Violence” on Monday, February 26.

The “Policing Justice Lecture Series,” presented by the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, is cosponsored in part by the Oregon Humanities Center’s Endowment for Public Outreach in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities; The Mark Spontenburgh Endowment; The Sally Claire Haseltine Endowed Fund in Art History; and the Davis Family Art Endowment.

All lectures will take place at 4 p.m. in 115 Lawrence Hall and will be livestreamed and archived on YouTube: [youtube.com/ISMediaServicesUO](https://youtube.com/ISMediaServicesUO). For information, contact [namstutz@uoregon.edu](mailto:namstutz@uoregon.edu)



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## Series explores Italian fascist and neo-fascist propaganda

World War I dramatized the power and triumphs of propaganda. Both fascism and communism in the postwar years were the centers of intense revolutionary propaganda. After capturing office, both fascists and communists sought to extend their power beyond their own national borders through the use of propaganda.

The Italian word “propaganda” originally referred to advertisements for consumer products, not political misinformation. But with the rise of fascism, propaganda assumed its modern definition: the marketing of politics. Throughout Benito Mussolini’s dictatorship (1922–

1945), advertising shaped autocracy, and vice-versa. We often think of fascist propaganda in two dimensions, picturing posters and newsreels. But because the regime created powerful incentives for private businesses to support state dictates, propaganda included architecture, fashion, and even children’s toys. Today, the far-right deploys

new kinds of propaganda, using generative AI and deep fakes, to attract new followers. From fascism to neo-fascism, the most powerful forms of propaganda surround voters with alternate realities.

Diana Garvin, assistant professor of

Italian and Mediterranean Studies, and author of *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women’s Food Work* (2022), has organized a speaker series “Propaganda: Understanding How Fascism and Neo-Fascism Make their Pitch.” The series will feature four scholars who have studied Italian fascist and neo-fascist propaganda to understand how ideas are packaged, and how to see through to the truth.

Claudio Fogu, French and Italian Studies, UC-Santa Barbara, will discuss the implicit premises of the term propaganda when used in historical writing and of its methodological pitfalls, seen through the lens of the research he has conducted on Italian fascism over the past three decades.

Stephanie Malia Hom, French and Italian Studies, UC-Santa Barbara, will examine the case of Leonarda Cianciulli, Italy’s notorious female serial killer, who, in 1939 and 1940, murdered three women with an axe and dismembered their bodies, after which she dissolved their body parts with lye and rendered them into bars of soap. Cianciulli believed she was being a good fascist mother, a mother who was making a human

sacrifice in order to protect her son who had been fighting for Italy in WWII.

Brian Griffith, History, California State University-Fresno, will discuss his digital archive of neo-fascist propaganda materials he gathered from the walls, billboards, and alleyways of Rome’s various neo-fascist neighborhoods while he was a Fulbright Scholar in Rome in 2018–19.

Marla Stone, History, Occidental College, will discuss how the Nazi and Fascist dictatorships mobilized culture to forge Axis mutuality and shared purpose during WWII. Travelling exhibitions, such as the Exhibition of National Socialism of 1939 and Italy’s First Exhibition of Italian Soldier Artists of 1942 and 1943, were acts of cultural exchange, soft diplomacy, and propaganda.

For details about these talks see the accompanying calendar. Sponsored by the Department of Romance Languages’s Italian Sector, the series is cosponsored by the OHC’s Endowment for Public Outreach in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities. For more information, contact [dgarvin@uoregon.edu](mailto:dgarvin@uoregon.edu)



Poster from the “Neo-Fascism in Post-war Italy” digital archive



## Film documents restoration of tribal land

The OHC’s Endowment for Public Outreach in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities is coposorsing a screening of *LAND/TRUST* (2022, 20 min.) on Thursday, January 25, 2024 at 2 p.m. at the Museum of Natural and Cultural History. The film explores interrelationships of people, plants, land, and labor as it follows Amah Mutsun Tribal Band members’ work to restore a coastal prairie on California’s Central Coast. The film is drawn from a body of material collected for the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Tribal Band archives starting in the summer of 2022. It follows the restoration work in the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve at Año Nuevo State Park, which encompasses the former site of Mitente, a village of the Awaswas-speaking Quiroste people.

The screening will be followed by a discussion with Alexii Sigona (Amah Mutsun Tribal Band), PhD candidate in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at UC-Berkeley and Ruth Anne Buetler, a graduate student at UC-Santa Cruz who co-created the documentary with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band as part of her Master of Fine Arts degree.



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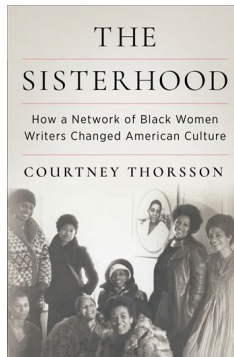
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## OHC's Wine Chat offers a book talk about *The Sisterhood*

One Sunday afternoon in February 1977, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, and several other Black women writers met at June Jordan's Brooklyn apartment to eat gumbo, drink champagne, and talk about their work. Calling themselves "The Sisterhood," the group—which also came to include Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Margo Jefferson, and others—would get together once a month over the next two years, creating a vital space for Black women to discuss literature and liberation.

Courtney Thorsson's *The Sisterhood: How a Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2023) tells the story of how this remarkable community transformed American writing and cultural institutions. Thorsson will give a book talk for OHC's Wine Chat series on Thursday, January 25, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. at Capitello Wines, 540 Charnelton St. Faith Barter, assistant professor of English, will follow up as discussant.

Drawing on original interviews with Sisterhood members as well as correspondence, meeting minutes, and readings of their works, Thorsson explores the group's everyday collaboration and profound legacy. The Sisterhood advocated for Black women writers at trade publishers and magazines such as Random House, *Ms.*, and *Essence*, and eventually in academic departments as well—often in the face of sexist, racist, and homophobic backlash. Thorsson traces the personal, professional, and



political ties that brought the group together as well as the reasons for its dissolution. She considers the popular and critical success of Sisterhood members in the 1980s, the uneasy absorption of Black feminism into the academy, and how younger writers built on the foundations the group laid. Highlighting the organizing, networking, and community building that nurtured Black women's writing, this book demonstrates that The Sisterhood offers an enduring model for Black feminist collaboration.

Courtney Thorsson is an associate professor of English at the UO, where she teaches, studies, and writes about African American literature from its beginnings to the present using Black feminist methods. Her first book was *Women's Work: Nationalism and Contemporary African American Women's Novels* (University of Virginia Press, 2013) and her writing has appeared in the volume *Foodscapes: Food, Space, and Place in a Global Society*. She is the recipient of a Public Scholars Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of the research and writing of *The Sisterhood*.

During the OHC Wine Chat on January 25th, books will be available for sale by [J.Michaels Books](http://J.MichaelsBooks.com). Beverages are available for purchase and there is a food cart on the premises of [Capitello Wines](http://CapitelloWines.com). There is ample parking at Banner Bank across the street. This event is free and open to the public. Please register: [ohc.uoregon.edu](http://ohc.uoregon.edu)