

# Geography, Neoliberalism and the Ethics of the Academic Self

<b>Research Group Affiliation</b>	History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group and Higher Education Research Group
<p>The theme for this year's conference is "Geographies that Matter" and we are invited to "place geography in its current context and to consider its medium-term future". This session aims to contribute to this dialogue by asking Geographers to reflect upon their experiences in the academy in the context of the neoliberalisation of the university. The session originates from empirical research conducted by both the organisers which has raised issues about the extent to which neoliberal reform of higher education institutes and the public sector engenders a particular type of professional capable of 'winning the game'. The impact of neoliberal reforms on public services has sparked considerable debate which is frequently characterized by, on the one hand, a sense of inevitability about structural reform and, on the other, appeals to an imagined 'Golden Age' of autonomy of professional practice. Within Geography, there is sporadic debate about the implications of a changing academy. The concern is usually focused on levels of commercial involvement and the relevance of research to wider political agendas. There is, however, relatively little comment on how institutional change actually impacts upon academic culture and the conditions within which academic Geographers construct a professional identity. Furthermore, debate about Geography's autonomy tends ignore a history of critical reflection going back to discussions about Geography's role in colonialism and military projects. In this panel session we bring together 5 academics from across Geography and ask them to reflect upon their experiences of these ongoing reforms by answering the question "what does being an academic Geographer mean to you?". Short presentations by the panellists will be followed by an open discussion involving the audience. Ultimately, this session aims to interrogate the space within which Geographers come to understand themselves.</p>	
<b>Session Organisers</b>	Ben Clifford & Kerry Holden (King's College London)

<b>Panelist 1</b>	Governing the Academic Self
Presenter	Noel Castree (University of Manchester)
<p>More than in most professions, academics are 'free' to make their professional selves, in turn collectively remaking the disciplinary and institutional conditions to which they must subsequently respond. The narrative of 'the neoliberalisation of the university' is a useful resource (or perhaps foil) for thinking systematically about the aims and values of higher education in general and academic selves specifically. This short biographical presentation makes two arguments. The first is that meta-narratives about the university both fail to capture the messy and often contradictory contingencies of academic careers, and also become alibis for professional choices made. The second is that there is not necessarily a worked-out conception of 'the academic good life' to be found at the grass-roots of the university system. 'Governing the academic self' is, consequently, a potentially busy but directionless business when it could – and should – be otherwise. I conclude that a 'thick' ethics of the self – and the academic profession more widely – is a <i>sine qua non</i>. I suggest some versions of such a substantive ethics.</p>	
<b>Panelist 2</b>	Competing with Other 'Stuff' that Matters: Critical Pedagogy and Teaching Commodity Geographies in the Snake-pit of Neoliberal 'iConsumption'
Presenter	Mike Goodman (King's College London)
<p>This short presentation is partially about me exercising several of my personal demons that, upon reflection, have come to the fore in attempting to teach about commodity geographies through so-called critical pedagogies. I have come to the rather depressing (yet motivating) position that I am simply reproducing many of the precepts of contemporary neoliberal capitalism by working to create 'better' (i.e. green) consumers rather than anything else. In short, there are growing limits to developing students' critical geographical knowledge of their consumption impacts on the rest of the planet and their propensity to care about these consequences on people and environments. This is partially, I am going to argue, a consequence of the fact that, in teaching about these things, we are in competition with the 'buzz' of the other 'stuff' that matters much more to students' and society in the novel goods of distinction such as the spectacle that is the iPhone. Similarly, we are in competition with the equal 'buzz' of sustainability which is now just one hybrid car, solar panel or fair trade coffee purchase away from realisation. iConsumption, albeit in its green form, is on the brain of most students, and I have not done a suitable job of getting out of this framework even when deploying what might pass for critical pedagogy. Rather, in order to work the</p>	

ethics of my academic self, I want to think of ways to better marry geographical knowledge, caring *and* practice to foster a more a/effective and progressive critical pedagogy that resonates with students, but doesn't simply re-frame these issues as those of becoming better consumers in an age of neoliberal social justice and environmentalism.

<b>Panelist 3</b>	Pennies from Heaven
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Presenter	John Thornes (University of Birmingham)
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Having been an academic geographer (climatologist) for 35 years I have obviously seen, and been part of, many changes of emphasis in teaching and research. My mission has always been to try and connect the 'ivory towers' I have found myself in – to the real world. I see little purpose in writing research papers that gather dust on library shelves – or to teach students in a complicated academic language. Playing draughts with chess pieces to try and impress the audience does not impress me! Hence I have been involved primarily in applied geographical research. I have been involved in the setting up (and subsequently the sale) of two successful university spin-out companies both of which continue to flourish today. I continue to do a lot of consultancy work, as well as acting as an expert witness in court cases involving the weather. These activities have been mostly encouraged by my various Heads of Geography and my University as they are in line with recent 'neoliberal' initiatives. My talk will reflect on these experiences and suggest that working 'outside the box' of traditional 'ivory tower' academic geography is vital for the subject's survival – to make geography matter.

<b>Paper 4</b>	Managing the Imperatives of the Entrepreneurial University
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Presenter	David Demeritt (King's College London)
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Reflecting on my own career and the ways in which I personally have managed the grant getting, productivity measuring demands to be 'entrepreneurial', this paper reflects on some of the tensions involved in policies designed to promote entrepreneurial activities. In addition to addressing the sort of subject effects that they have on university personnel, I want to think about their implications for university governance, planning, and conduct of schemes such as full economic costing designed to make costs fully transparent.

<b>Paper 5</b>	Reflections of a Feminist.
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Presenter	Linda McDowell (University of Oxford)
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In this session, I want to raise some questions about the changing academic and policy debates about gender equality and diversity in British universities, illustrating through my own experience of research funding, publishing, career mobility and progression and knowledge practices have changed over three decades. In particular, I want to raise questions about the concepts of equity and excellence, particularly in the context of the RAE, to assess the extent of their compatibility.