

**An Analysis of the Undergraduate Curriculum
at the University of Texas at Austin, 2011–2025**

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Executive Summary

This report draws on a comprehensive dataset of syllabi to present a portrait of the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) from 2011 to 2025. With an eye to the breadth and balance of UT's curriculum, our report proceeds in two parts: the first focuses on American civics; the second, on great books. Here are some of the main findings:

- UT's curriculum has notable strengths. For example, its great books curriculum in philosophy has remained strong. Classical and Anglo-American authors are still commonly assigned, even as the curriculum has expanded to include more critical theorists. In fact, students have *more* opportunities to study Enlightenment thinkers as well as critical theorists than they once did.
- The literary canon is diversifying somewhat as well, but literary authors are assigned much less often today than they once were—and epics are less frequently taught together, leaving fewer opportunities to study the epic tradition from Homer to Milton.
- Classics from the conservative intellectual tradition are rarely taught. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, for example, is taught just a couple of times every year.
- Students at UT are required to take an introductory course in American and Texan politics, ensuring that all students learn about the American constitutional order. Elective offerings in American history and politics, on the other hand, tend to exclude important ideas. Liberal and centrist public intellectuals—not just conservative ones—are rarely assigned.
- UT's curriculum has become more focused on race, gender, and social justice. And while these topics are important, they are generally not taught in ways that address wider scholarly controversies and may crowd out other issues of public significance; for example, many of the nation's prominent non-left Black social scientists are rarely assigned in these courses.
- Even as elective offerings in American politics increasingly focus on inequality, UT's curriculum shows little interest in America's class divisions. Additionally, some of the most contentious issues in American politics, like racial bias in the criminal justice system and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are generally taught in ways that do not open out into wider scholarly controversies.

Our primary aim in this report is simply to make UT's curriculum more legible. We conclude, though, by observing that the recent civics reform movement—both at UT and around the

country—has been focused on course offerings that feature foundational texts. At Texas, such efforts may help account for the enduring vitality of the philosophical canon. Our findings, however, suggest that it may be time to give more attention to UT’s elective offerings on the American experience—its people, controversies, and history.

Methods and Scope

Our assessment relies on a tool we developed called Syllabus Lens, which reads university syllabi and records the assigned readings. It allows us to see not only how often specific authors and texts are taught, but also the readings they are paired with—and how these assignments vary over time. In short, we can see what’s popular, what’s not, and how authors are taught.

Extraction is performed by an artificial-intelligence model. We hand-annotated 100 syllabi, recording every assigned title and author, and tested eight commercially available models against that record. The model we selected finds 96% of the books actually assigned: it very rarely misses a reading. It is less discriminating about what it includes, though, and sometimes incorporates junk text, such as fragments of syllabus text misconstrued as titles. Where a title is correctly identified, the author is correctly identified in 97% of cases under a lenient name-matching standard and 75% under a strict one. Extracted titles are then consolidated. A single work appears across syllabi in several forms, with and without subtitles and under editions credited to a translator rather than an author. For instance, one syllabus might list *The Waste Land* and another *The Wasteland*; one gives a book’s subtitle, and another does not. We group these using fuzzy matching, with a sensitivity threshold calibrated against the annotated set.¹

Our report focuses on two important slices of UT’s curriculum: the teaching of American civics and great books. To assess courses in these areas, we employed a variety of methods. We looked at both the most commonly assigned texts and authors on these subjects as well as important thinkers who are either rarely or never taught. Furthermore, we assessed how the

¹ Occasionally, there were false positives, but they were rare and do not figure in our analysis. In a few cases, the AI extraction engaged in systematic misreading, but we screened for such accidents before reporting. This happened in the case of Ovid and Kafka, for instance, where our tool miscategorized Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. But in practice such issues have been rare, and the ones we found were flagged and fixed via manual searches through the syllabi. A full analytics report is available at <https://syllabus-lens-791674176212.us-central1.run.app/>.

assignments of these works have varied over time—and which texts they are generally taught alongside. Additionally, when it was useful to do so, we used keyword searches of course titles to map the geography of UT’s curriculum. In other cases, we placed thinkers into particular intellectual traditions (e.g., Anglo-American political philosophy) to gain a fuller sense of how well different schools of thought are represented in the curriculum.²

There are, naturally, limits to our method. Our data tool, for example, is better at extracting assigned books than articles. And because we cannot account for the size of various classes, a simple count of book assignments may sometimes give a distorted sense of student exposure to a particular set of readings. This limitation, though, applies less to books that are seldom assigned. Additionally, we cannot assess whether an instructor is doing a responsible job teaching a text, whether it is being taught critically or sympathetically, or other such pedagogically specific evaluations. What we presume, though, is that the university has a stake in ensuring that students have the opportunity to form their own opinions, and that aim is best accomplished by exposing them to an appropriately diverse set of texts.

That said, our goal is to provide an assessment of the curriculum, not to single out professors or departments. We focus, rather, on limits to the breadth and depth of the curriculum as a whole, in part to better inform the pedagogical choices of individual professors and to help administrators shape future programming at their university.

² At UT, in just one period (2021–25), our system logged 22,080 assigned texts in the humanities—almost half of which were assigned only once (9,977). One way we tried to account for some of this rich diversity is by accounting for all authors that were assigned at least 30 times (see, for example, Table 2.8). By this metric, some 323 authors in the social sciences and humanities were taught, accounting for some 10,492 assignments between 2021–2025.

Part I: American Civics

A strength of UT's curriculum is that all students are required to take a course called "American and Texas Government," which introduces students to our political institutions, with attention to the American and Texas constitutions. Students are also required to take a course in U.S. or Texas politics, one of which is "Constitutional Principles," a course in which students read *The Federalist Papers* and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

But what about American civic education beyond these foundational courses? These classes, combined with the core requirements, provide UT's domestic students with the knowledge that will inform their growth as citizens. For international students, they present a portrait of American culture, history, and democracy.

The first section of this assessment of UT's civic education surveys the most commonly assigned texts centered on American history and politics. This survey indicates how well the curriculum as a whole covers the range of issues and perspectives that are central to our public life. The following sections look more closely at courses that introduce students to political controversies. Here we are especially interested in the extent to which students are exposed to scholarly disagreement over the issues that divide Americans.

I. Most Commonly Assigned Texts and Authors

The most frequently assigned works during the most recent 5-year period (2021–25) are primarily focused on racial oppression and inequality, both past and present. As Table 1.1 shows, among the top 20 assigned texts, 13 focus on race. Of these, 8 are centered on Black Americans, 4 on Latinos, and 2 on Native Americans. The most popular was *Borderlands/La Frontera: The*

New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldúa, assigned 109 times between 2021 and 25. Other popular texts include Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.³

The outliers include two classics of American political thought (*The Federalist Papers* and *Democracy in America*), textbooks on American history, as well as two classics of urban studies (*Delirious New York* and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*). The most popular American history textbook is Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, assigned 45 times. It offers a more radical (and less scholarly) account than Eric Foner’s center-left textbook, *Give Me Liberty!* More moderate textbooks, like Paul Johnson’s *A History of the American People*, were not assigned.

Table 1.1. Twenty Most Commonly Assigned Texts on American History, Politics, and Literature, 2021–25

Title	Author	Count
<i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i>	Gloria Anzaldúa	109
<i>Beloved</i>	Toni Morrison	98
<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	W.E.B. Du Bois	90
<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i>	Michelle Alexander	84
<i>Democracy in America</i>	Alexis de Tocqueville	73
<i>Parable of the Sower</i>	Octavia E. Butler	51
<i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i>	Jane Jacobs	47
<i>Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan</i>	Rem Koolhaas	46
<i>A People’s History of the United States</i>	Howard Zinn	45
<i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i>	Harriet Jacobs	42
<i>Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness</i>	Simone Browne	41
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	Frederick Douglass	41
<i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>	Angela Davis	40
<i>The Federalist Papers</i>	Madison, Hamilton, Jay	39
<i>Between the World and Me</i>	Ta-Nehisi Coates	38
<i>Give Me Liberty! An American History</i> (various editions)	Eric Foner	37
<i>An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States</i>	Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz	35
<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	Sandra Cisneros	33
<i>Keywords for Latina/o Studies</i>	Deborah R. Vargas	32
<i>How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova</i>	V. F. Cordova	32

³ Of course, these texts are not exclusively about race; many take an intersectional approach that also attends to the imbrication of class, gender, and other categories of identity. But they are framed around race.

When we extend our survey to the next set of most commonly assigned texts, we see the same emphasis on race (see Table 1.2). Again, we find that 13 of 21 are focused on racial oppression and inequality. Among the outlying texts, two are focused on economic inequality (*\$2.00 a Day* and *Unequal Childhoods*), one on gender oppression (*The Handmaid's Tale*), one on environmental disaster (*Silent Spring*), one on urban design (*Learning from Las Vegas*), one on social control in our education system (*Troublemakers*), one on indigenous medicine (*Braiding Sweetgrass*), and another on the gay experience (*Angels in America*).

Table 1.2. Next Most Commonly Assigned Texts on American History, Politics, and Literature, 2021–25

Title	Author	Count
<i>The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children</i>	Gloria Ladson-Billings	31
<i>\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i>	Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer	31
<i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i>	Anne Fadiman	30
<i>Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School</i>	Carla Shalaby	29
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Lorraine Hansberry	28
<i>The Racial Contract</i>	Charles Mills	28
<i>Silent Spring</i>	Rachel Carson	26
<i>The Fire Next Time</i>	James Baldwin	26
<i>Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America</i>	Mae Ngai	26
<i>A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America</i>	Ronald Takaki	26
<i>Up from Slavery</i>	Booker T. Washington	25
<i>Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States</i>	Seth M. Holmes	25
<i>Silencing the Past</i>	M.-R. Trouillot	25
<i>The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool</i>	Brenda Gottschild	24
<i>Learning from Las Vegas</i>	Robert Venturi	24
<i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i>	Robin Kimmerer	23
<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	Margaret Atwood	23
<i>Black Feminist Thought</i>	Patricia Hill Collins	19
<i>Racial Formation in the United States</i>	Michael Omi and Howard Winant	18
<i>Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life</i>	Annette Lareau	17
<i>Angels in America</i>	Tony Kushner	17

Because 27 of the 41 most commonly assigned texts focus on racial oppression and inequality, we wondered if this emphasis is a recent development, fueled by what some have dubbed “the great awakening.”⁴ Thus, we also assessed how UT’s curriculum has changed over time by comparing the most commonly assigned texts in the current 5-year period (2021–25) to two prior periods (2011–15 and 2016–20).

The first time period (2011–15) is a particularly interesting reference point, as it precedes the Trump era and occurs before campus politics shifted further leftward. As Table 1.3 shows, this period shows a broader mix of subject matter in the most commonly assigned texts. Half the texts (10 out of 20) are centered on race. Two texts are focused on debates over marijuana legalization as well as another couple of works on gay liberation—both salient issues at the time.

Table 1.3. Twenty Most Commonly Assigned Texts on American History, Politics, and Literature, 2011–2015

Title	Author	Count
<i>Democracy in America</i>	Alexis de Tocqueville	91
<i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i>	Gloria Anzaldúa	88
<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	W.E.B. Du Bois	75
<i>What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets</i>	Michael J. Sandel	67
<i>The Death and Life of the Great American School System</i>	Diane Ravitch	59
<i>Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier</i>	Emily Brady	57
<i>Controversies: The Legalization of Marijuana</i>	Mark G. Longaker	57
<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	Sandra Cisneros	48
<i>English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States</i>	Rosina Lippi-Green	48
<i>Beloved</i>	Toni Morrison	45
<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i>	Michelle Alexander	41
<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	Harriet Beecher Stowe	39
<i>Invisible Man</i>	Ralph Ellison	37
<i>The Bluest Eye</i>	Toni Morrison	37
<i>No Impact Man</i>	Colin Beavan	37
<i>The Awakening</i>	Kate Chopin	36
<i>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</i>	Alison Bechdel	36
<i>The Federalist Papers</i>	Madison, Hamilton, Jay	34
<i>Angels in America</i>	Tony Kushner	33
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	Frederick Douglass	33

⁴ See, for example, Musa al-Gharbi, “The ‘Great Awakening’ is Winding Down,” at <https://musaalgharbi.com/2023/02/08/great-awakening-ending/>

We also find that, in spite of significant continuity over time, some works have become even more popular, while others are fading or have dropped from the curriculum altogether. As Table 1.4 shows, texts on race have become even more popular in recent years. Assignments of *The New Jim Crow* (first published in 2010) increased dramatically, as did *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Overall, seven of the 10 texts that grew in popularity focused on race. Thus, while texts on the subject of race and racial inequality were the most popular in 2011–15, they have become even more so in recent years.

Table 1.4. Texts That Have Increased in Popularity, Across Three Time Periods

Title	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
<i>An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States</i>	0	6	35	+35
<i>A People's History of the United States</i>	23	40	45	+22
<i>Give Me Liberty! An American History</i>	16	19	37	+21
<i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i>	22	22	47	+25
<i>New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i>	41	82	84	+43
<i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i>	24	26	42	+18
<i>The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children</i>	20	46	31	+11
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	25	27	28	+3
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	33	38	41	+8
<i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i>	88	76	109	+21

Some of the texts that were most popular in the first period (2011–15) declined in popularity, as Table 1.5 shows. Two books on marijuana legalization, for example, are no longer assigned. In most cases, though, classic texts top the list of readings that declined in popularity. They include works interested in individualism and moral freedom in America, including those by Thoreau, Whitman, Ellison, Kerouac, and Twain. For those concerned with the health of education in American civics, though, perhaps the most notable change has been the fading of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville's classic, the most commonly assigned text in the first time period (2011–15), has been losing ground. So, too, has *Bowling Alone*, the most important

contemporary work that articulates Tocquevillian concerns about American democracy—including individualism, cultural restlessness, inequality, and threats to freedom of thought.

Table 1.5. Texts That Have Declined in Popularity, Across Three Time Periods

Title	Author	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
<i>Controversies: The Legalization of Marijuana</i>	Mark G. Longaker	57	0	0	-57
<i>Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier</i>	Emily Brady	57	0	0	-57
<i>No Impact Man</i>	Colin Beavan	37	0	0	-37
<i>What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets</i>	Michael J. Sandel	67	13	3	-64
<i>Leaves of Grass</i>	Walt Whitman	31	8	6	-25
<i>The Awakening</i>	Kate Chopin	36	9	10	-26
<i>The Sun Also Rises</i>	Ernest Hemingway	32	11	11	-21
<i>On the Road</i>	Jack Kerouac	32	25	12	-20
<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	Harriet Beecher Stowe	39	33	16	-23
<i>Walden</i>	Henry Thoreau	23	27	10	-13
<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	Mark Twain	24	16	11	-13
<i>Invisible Man</i>	Ralph Ellison	37	20	21	-16
<i>Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community</i>	Robert Putnam	27	28	16	-11
<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	Sandra Cisneros	48	50	33	-15
<i>English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States</i>	Rosina L. Lippi-Green	48	43	15	-33
<i>Democracy in America</i>	Tocqueville	91	84	73	-18

If we look at the most assigned authors, rather than texts, the emphasis on race is even more pronounced. As Table 1.6 shows, all of the most commonly assigned authors who write about America focus on racial inequality; additionally, with only three exceptions, their popularity has grown in recent years. Among the most assigned authors are Michelle Alexander, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and bell hooks.

Table 1.6. Most Assigned Authors Who Write on American Politics, History, and Culture, 2011–25

Author	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
Toni Morrison	121	140	125	+4
Gloria Anzaldúa	103	96	143	+40

bell hooks	88	83	120	+32
W.E.B. Du Bois	112	99	108	-4
Angela Davis	35	60	104	+69
Octavia Butler	22	35	87	+65
Michelle Alexander	42	82	84	+42
James Baldwin	53	64	83	+30
Sandra Cisneros	72	68	74	+2
Ta-Nehisi Coates	5	60	49	+44

Perhaps UT professors simply want to diversify the authors they assign, which traditionally have been predominantly white and male. Table 1.6 shows that while many popular authors are African Americans, Black social scientists who write on race from non-radical perspectives—including William Julius Wilson, Orlando Patterson, Elijah Anderson, Glenn Loury, Carol Swain, John McWhorter, and Randall Kennedy—are far less popular despite their academic prominence. As Table 1.7 shows, with the exception of Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death*, such works were basically not assigned from 2021 to 2025.

Table 1.7. Texts on Racial Inequality by Prominent Non-Radical Black Authors, 2021–25

Title	Author	Count	Citations
<i>Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study</i>	Orlando Patterson	18	9,414
<i>Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of African Americans in Congress</i>	Carol Swain	4	1,133
<i>Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality</i>	Robert Sampson and William Julius Wilson	2	2,698
<i>The Anatomy of Racial Inequality</i>	Glenn Loury	1	1,293
<i>Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America</i>	John McWhorter	1	345
<i>The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's Racial Crisis</i>	Orlando Patterson	1	558
<i>Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City</i>	Elijah Anderson	0	8,436
<i>Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America</i>	John McWhorter	0	972
<i>The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy</i>	William J. Wilson	0	6,154
<i>When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor</i>	William J. Wilson	0	11,651
<i>Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America</i>	James Forman Jr.	0	746
<i>Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries</i>	Orlando Patterson	0	917
<i>Race, Crime, and the Law</i>	Randall Kennedy	0	2,221

II. Public Intellectuals at UT

Because a good civic education requires universities to be attuned to debates taking place beyond the precincts of the Ivory Tower, we further wondered how public intellectuals are taught generally. How well are the nation’s most prominent thinkers—left, right, and center—represented in UT’s curriculum?

Partly because the university’s critics worry that conservative thinkers are neglected, we began by compiling a list of some of the most influential conservative and center-right intellectuals. Our approach was ecumenical, as we also included thinkers of a more libertarian bent. Though we make no claim that our list is comprehensive, it identifies some of the most important thinkers on the right and captures much diversity within it.

The great free market thinkers of the 20th century top the list (see Table 1.8). The works of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman appear in 40 syllabi over a 5-year period. C.S. Lewis is also relatively popular. His most assigned work—*The Abolition of Man*—appears in 15 syllabi.⁵ Most other thinkers, though, are rarely, if ever, assigned—especially today’s most prominent cultural conservatives. Princeton’s Robert George appears once. Patrick Deneen’s best-selling work, *Why Liberalism Failed*, was assigned just once as well. Others, such as Harvard’s Harvey Mansfield and University of Virginia’s Brad Wilcox, do not appear on any syllabi. Collectively, the conservatives on this list have been assigned 150 times during this period, or about 30 times per year.

Table 1.8. Texts Authored by 50 Conservative Intellectuals, 2021–25

Author	Count		Author	Count
F.A. Hayek	29		Christopher Lasch	1
C.S. Lewis	17		Leon Kass	1
Milton Friedman	11		Camille Paglia	0
John Finnis	10		Niall Ferguson	0
Alasdair MacIntyre	8		Harvey Mansfield	0
James Q. Wilson	8		W. Bradford Wilcox	0
Mark Bauerlein	7		John Yoo	0
Sam Huntington	7		Wilfred McClay	0
Victor Davis Hanson	6		Adrian Vermeule	0
Yuval Levin	5		John Tomasi	0
G.K. Chesterton	5		James Davison Hunter	0
Michael Novak	5		Nicholas Eberstadt	0
Richard Weaver	5		Michael Oakeshott	0
Mary Ann Glendon	4		Donald Kagan	0
Walter Russell Mead	4		Peter Berkowitz	0
Barry Goldwater	3		Arthur Brooks	0
David Brooks	3		Justin Dyer	0
Charles Murray	2		Daniel P. Moynihan	0
Thomas Sowell	2		William F. Buckley	0

⁵ We report on these findings in greater detail in our discussion of the canon at UT Austin.

Mark Regnerus	2		Irving Kristol	0
Robert George	1		Yoram Hazony	0
Russell Kirk	1		Shelby Steele	0
Patrick Deneen	1		Reihan Salam	0
Glenn Loury	1		Hadley Arkes	0
Keith Whittington	1		Rod Dreher	0

To consider the possibility that public intellectuals in general are often neglected, we looked at centrist/liberal thinkers as well as prominent intellectuals on the left. The former category includes liberal-leaning thinkers who are neither left nor right, such as Jonathan Haidt, Steven Pinker, and Robert Putnam. The latter includes more radical intellectuals, such as Angela Davis and Ibram X. Kendi. Again, we developed both lists through our broad familiarity with public intellectuals.

As Table 1.9 shows, centrist/liberal intellectuals do not seem more popular than conservative ones, and both are far less well represented than their counterparts on the left. Angela Davis appears more often than Steven Pinker, Robert Putnam, Steven Levitsky, Francis Fukuyama, and Jonathan Haidt, *combined*. Thus, it seems that UT students might benefit from a broader exposure to non-left intellectuals, not just conservative ones.

Table 1.9. Texts Authored by Public Intellectuals from Across the Political Spectrum, 2021–25

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Count</i>		<i>Centrist/Liberal</i>	<i>Count</i>		<i>Left</i>	<i>Count</i>
F.A. Hayek	29		Steven Pinker	28		bell hooks	120
C.S. Lewis	17		Robert Putnam	22		Angela Davis	104
Milton Friedman	11		Steven Levitsky	16		Michelle Alexander	84
John Finnis	10		Francis Fukuyama	11		Edward Said	57
Alasdair MacIntyre	8		Jonathan Haidt	9		Peter Singer	50
James Q. Wilson	8		Michael Sandel	9		Ta-Nehisi Coates	49
Mark Bauerlein	7		Ezra Klein	4		Ibram X. Kendi	42
Sam Huntington	7		Danielle Allen	4		Judith Butler	38
Victor Davis Hanson	6		Jonathan Rauch	2		Robin DiAngelo	25

Yuval Levin	5		Mark Lilla	0		Isabel Wilkerson	19
Totals	108			105			588

III. Race, Gender, and Class

Looking at texts alone, however, left us wondering: How often are courses on race and related issues taught at UT? Thus, we also identified all the course titles that included the following terms: race, racial, African American, Latino/Latina, Latinx, Hispanic, Mexican American, and the like.⁶ Similarly, we identified courses about gender, social justice, and class.⁷ A handful of these courses—22 in total—were in both the race and gender categories, including classes like “Race, Gender, and Surveillance.” Even so, our assessment underestimates the extent to which such issues are taught, as many courses teach race and gender without signaling that fact in their titles; for example, courses like “Topics in the Liberal Arts,” “Topics in Writing,” “Topics in United States History,” “Senior Seminar,” “School Organization and Classroom Management,” and “Rights in Modern America” often focus on issues like race and gender.

As Table 1.10 shows, race-themed courses at UT were quite common and increased after 2020, though not as much as some might have suspected. Gender-themed courses are popular as well, increasing significantly during the MeToo era. Social justice-themed courses, meanwhile, spiked dramatically after 2020. Many of these courses, though, seem to be largely about race as well. Courses framed around class difference or inequality are far less common. Between 2021 and 2025, UT only had 15 courses with the keywords class, stratification, poverty, or inequality

⁶ The full list included race, racial, African American, Latino/Latina, Latinx, Hispanic, Mexican American, Native American, Black, ethnic/ethnicity, Chicano/Chicana, Indigenous, Asian American, slavery/enslaved, civil rights, Whiteness, segregation, apartheid, and diaspora.

⁷ Gender courses included these terms: gender, women, feminism, LGBTQ, gay, lesbian, queer, woman, sexuality/sexual, masculinity, femininity, transgender/transsexual, homosexual, bisexual, womanism, reproductive. Social justice courses included either social justice, restorative justice, restorative practices, activism, or equity. We excluded a class titled “private equity” from our analysis. Class courses included class, stratification, poverty, or inequality.

in their titles. Five of these—“Gender, Race, and Class in American Society”—proved, upon inspection, to be mostly not about class; another, a course called “Social Inequality,” had been framed around class in earlier periods, but after 2020 was transformed into a course about racial inequality. Only a few courses offered between 2021 and 2025 clearly focused on class differences; one was “Social Inequality and Health in the United States,” offered six times in this period.

Table 1.10. Course Titles on Race, Gender, Social Justice, 2011–25

Topic	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Total
Race	511	505	586	1,602
Gender	213	280	301	794
Social Justice	44	108	212	364
Class	7	10	15	32

Do these courses represent a significant slice of UT’s curriculum? From one perspective, the answer is clearly “no.” UT’s curriculum is vast. Our dataset includes 29,299 courses between 2021 and 25. All the courses explicitly themed around race, gender, social justice, and class represent approximately 4% of all UT courses. Even allowing for the fact that we have undercounted identity-themed classes, these courses are not representative of the typical class. As at other universities, students are drawn to courses that offer them more technical skills. By our count, UT offered more than three thousand courses in engineering/computer science and nearly two thousand foreign language courses between 2021 and 2025.

From another perspective, though, UT’s offerings on identity-themed courses are more significant, as they make up a substantial share of courses in the social sciences and humanities. In fact, these courses are more than all the offerings in the departments of government and

history *combined* (see Table 1.11). It is striking that in an age of growing material, cultural, and political class divide, class-themed courses seem so rare at UT.

Table 1.11. Courses in Race, Gender, and Social Justice Compared to Offerings by Various Departments, 2021–25

Courses	Count
Identity-Themed	1,099
History	492
Government	467
Philosophy	399
Psychology	319
Sociology	283

Because looking only at course names likely underestimates students’ exposure to America’s class divisions in UT’s curriculum, we also examined assigned readings. We began by identifying some of the most important works of social science on class, informed by our knowledge of the literature as well as citation counts. Additionally, we included J. D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy* because of the political stature of the author.

As Table 1.12 shows, a few books on class do seem relatively popular at UT, especially Luke Shaefer and Kathryn Edin’s *\$2.00 a Day*, assigned 31 times between 2021 and 2025. Even so, many important works are neglected, especially those centered on the lives and politics of the white working class. For instance, books by Vance, Arlie Hochschild, Charles Murray, Barbara Ehrenreich, Michèle Lamont, David Goodhart, Katherine Cramer, Justin Gest, and Joan Williams have been assigned just *four* times, despite being widely cited.

Table 1.12. Syllabus Counts of Influential Texts on Class, 2021–25

Title	Author	Count	Citations
<i>\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i>	Kathryn J. Edin and H.	31	749

	Luke Shaefer		
<i>Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life</i>	Annette Lareau	17	15,548
<i>Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City</i>	Matthew Desmond	11	3,381
<i>Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste</i>	Pierre Bourdieu	11	25,764
<i>Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage</i>	Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas	10	3,161
<i>The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats</i>	Jim Goad	8	195
<i>Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism</i>	Anne Case and Angus Deaton	4	2,850
<i>The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality</i>	Angus Deaton	4	3,470
<i>Capital in the Twenty-First Century</i>	Thomas Piketty	2	35,757
<i>Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs</i>	Paul E. Willis	2	24,076
<i>Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis</i>	J. D. Vance	1	600–800*
<i>Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right</i>	Arlie Russell Hochschild	1	5,383
<i>Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010</i>	Charles A. Murray	1	1,185
<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America</i>	Barbara Ehrenreich	1	2,824
<i>The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite</i>	Daniel Markovits	1	1,028
<i>Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age</i>	Larry M. Bartels	0	5,168
<i>The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration</i>	Michèle Lamont	0	3,689
<i>The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics</i>	David Goodhart	0	1,555
<i>Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis</i>	Robert D. Putnam	0	2,730
<i>Cities and the Creative Class</i>	Richard Florida	0	10,828
<i>The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker</i>	Katherine J. Cramer	0	2,916
<i>The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality</i>	Justin Gest	0	829
<i>White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America</i>	Joan C. Williams	0	419

Note. Citation data from Google Scholar.

* Vance citation data is an estimate from Gemini, since it was not recorded by Google Scholar.

IV. Teaching Controversial Political Issues

Beyond the general survey of commonly assigned texts, we wondered how contentious issues were taught at UT. Thus, we asked: Are courses designed around political debate and controversy? Are any required?

Some courses do attempt to expose students to intellectual controversy around issues of national importance. One core course at UT is partially designed around such controversies: “Constitutional Principles,” which includes debates over the American constitution (Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists) and race (Du Bois vs. Washington). This course also fulfills a GE requirement, as students can select it from among three other government classes. Other courses, such as “Arguing with Liberals” and “Arguing with Conservatives”—both in the Rhetoric Department—explicitly task students with applying classical liberal or conservative theory to current public debates.

A philosophy course called “Contemporary Moral Problems” is not part of the core curriculum, but it does introduce students to polarizing political issues, at least some of the time. By our count, eight of these courses (between 2021 and 2025) included texts that offered different perspectives on abortion, the death penalty, and killing animals, among others. For example, six such courses paired Judith Jarvis Thomson’s “A Defense of Abortion” with Don Marquis’s “Why Abortion Is Immoral.” However, professors did not consistently structure this course around such controversies. In 11 cases, “Contemporary Moral Problems” focuses on “harmful systems,” including the military-industrial complex, the prison industrial complex, and industrial agriculture. This language strikes us as a narrow way of framing the discussion, and an examination of the syllabus content confirmed our impression.

Similarly, other foundational courses at UT seem to push a more sectarian vision of the good society, often by foregrounding a particular critique of American institutions. One is “Foundations of Social Justice,” required for all undergraduates who major in social work. Taught 43 times between 2021 and 2025, the course uses a social justice frame to understand inequality in the United States by drawing on theories like positionality, “othering,” and

intersectionality. It does not, however, seem to introduce students to the broader scholarly contention over these topics. For example, one such course described its objective: “Using a social justice lens, identify policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist and other oppressive ideas and actions and suggest strategies for change.”

While introductory courses like “Constitutional Principles,” “Contemporary Moral Problems,” and “Foundations of Social Justice” introduce UT students to some of the political issues that have roiled American democracy, in other cases these curricular concerns were found in electives and scattered across varied departments. Because racism in the criminal justice system and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been especially polarizing, we give them special attention in this report.

We begin our look at criminal justice with an analysis of *The New Jim Crow*. Not only is it the most assigned work on racism and the criminal justice system, but it is also among the most assigned title on American history/politics at UT, appearing in 84 courses from 2021 to 2025. We explored how often Alexander’s critics were assigned with her book, including James Forman Jr.’s Pulitzer Prize–winning book *Locking Up Our Own*. In this analysis, we also included Michael Fortner’s *The Black Silent Majority*, John Pfaff’s *Locked In*, and Patrick Sharkey’s *Uneasy Peace*.

As Table 1.13 shows, these works are essentially never included in courses that assign *The New Jim Crow*. In fact, the books by Forman, Fortner, and Pfaff do not appear to have been taught in *any* course at UT between 2021 and 2025. And when we examined the 2 cases in which *Uneasy Peace* was assigned, it was listed as “suggested” rather than required reading. Thus, we could not identify any course that required UT students to read Alexander’s critics.

Table 1.13. Are Alexander’s Most Prominent Critics Assigned with *The New Jim Crow*?

Title	Author	Count	Percent
<i>Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence</i>	Patrick Sharkey	2	2.4%
<i>Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America</i>	James Forman Jr.	0	0%
<i>Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration</i>	John Pfaff	0	0%
<i>The Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment</i>	Michael Fortner	0	0%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses taught in 2021-25 (n=84)

We broadened our analysis to consider other popular texts on policing and the criminal justice system. As Table 1.14 shows, the most popular texts tend to present either radical or abolitionist views on policing and/or mass incarceration, mostly framing these institutions as designed to subjugate racial minorities. The exception is James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling’s essay “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,” a center-right case for community policing. The scholarly impact of this essay, which had great influence on policing reforms in the 1990s, especially in New York City, is rivaled only by Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. It has been cited thousands of times.

Table 1.14. Beyond Alexander: The Most Assigned Titles on Policing and Mass Incarceration (2021-25)

Title	Author	Count
<i>Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness</i>	Simone Browne	41
<i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>	Angela Y. Davis	40
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i>	Bryan Stevenson	19
<i>Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond</i>	M. L. Hill	13
<i>No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity</i>	Sarah Haley	13
<i>Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys</i>	Victor Rios	10
<i>Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life</i>	Ruha Benjamin	8
“Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety”	James Q. Wilson and	

	George L. Kelling	6
<i>Police in the Hallways: Discipline in an Urban High School</i>	Kathleen Nolan	6
<i>Arbitrary Justice: The Power of the American Prosecutor</i>	Angela J. Davis	6

Much is missing from this curriculum if UT’s students are to have a rudimentary understanding of the scholarly debates around crime and punishment. For example, they need to encounter arguments that show (a) the harms of violent crime generally; (b) the cost of violent crime on poor and Black Americans in particular; (c) the benefits of the great crime decline to these same citizens; (d) the role that incarceration and proactive policing played in reducing violence; (e) the popular support for tough-on-crime policies among Black Americans; (f) the challenges of police work; (g) the poor record of rehabilitation efforts; and (h) evidence that police shootings are not driven by racial bias. Many of these empirical claims remain contestable, of course. And they certainly do not settle larger normative disputes. They are, however, important to understanding public debates around race, crime, and punishment.

Books and articles by prominent scholars have stressed all of these claims. Yet, as Table 1.15 shows, such scholarship is almost entirely absent from UT’s curriculum. For instance, Pfaff’s study—which, contrary to Alexander, finds that the drug war did not cause mass incarceration—is not assigned. And, as mentioned previously, Forman’s Pulitzer Prize–winning book has not been taught.

Table 1.15. Alternative Perspectives on the Criminal Justice System (2021-25)

Title	Author	Count	Citations
<i>Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence</i> (2018)	Patrick Sharkey	2	404
<i>Cop in the Hood: My Year Policing Baltimore’s Eastern District</i> (2008)	Peter Moskos	0	517

<i>When Police Kill</i> (2017)	Franklin Zimring	0	357
<i>The Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment</i> (2015)	Michael Fortner	0	296
<i>Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets</i> (2019)	Thomas Abt	0	219
<i>Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America</i> (2017)	James Forman Jr.	0	746
<i>Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration</i> (2017)	John Pfaff	0	774

Unlike racism and the criminal justice system, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not taught very frequently, as Table 1.16 suggests. Indeed, our survey found that only a few professors teach it. Relevant courses include “The History of Israel,” “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” “The Levant: From Colonialism to Coexistence,” and “Topics of the Middle East.” The subject was also offered in a course titled “The Jewish Nation, Invented or Imagined? History and the Politics of Peoplehood” on three occasions, a couple of times in a writing seminar called “Rhetoric of Israel/Palestine,” and twice in a course called “The Twentieth-Century Arab World.” The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was also featured in a course called “The Modern Middle East.” All told, we estimate that the subject has been taught approximately 16 times between 2021 and 2025.

The most commonly assigned text is a well-regarded and balanced reader by Walter Laqueur (see Table 1.16) that includes important primary documents, such as the Peel Commission report and various UN resolutions. Generally, though, the other commonly assigned texts are sharply anti-Zionist. The “new historians”—Israeli scholars who challenged traditional Zionist narratives—are well represented, including Benny Morris, Tom Segev, and Avi Shlaim. So, too, is Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian American and a recently retired professor at Columbia. In fact, across all syllabi, Khalidi is the most assigned author (as distinct from text). The textbooks by James Gelvin and Charles D. Smith are also regarded as sharply critical of Israel.

Table 1.16. Most Assigned Texts on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 2021–25

Title	Author	Count
<i>The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East</i>	Walter Laqueur	11
<i>The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited</i>	Benny Morris	10
<i>Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness</i>	Rashid Khalidi	8
<i>1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East</i>	Tom Segev	7
<i>The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World</i>	Avi Shlaim	6
<i>The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War</i>	James Gelvin	5
<i>Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict</i>	Charles D. Smith	5
<i>The Origins of Israel, 1882–1948: A Documentary History</i>	Eran Kaplan	5
<i>One Hundred Years' War on Palestine</i>	Rashid Khalidi	4
<i>A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict</i>	Mark Tessler	4

Notably absent from most courses at UT are books by scholars who are sympathetic to Israel. For example, Efraim Karsh—the most important critic of the new historians—does not show up in any course on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; nor does *The Case for Israel* by Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz or Daniel Gordis’s *Israel: A Concise History*.

Even so, after more careful investigation, we did identify a few courses that expose students to a broad range of perspectives on the conflict. One course pairs two textbooks with divergent points of view—one by Ilan Pappé (a new historian) and the other by Anita Shapira (a scholar who is sympathetic to Israel). Yet another course, offered a few times at UT, teaches the book *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine*, which presents competing perspectives on the conflict. Overall, though, students at UT would benefit from having more courses that teach the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially in a moment when the issue is polarizing our own political life.

Finally, we also wondered how often influential works of social science that challenge campus orthodoxies have been assigned. Thus, we compiled a list of such works (see Table

1.17). They included research that found that ethnic and racial diversity weakened community ties (Putnam); that mass immigration depresses wages (Borjas); that racism and poverty are declining (Pinker); that affirmative action depresses bar passage rates for Black Americans (Sander); that religiosity is the best predictor of giving and volunteering (Putnam and Campbell); that American boys are suffering and neglected (Reeves); that marriages improve many social outcomes (Waite and Gallagher); and that divorce is a major social problem (Cherlin). As Table 1.17 shows, these works generally cannot be found in the curriculum, despite high citations.

Table 1.17. Influential Works of Social Science That Challenge Orthodox Ideas

Title	Author	Count	Citations
<i>Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy</i> (1999)	George Borjas	4	2,203
<i>The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today</i> (2010)	Andrew Cherlin	2	1,828
<i>American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us</i> (2010)	Robert Putnam and David Campbell	0	4,037
<i>Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress</i> (2018)	Steven Pinker	0	3,667
<i>The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better off Financially</i> (2000)	Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher	0	3,442
"E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century" (2007)	Robert D. Putnam	0	8,341
"A Systemic Analysis of Affirmative Action in American Law Schools" (2004)	Richard H. Sander	0	914
<i>Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It</i> (2022)	Richard V. Reeves	0	358

Note: the articles by Putnam and Sander represent possible undercounts, because our extraction system is more reliable with books than with articles.

Part II: Great Books

Advocates of the canon tend to defend the teaching of great books because they introduce students to a conversation that endures across time, one that provides them with a window into the human condition and the civilization they will inherit. Defenders of liberal education sometimes further contend that undergraduate education has become too specialized, in part because universities have abandoned a core curriculum centered on great books.⁸ Critics, meanwhile, view such claims skeptically, often preferring to see these works as artifacts of particular places and times, with little to say to us in the modern day.

Here we make no effort to address such claims. Instead, we offer a careful analysis of the evolving place of great books in UT's curriculum. Our approach is an ecumenical one, as we included many twentieth-century authors who have not been fully canonized by the professoriate as well as non-Western authors. This allows us to focus on the actual content of the curriculum rather than adjudicate the canonization of particular authors.

I. Overview: Change and Continuity in the Canon

Partisans of the traditional canon will find much to like in UT's curriculum. As Table 2.1 shows, Shakespeare is by far the most commonly assigned canonical author. His works appeared in 342 syllabi between 2021 and 2025. Plato is popular as well, with 207 assignments in this period, followed closely by Marx and Aristotle. Several Anglo-American thinkers are commonly assigned, headed by John Locke and John Stuart Mill; and Continental thought is represented by

⁸ At UT Austin, in fact, the recent reform of the Core was undertaken partly out of concern that courses have become too specialized. See p. 6 of the UT Austin Core Curriculum Task Force Report, available online at https://www.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/documents/core-curriculum-task-force-report_ay2025-26.pdf

Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx. Clearly, students have the opportunity to read a wide range of canonical thinkers at the University of Texas.

Table 2.1. Most Commonly Assigned Canonical Authors at UT Austin, 2021–25 (syllabus count, top 20)

Author	2021–25
William Shakespeare	342
Plato	207
Karl Marx	165
Aristotle	162
Immanuel Kant	136
John Locke	119
John Stuart Mill	115
W.E.B. Du Bois	108
Homer	97
David Hume	95
Virginia Woolf	92
Friedrich Nietzsche	88
Jane Austen	84
René Descartes	80
Niccolò Machiavelli	80
Sigmund Freud	78
Max Weber	78
Thomas Hobbes	76
Alexis de Tocqueville	74
Sophocles	68

Note. Contemporary (post-1945) excluded.

However, there have been fewer opportunities to encounter such writers in recent years. As Table 2.2 shows, many canonical authors are much less popular than they were in the early 2010s. Shakespeare has fallen sharply: assignments of his work have declined by 35% since 2011. Other British authors also experienced a marked decline, including John Milton and Walter Scott. Some Western authors plummeted as well, including Homer, Dante, and Cervantes. Classic American writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Harriet Beecher Stowe have also become less popular (by 59% and 56%, respectively).

Table 2.2. Authors That Have Declined in Popularity, 2011–25 (top 20)

Author	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
William Shakespeare	530	474	342	-188
Plato	270	213	207	-63
John Milton	109	116	55	-54
Homer	146	110	97	-49
Ernest Hemingway	81	39	33	-48
Joseph Conrad	62	43	16	-46
Mark Twain	67	59	28	-39
Albert Camus	78	40	45	-33
Walter Scott	38	9	7	-31
Dante Alighieri	60	61	34	-26
T.S. Eliot	48	32	22	-26
Christopher Marlowe	28	8	2	-26
Alexis de Tocqueville	99	88	74	-25
Miguel de Cervantes	59	41	34	-25
Harriet Beecher Stowe	43	33	19	-24
Kate Chopin	39	13	15	-24
Stephen Crane	29	20	6	-23
Tennessee Williams	36	24	14	-22
Honoré de Balzac	22	14	0	-22
Ralph Ellison	43	28	22	-21

Note. Contemporary writers (post-1945) excluded.

These steep declines, however, were confined largely to the literary canon. As Table 2.2 shows, of the 20 canonical authors that declined most in popularity, only two were outside the literary tradition (Plato and Tocqueville). These important exceptions aside, many great works of philosophy and social theory surged in popularity. As Table 2.3 shows, a broad range of thinkers gained ground, including Kant, Marx, Mill, and Weber.

Table 2.3. Authors That Increased in Popularity, 2011–25 (top 20)

Author	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
Immanuel Kant	87	103	136	+49
Karl Marx	129	128	165	+36
John Stuart Mill	83	98	115	+32
Jeremy Bentham	18	9	46	+28
Martin Luther	7	40	32	+25
Max Weber	54	61	78	+24
David Hume	76	70	95	+19
Thomas Aquinas	34	37	52	+18
Anonymous (<i>The Upanishads</i>)	9	7	27	+18
Anonymous (The Bible)	46	77	64	+18
Vladimir Lenin	5	33	23	+18
F.A. Hayek	11	17	29	+18
Jun'ichirō Tanizaki	14	13	31	+17
Anonymous (<i>One Thousand and One Nights</i>)	4	8	21	+17
Thomas Hobbes	60	74	76	+16
Harriet Jacobs	30	31	46	+16
Baruch Spinoza	11	31	26	+15
Hippocrates	4	8	19	+15
Frederick Douglass	42	56	56	+14
Anselm of Canterbury	11	17	24	+13

Note. Contemporary (post-1945) authors excluded. Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* excluded.

There is also evidence that the canon is broadening somewhat. World literature receives a greater, if still modest, accent, as indicated in the above table by the *Upanishads* and the Japanese novelist Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. American literature is represented by Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, whose autobiographies detail their experiences of slavery and struggle for abolition. Note, though, how modest this growth is. The canon is shrinking more than it is growing, as literature has declined more than philosophy has expanded.

We further placed canonical authors of philosophy/social theory and literature into distinct intellectual traditions, to see if any were driving these general changes. For example, when we confine our analysis to all canonical authors prior to 1945, we notice a particularly sharp decline in American and English literature, but not in world literature, which has grown somewhat since 2011 from a very small base (see Table 2.4). Many varieties of political and

social theory, meanwhile, increased modestly. Anglo-American political philosophy rebounded in 2021–25, after dipping in 2016–20, perhaps because of new centers and initiatives at UT.⁹

Table 2.4. Assignments by Category, 2011–25

Subject	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
<i>Literature</i>				
American Literature	953	875	669	-30%
British Literature	1,534	1,372	1,018	-34%
European Literature	1,662	1,468	1,357	-18%
Latin American Literature	129	77	81	-37%
World Literature	41	38	79	+93%
<i>Philosophy/Social Theory</i>				
Anglo-American Philosophy	555	541	620	+12%
Continental Philosophy	950	992	1,000	+5%
Social Theory	841	899	916	+9%
World Philosophy	48	46	63	+31%
Other	106	93	138	+30%
Total	6,819	6,401	5,941	-13%

Note. “World literature” comprises African, Middle Eastern, East Asian, and South Asian literature. “World philosophy” comprises East Asian and South Asian philosophical texts. “Other” contains works that were difficult to classify—predominantly, treatises on art and architecture, as well as some scientific works.

The analysis thus far has excluded contemporary authors—that is, authors whose main works were published after 1945. The contemporary period offers some particular challenges, as the canonical stature of many authors is still being contested. To deal with this difficulty, we include the most commonly assigned authors in the humanities and social sciences at UT Austin, many of whom are at least possible candidates for canonization by virtue of their popularity.¹⁰

Critical theorists are especially popular on the list of more contemporary authors, as Table 2.5 shows. Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire, and Edward Said top the list, while Frantz

⁹ The surge in traditional philosophers likely owes to an increase in philosophy courses in general. An analysis of course titles—an imperfect proxy—found 37 new course offerings in this field in 2021–25, with respect to 2011–15.

¹⁰ We exclude authors whose main works were published after 1990. Since many of them are still writing, it seems premature to consider them possible candidates for canonization. We also exclude authors whose work is particularly relevant to American history, culture, and politics, as they are examined in our report on American civics.

Fanon and Benedict Anderson are popular as well, with more than 200 assignments combined. Despite this dominance, the rationalist Anglo-American tradition is not neglected, as works by Peter Singer and John Rawls are also commonly assigned. We see prominent works on gender (Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir) as well as on race, nationalism, and empire (Eric Hobsbawm, Aimé Césaire, and Chinua Achebe). Additionally, some classics in sociological and anthropological theory (Erving Goffman, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu) are popular.

Table 2.5. Most Commonly Assigned Contemporary Authors, 2011–25

Author	Top Text	Count
Michel Foucault	<i>Discipline and Punish</i>	302
Paulo Freire	<i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>	267
Edward Said	<i>Orientalism</i>	194
John Berger	<i>Ways of Seeing</i>	146
Peter Singer	<i>Ethics in the Real World</i>	145
Italo Calvino	<i>Invisible Cities</i>	143
Frantz Fanon	<i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>	134
Erving Goffman	<i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>	134
Gabriel García Márquez	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	117
Hannah Arendt	<i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i>	108
Benedict Anderson	<i>Imagined Communities</i>	107
Clifford Geertz	<i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i>	107
John Rawls	<i>A Theory of Justice</i>	101
Judith Butler	<i>Gender Trouble</i>	98
Eric Hobsbawm	<i>The Invention of Tradition</i>	93
Chinua Achebe	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	92
Aimé Césaire	<i>Discourse on Colonialism</i>	91
Simone de Beauvoir	<i>The Second Sex</i>	91
Pierre Bourdieu	<i>Distinction</i>	90
Primo Levi	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i>	87

Note. Two texts on art and aesthetics (by Robert Venturi and Peter Brooks) are excluded, as is a text on popular science by Stephen Jay Gould.

The top contemporary authors that declined in popularity during the study period were a motley mix (see Table 2.6), a finding that is perhaps to be expected given their disputed stature. The table includes several social theorists, most notably Bourdieu, Geertz, and Claude Lévi-Strauss as well as some critics who have also had an influence on social theory, such as Guy

Debord, Marshall McLuhan, Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, and Michel de Certeau. We see a further decline in literary authors, ranging from Latin American novelists like Carlos Fuentes and Ángeles Mastretta to playwrights and novelists like Samuel Beckett, Salman Rushdie, Aldous Huxley, and Tom Stoppard. Some European writers, like Italo Calvino and Marguerite Duras, also declined.

Table 2.6. Contemporary Authors That Declined in Popularity, 2011–25 (top 21)

Author	Top Text	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson	<i>Metaphors We Live By</i>	32	4	5	-27
Carlos Fuentes	<i>The Death of Artemio Cruz</i>	28	12	2	-26
Italo Calvino	<i>Invisible Cities</i>	63	41	39	-24
Samuel Beckett	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	43	22	19	-24
Edward Said	<i>Orientalism</i>	79	58	57	-22
Salman Rushdie	<i>Midnight's Children</i>	30	22	9	-21
Ángeles Mastretta	<i>Arráncame la vida</i>	21	39	0	-21
Richard Dawkins	<i>The Selfish Gene</i>	38	27	18	-20
Noam Chomsky	<i>Language and the Problems of Knowledge</i>	31	11	13	-18
Pierre Bourdieu	<i>Distinction</i>	38	31	21	-17
Herbert S. Klein	<i>A Concise History of Bolivia</i>	29	18	15	-14
Marguerite Duras	<i>Hiroshima, Mon Amour</i>	19	7	5	-14
Clifford Geertz	<i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i>	39	42	26	-13
Guy Debord	<i>The Society of the Spectacle</i>	20	19	7	-13
Aldous Huxley	<i>Brave New World</i>	19	14	6	-13
Marshall McLuhan	<i>Understanding Media</i>	23	14	13	-10
Primo Levi	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i>	33	30	24	-9
Tom Stoppard	<i>Arcadia</i>	28	23	19	-9
Claude Lévi-Strauss	<i>Structural Anthropology</i>	14	15	5	-9
Michel de Certeau	<i>The Practice of Everyday Life</i>	29	22	21	-8
Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>No Exit</i>	25	17	17	-8

By contrast, a clearer pattern emerges when we look at contemporary authors who have surged in popularity (see Table 2.7). Here, the accent is on critical theory, and secondarily on liberal and Marxist thinkers. Thus, the changes are headlined by Foucault, Paulo Freire, and

Fanon. To a lesser extent, liberal theorists (Rawls, Nozick, and Arendt) and relatively old-fashioned Marxists (Harvey and Hobsbawm) increased in popularity as well.¹¹ In the literary realm, there is a stress on medievalism and Anglo-Catholic literature—C.S. Lewis, Tolkien, and Beowulf. But such literature is still rare: only 5 of the top 20 authors here were literary authors.

Table 2.7. Contemporary Authors That Increased in Popularity, 2011–25 (top 21)

Author	Top Text	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
Michel Foucault	<i>Discipline and Punish</i>	82	96	124	+42
Gabriel García Márquez	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	15	47	55	+40
Paulo Freire	<i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>	70	92	105	+35
Erving Goffman	<i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>	25	49	60	+35
John Rawls	<i>A Theory of Justice</i>	20	27	54	+34
Robert Nozick	<i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>	15	13	44	+29
Frantz Fanon	<i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>	33	45	56	+23
Hannah Arendt	<i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i>	24	40	44	+20
Bruno Latour	<i>Science in Action</i>	11	20	30	+19
David Harvey	<i>Paris, Capital of Modernity</i>	8	19	24	+16
J.R.R. Tolkien	<i>The Hobbit</i>	12	38	27	+15
Donna Haraway	<i>A Cyborg Manifesto</i>	21	20	36	+15
Thomas S. Kuhn	<i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i>	19	16	34	+15
Judith Butler	<i>Gender Trouble</i>	25	35	38	+13
Chinua Achebe	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	25	30	37	+12
Jürgen Habermas	<i>The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere</i>	19	28	31	+12
Jean Baudrillard	<i>Simulations</i>	5	14	16	+11
Terry Eagleton	<i>On Culture</i>	5	13	16	+11
Eric Hobsbawm	<i>The Invention of Tradition</i>	23	37	33	+10
Anonymous	<i>Beowulf: A Verse Translation</i>	10	16	20	+10
C.S. Lewis	<i>The Abolition of Man</i>	9	18	17	+8

Note. Treatises on photography, film, and architecture have been excluded.

Whereas many of the older authors were declining in popularity toward the close of the study period, most of the ranking contemporary authors were consolidating their stature. In fact,

¹¹ The growing popularity of authors like Foucault and Rawls more than offset the waning interest in the thinkers profiled in the previous table: there was an average of 21 more assignments in Table 2.7, versus 16 fewer assignments in Table 2.6.

when we took the widest view, broadening our analysis to include *all* literary and philosophical works with over 30 assignments, we noticed a surge in contemporary philosophy and social thought (Table 2.8).¹² But the period also saw a more modest growth of interest in traditional philosophy and theory, stretching from antiquity to the end of World War II. Last, while literature declined in both eras, the assignment of pre-1945 works dropped more sharply. And, after 1945, the surge in political thought was *not* accompanied by any uptick in literature.

Table 2.8. Synopsis of Change in the Canon at UT Austin, 2011–25

Canonical Category	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Percent Change
<i>Literature</i>	5,671	5,243	4,484	-21%
Contemporary (1945-1990)	1,330	1,392	1,237	-7%
Traditional (pre-1945)	4,341	3,851	3,247	-25%
<i>Philosophy/Social Theory</i>	4,821	5,003	5,595	+16%
Contemporary (1945-1990)	2,343	2,453	2,901	+24%
Traditional (pre-1945)	2,478	2,550	2,694	+9%
Total	10,492	10,246	10,079	-4%

Note. American authors are included in the contemporary count, so as not to distort the totals, though their analysis is reserved for our report on American civics.

Overall, the decline in the Western canon has been real, but modest: canonical works from antiquity to 1800 are assigned about 13% less often than they were back in 2011–15 (see Table 2.9). However, closer inspection reveals that much of the decline has been driven by a waning interest in medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment literature. On the other hand, with the exception of the Classical period, canonical works of political philosophy from all eras are being assigned more often. Thus, although critical theory has become more popular at UT, it has not come at the expense of Enlightenment political theory. The two rivals have prospered together. Critical theory has not colonized the curriculum at UT, as some critics may fear.

¹² The data come from some 323 authors, accounting for roughly 45 percent of all the assigned readings in literature, philosophy, and social thought.

Table 2.9. The Western Canon from Antiquity to Enlightenment, 2011–25

Canonical Text	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Change
<i>Literature</i>				
Classical	699	628	634	-9%
Medieval	172	172	127	-26%
Renaissance	803	687	494	-38%
Enlightenment	157	124	91	-42%
<i>Philosophy/Social Theory</i>				
Classical	444	355	369	-17%
Medieval	117	160	147	+26%
Renaissance	92	146	118	+28%
Enlightenment	675	748	777	+15%
Total	3,159	3,020	2,757	-13%

Note. Only pre-1800 European, British, and Latin American authors are included in this table.

Finally, since critics often claim that conservative voices have been marginalized in higher education, we take a closer look at the conservative canon at UT Austin. While delineating the boundaries of conservatism is challenging, we have assembled a list of thinkers who have seldom been treated as liberal or progressive; indeed, many continue to have an impact on contemporary conservative movements. Although their place in the curriculum is not very conspicuous, conservatives *are* assigned at the University of Texas. In fact, they are growing somewhat in popularity, albeit from a small base (Table 2.10).

Table 2.10. Selected Conservative Intellectuals in the Western Canon, 2011–25 (top 9)

Author	2011–15	2016–20	2021–25	Total	Change
Edmund Burke	24	27	20	71	-4
F.A. Hayek	11	17	29	57	+18
John Ruskin	15	15	20	50	+5
C.S. Lewis	9	18	17	44	+8
Ayn Rand	5	10	15	30	+10
Thomas Carlyle	9	8	6	23	-3
Northrop Frye	5	8	6	19	+1
G. K. Chesterton	6	6	5	17	-1
Alasdair MacIntyre	3	3	8	14	+5
Total	87	112	126	325	+39

Note. Other conservatives we looked at: Mircea Eliade had 12 assignments over the study period; Leo Strauss had 6; Carl Schmitt had 3; Jacob Burckhardt and T.S. Eliot had 2 each (excluding Eliot's poetry); Oswald Spengler and

Ernst Kantorowicz had 1 each. Several conservatives—for instance, Ernst Curtius, Julius Evola, René Guénon, and Joseph de Maistre—had zero assignments. Martin Heidegger, despite his ties with the Nazi Party, is seldom treated as a conservative and so is not included here—though, for the curious, he gets 60 assignments across the study period.

A comparison with other thinkers underscores the marginal position of conservative authors at UT. Burke was assigned 20 times in 2021–25 and Hayek 29. During the same period, Locke was assigned 119 times and Mill 115 times, to take two paradigmatic liberals; and Marx was assigned 165 times and Du Bois 108 times, to take two paradigmatic left-wing intellectuals. There has also been a modest surge in libertarian thinkers at UT—Hayek and Rand were assigned 28 more times in 2021–25 than they were back in 2011–15.

II. How Are Great Books Taught?

In this section we assess how great books are taught at Texas, paying attention to the texts they are assigned with, and how these coassignments have changed over time.

The Literary Canon

We begin with an exploration of how great works of literature are taught. As noted in the previous section, many such works are much less assigned than they were even a decade ago. To a notable extent, this finding appears to be an artifact of fewer literary courses being offered at UT Austin. Our analysis of course titles—an imperfect proxy, to be sure—indicates that about 24% fewer literature courses were offered in 2021–25 than a decade earlier. This change accounts for most of the fall in literary assignments observed above.¹³ Thus, the decline itself is the main story, rather than any shift in how great literature is being taught.

¹³ In particular, our analysis found that literary offerings fell from 1,327 to 982 (-26%) using a narrow definition of “literature course,” versus 1,582 to 1,239 (-22%) using a broader definition of “literature course.” The narrow definition searched course titles for unambiguous literary markers—words like literature, poetry, fiction, novel, drama, epic, tragedy, satire, and the names of specific writers. The broader search also looked for words like

That said, there are some subtle changes in how great works of literature are being taught. For example, there has been a decline in courses on the classical epic tradition—meaning, the teaching of epics, along with the poems, novels, and essays they have influenced. These texts form part of a distinct tradition that has left its mark on Western civilization.

To see this transformation, we turn first to Dante’s *Inferno*, a work that has long held a privileged position as one of the key poems of Western civilization. Its stature was evident in the first period of our study, 2011–15, when it was assigned in courses ranging from required First-Year Signature Courses (10 times) to humanities requirements like Masterworks of World Literature (15 times). These courses often taught Dante’s classic as part of a tradition stretching from antiquity to the twentieth century.¹⁴ Today, however, Dante is taught less as part of an epic tradition. For example, Vergil’s *Aeneid* was apparently only assigned twice with the *Inferno* in 2021–25, even though the two classics were paired together some 43% of the time just 10 years prior (see Table 2.11). This change is especially striking, since Dante made the Roman poet his guide through the underworld.

Table 2.11. Authors Most Commonly Assigned Alongside Dante’s *Inferno*

Author	Top Text	Percent (2011–15)	Percent (2021–25)
Homer	<i>The Odyssey</i>	57%	9%
Vergil	<i>The Aeneid</i>	43%	9%
Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i>	37%	9%
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	29%	0%
Ovid	<i>Metamorphoses</i>	23%	0%
Giovanni Boccaccio	<i>The Decameron</i>	20%	0%
J.W. Goethe	<i>Faust</i>	17%	32%
Guy Raffa	<i>Danteworlds</i>	17%	18%
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	17%	18%
Anonymous	<i>One Thousand and One Nights</i>	11%	18%
Anonymous	<i>The Bible</i>	11%	18%

narrative, myth, romance, comedy, and storytelling. Both searches excluded creative writing and workshops, composition and rhetoric, journalism, screenwriting, theatre, and music repertoire (e.g. piano “literature”).

¹⁴ For example, a crucial chapter of Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* contains an evocation of Dante’s version of Ulysses.

Chinua Achebe	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	11%	18%
Primo Levi	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i>	11%	5%
Apollonius of Rhodes	<i>The Argonautica</i>	11%	0%
Hesiod	<i>Theogony</i>	11%	5%
Aeschylus	<i>The Oresteia</i>	11%	5%
Charles Baudelaire	<i>The Flowers of Evil</i>	9%	27%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses taught in 2011–15 (n=35) and 2021–25 (n=22).

Classes that assign Vergil’s *Aeneid* also underscore the decline in the epic tradition. The *Aeneid* is a crucial work of Roman civilization, and it was ubiquitous from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Classical authors were companions of the *Aeneid* throughout our study period, as one might expect (see Table 2.12). But in the early period (2011–15), Vergil was also taught alongside figures from the epic canon and its offshoots—Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante—all of whom grappled with Vergil in their own literary work. By the end of the study period, though, such traditional companions appear less often with the *Aeneid*, and fewer companion texts from outside of antiquity appear at all. And the ones that are assigned are less likely to be from the canon, such as Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass* (a novel for young adults) and Femi Osofisan’s *Women of Owu* (a retelling of Euripides’s *Trojan Women* set in West Africa). An analysis of Homer’s *Odyssey* tells a similar story to that of the *Aeneid*.¹⁵

Table 2.12. Most Commonly Assigned Authors with Vergil’s *Aeneid*

Author	Top Text	Percent (2011–15)	Percent (2021–25)
Homer	<i>The Odyssey</i>	93%	96%
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	43%	63%
William Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i>	40%	38%
Ovid	<i>Metamorphoses</i>	38%	38%
Dante Alighieri	<i>Divine Comedy</i>	33%	8%
Hesiod	<i>Theogony</i>	31%	75%
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	29%	54%
Plato	<i>Symposium</i>	26%	38%
Anonymous	<i>The Bible</i>	21%	4%
Aeschylus	<i>The Oresteia</i>	19%	38%

¹⁵ For Homer, companion texts from the Greco-Roman world remain quite vibrant, but there is a real decline in teaching *The Odyssey* with texts from the later literary tradition—such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Julius Caesar	<i>Gaul</i>	14%	42%
Apollonius of Rhodes	<i>The Argonautica</i>	14%	0%
Miguel de Cervantes	<i>Don Quixote</i>	12%	0%
John Milton	<i>Paradise Lost</i>	12%	0%
Guy Raffa	<i>Danteworlds</i>	10%	0%
Apollodorus	<i>The Library of Greek Mythology</i>	10%	0%
Peter S. Hawkins	<i>Dante</i>	7%	0%
Primo Levi	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i>	7%	0%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses taught in 2011–15 (n=42) and 2021–25 (n=24). Pullman is assigned 8 times in that latter period, and Osofisan is assigned 6 times.

A parallel shift is evident in the teaching of English classics (see Table 2.13). Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was also taught less frequently with classic English authors. For example, whereas Milton was taught with Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* almost 30% of the time in 2011–15, the pairing had declined by well over half by 2021–25. Traditional companion authors such as Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and Thomas Malory also declined.

Table 2.13. Most Commonly Assigned Authors with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Author(s)	Title	2011–15	2021–25	Change	Percent (2011–15)	Percent (2021–25)
Jonathan Swift	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	19	5	-14	29%	15%
Geoffrey Chaucer	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	19	4	-15	29%	12%
Anonymous	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	14	4	-10	22%	12%
Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	11	7	-4	17%	21%
Mary Shelley	<i>Frankenstein</i>	11	3	-8	17%	9%
William Shakespeare	<i>The Tempest</i>	11	3	-8	17%	9%
Virginia Woolf	<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	11	1	-10	17%	3%
Thomas Malory	<i>Le Morte d'Arthur</i>	10	2	-8	15%	6%
William Blake	<i>Songs of Innocence and Experience</i>	9	3	-6	14%	9%
Edmund Spenser	<i>The Faerie Queene</i>	9	2	-7	14%	6%
William Shakespeare	<i>Henry VI</i>	9	0	-9	14%	0%
T.S. Eliot	<i>The Waste Land</i>	8	5	-3	12%	15%
Alexander Pope	<i>The Rape of the Lock</i>	8	2	-6	12%	6%
Joseph Conrad	<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	8	0	-8	12%	0%
Samuel Beckett	<i>Happy Days</i>	7	0	-7	11%	0%
Thomas Hobbes	<i>Leviathan</i>	6	4	-2	9%	12%
Aphra Behn	<i>Oroonoko</i>	6	2	-4	9%	6%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to the number of courses taught in 2011–15 (n=65) and 2021–25 (n=33).

The significance of these changes, of course, depends on one's philosophical approach to great books. Some might see these developments as worrying on the grounds that there is something valuable about understanding these works within their particular literary tradition. Others, though, might note that these classics are being integrated into a more diverse, more contemporary, and more cosmopolitan set of readings.

The Philosophy Canon

As we have seen, the study period saw a surge in canonical authors in philosophy and social theory at the University of Texas. Here, we take a closer look at how such thinkers are being taught, largely by exploring the texts with which they are paired. As we will see, great works of philosophy are still typically offered with other canonical texts as well as with contemporary works of social, political, and ethical salience.

Consider, for example, the works of John Locke. Locke, of course, is one of the representative Anglo-American philosophers, most often appearing alongside fellow liberal theorists. His most frequently assigned text is *The Second Treatise of Government*. As Table 2.14 shows, this foundational work is often assigned with other liberal texts (by Tocqueville, Hobbes, Madison, and Mill) as well as with critics of liberalism (Marx and Du Bois) and thinkers who are harder to classify (Aristotle and Rousseau).

Table 2.14. Authors Assigned with Locke's *Second Treatise*, 2011–25 (top 9)

Author	Top Text	Total	Percent
Alexis de Tocqueville	<i>Democracy in America</i>	84	35%
Thomas Hobbes	<i>Leviathan</i>	79	33%
Aristotle	<i>Politics</i>	66	28%
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	<i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i>	66	28%

Madison, Hamilton, Jay	<i>Federalist Papers</i>	60	25%
John Stuart Mill	<i>On Liberty</i>	54	23%
Karl Marx	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	52	22%
John Locke	<i>Letter Concerning Toleration</i>	47	20%
W.E.B. Du Bois	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	42	18%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses in database (n=239).

At the same time, Locke is also increasingly taught with a different mix of texts. Today Locke’s *Second Treatise* is also commonly paired with works on race and imperialism, such as those by Washington, Douglass, and Du Bois (Table 2.15). These Black American thinkers surged between 2016 and 2025; other authors who had similar concerns also grew in popularity as companions to Locke, though their counts were still too low to report in the table below. This is a notable finding, as it shows that an increased attention to race and empire is linked with traditional philosophical material in some parts of the curriculum—suggesting that students have an opportunity to grapple with diverse intellectual perspectives in a single course.

Table 2.15. Authors Assigned with Locke’s *Second Treatise* (top 20)

Author	Top Text	Percent (2011–15)	Percent (2021–25)
Thomas Hobbes	<i>Leviathan</i>	30%	39%
Karl Marx	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	16%	33%
Alexis de Tocqueville	<i>Democracy in America</i>	43%	32%
Madison, Hamilton, Jay	<i>The Federalist Papers</i>	18%	31%
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	<i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i>	27%	29%
Aristotle	<i>Politics</i>	30%	26%
W.E.B. Du Bois	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	7%	25%
Booker T. Washington	<i>Up from Slavery</i>	4%	25%
Frederick Douglass	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	4%	24%
John Stuart Mill	<i>On Liberty</i>	20%	23%
Robert Nozick	<i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>	1%	16%
Adam Smith	<i>The Wealth of Nations</i>	17%	15%
John Rawls	<i>A Theory of Justice</i>	1%	15%
Plato	<i>The Republic</i>	17%	11%
Max Weber	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	0%	10%
Niccolò Machiavelli	<i>The Prince</i>	17%	9%
Friedrich Nietzsche	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>	10%	9%
Edmund Burke	<i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i>	6%	8%

Ruth Benedict	<i>Patterns of Culture</i>	0%	8%
Friedrich Hayek	<i>The Road to Serfdom</i>	10%	7%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses taught in 2011–15 (n=82) and 2021–25 (n=87).

Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration* is also getting drawn into contemporary debates. In 2011–15, this philosophical work was assigned alongside texts associated with general political philosophy (e.g., Hobbes, Tocqueville, Rousseau). Today, though, it is increasingly assigned alongside texts on free speech, the law, and the jurisprudence of toleration in courses like “Constitutional Principles.” This profile probably reflects the salience of free-speech issues during the era of cancellation and the wider debate about free speech in a polarized polity.

The diversity of pedagogical approaches to Locke is typical of other canonical authors, from Plato to Marx. Although there is not space for a detailed analysis here, our research indicates that such thinkers appear in a variety of contexts, indicating the continued vitality of the canon at UT Austin.

A comparable picture emerges from a look at one of the quintessential contemporary theorists taught at UT Austin—Michel Foucault, the most commonly assigned author from the contemporary canon. We focus here on his most commonly assigned work: *Discipline and Punish*, assigned 60 times in 2021–25. As Table 2.16 shows, *Discipline and Punish* often appears alongside other landmark theoretical texts, such as those of Émile Durkheim, Freud, Du Bois, Weber, and Marx. But it also appears with carceral studies authors like Angela Davis and Simone Browne and even among art historians like Erwin Panofsky and Rudolf Wittkower.

Table 2.16. Most Commonly Assigned Authors with Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (top 10)

Author	Top Text	2021–25	Percent
Émile Durkheim	<i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i>	21	35%
Michel Foucault	<i>Madness and Civilization</i>	19	32%
Angela Davis	<i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>	13	22%
Sigmund Freud	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i>	12	20%

W.E.B. Du Bois	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	11	18%
Max Weber	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	11	18%
Karl Marx	<i>The German Ideology</i>	11	18%
Erwin Panofsky	<i>Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History</i>	10	17%
Rudolf Wittkower	<i>Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism</i>	10	17%
Simone Browne	<i>Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness</i>	9	15%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses in database (n=60).

Foucault’s coassignment profile indicates that critical theory is being taught alongside older social theory at UT Austin, a pattern that holds across all three time periods. However, in recent years, Foucault’s role in courses on carceral studies as well as in courses on gender and state power seems to have expanded markedly, as Table 2.17 shows. Thus, Foucault is well integrated into the curriculum in a variety of fields. An examination of Du Bois and Fanon tells similar stories. Both are taught alongside a diverse array of canonical thinkers as well as with more contemporary empirical and theoretical material.

Table 2.17. Most Commonly Assigned Authors with Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, 2011–25 (top 20)

Author	Top Text	Percent (2011–15)	Percent (2021–25)
Émile Durkheim	<i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i>	50%	35%
Angela Davis	<i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>	0%	22%
Sigmund Freud	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i>	17%	20%
Karl Marx	<i>The German Ideology</i>	47%	18%
Max Weber	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	33%	18%
W.E.B. Du Bois	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	10%	18%
Erwin Panofsky	<i>Meaning in the Visual Arts</i>	0%	17%
Rudolf Wittkower	<i>Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism</i>	0%	17%
Simone Browne	<i>Dark Matters</i>	7%	15%
Joy James	<i>Resisting State Violence</i>	3%	13%
Amy Brandzel	<i>Against Citizenship</i>	0%	13%
Ariela Gross	<i>What Blood Won't Tell</i>	0%	13%
Joseph J. Ellis	<i>What Did the Declaration Declare?</i>	0%	13%
Lawrence M. Friedman	<i>Crime and Punishment in American History</i>	0%	13%
Margot Canaday	<i>The Straight State</i>	0%	13%
Martha Chamallas	<i>Introduction to Feminist Legal Theory</i>	0%	13%
Pierre Bourdieu	<i>The Logic of Practice</i>	17%	12%
Jürgen Habermas	<i>Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader</i>	10%	12%
Michelle Alexander	<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in</i>	7%	7%

	<i>the Age of Colorblindness</i>		
Erving Goffman	<i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>	23%	5%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses taught in 2011–15 (n=30) and 2021–25 (n=60). *Discipline and Punish* is most commonly assigned with other texts by Foucault. This row has been eliminated from the table.

While most great books are positioned within well-defined intellectual traditions and paired with other classics, there are exceptions. One is Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which became an instant classic upon its publication in 1968. It helped found the field of critical pedagogy, building explicitly on Marx and Lenin. It is one of the most commonly assigned texts at UT Austin, with a count of 267 across the study period. Yet the text is not assigned alongside other canonical treatments of education, such as those by Plato or Rousseau. Rather, it is assigned alongside other texts aligned ideologically with Freire, but with a more empirical and American bent. Perhaps this fact reflects where Freire sits in the curriculum. Freire is taught in courses such as “Sociocultural Influences on Learning,” “Knowing and Learning in Math and Science,” and other courses in UT’s pedagogy curriculum—required courses, for some pathways through the discipline. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* thus functions as one of the main theoretical lights informing the study of American education. It is paired predominantly with texts that emphasize inequality and racism in the educational system (Table 2.18).

Table 2.18. Most Commonly Assigned Texts with Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2011–25 (top 14)

Author	Title	Count	Percent
Gloria Ladson-Billings	<i>The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children</i>	56	21%
Angela Valenzuela	<i>Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring</i>	34	13%
Jeannie Oakes	<i>Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality</i>	26	10%
bell hooks	<i>Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom</i>	26	10%
Lev Vygotsky	<i>Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes</i>	19	7%
Pedro Noguera and Jean Yonemura Wing (eds.)	<i>Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Gap in Our Schools</i>	18	7%

Peter McLaren	<i>Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education</i>	16	6%
Annette Lareau	<i>Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education</i>	16	6%
Howard Gardner	<i>Multiple Intelligences</i>	15	6%
Ta-Nehisi Coates	<i>Between the World and Me</i>	14	5%
Carter G. Woodson	<i>The Mis-Education of the Negro</i>	14	5%
Gloria Anzaldúa	<i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i>	14	5%
Mason Stokes	<i>The Color of Sex</i>	13	5%
Meredith Woo-Cumings	<i>The Developmental State</i>	13	5%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses in database (n=267).

And, finally, the presence of some conservatives in the curriculum raises an interesting question: How are conservatives being taught in a curriculum that is dominated by center-left and progressive voices? It is helpful to begin with Edmund Burke, the founder of Anglo-American conservatism. As mentioned, Burke has a relatively modest place among the other canonical authors, being assigned in a total of 71 courses over the study period. But in other respects, Burke’s profile resembles that of his peers. He is assigned in a wide variety of courses—including political and social theory, history, and literature (appearing in surveys of British literature for his aesthetic theories as well as for the quality of his prose). *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was frequently taught alongside Rousseau in a “Reacting to the Past” module on the French Revolution. Burke is often taught alongside not only his contemporaries or near-contemporaries, but also thinkers such as Plato, Locke, and Marx—authors with whom he is philosophically at odds (Table 2.19). Notably, Burke is not taught with other conservatives, in part because there are very few courses on the conservative intellectual tradition.

Table 2.19. Authors Most Commonly Assigned Alongside Edmund Burke, 2011–25

Author	Count	Percent
John Locke	31	44%
Plato	22	31%
Karl Marx	21	30%
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	21	30%
Thomas Hobbes	20	28%
William Shakespeare	18	25%
William Blake	16	23%

Mary Wollstonecraft	15	21%
John Bunyan	15	21%
Thomas Taylor	14	20%
Olaudah Equiano	14	20%
Richard Hooker	14	20%
T.S. Eliot	13	18%
John Milton	13	18%
Geoffrey of Monmouth	13	18%
Wace	13	18%
Elizabeth Barrett Browning	13	18%
Aphra Behn	13	18%
Thomas Malory	13	18%
Geoffrey Chaucer	13	18%
Jonathan Swift	13	18%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses in database (n=71).

In recent years, the most frequently assigned conservative text at UT has not been *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; it was *The Road to Serfdom* by Friedrich Hayek, which appeared in 27 syllabi from 2021 to 2025. Hayek’s classic shows up with an even more diverse range of coassignments than Burke (see Table 2.20). *The Road to Serfdom* is assigned alongside economic thinkers and novelists, and alongside Marxists and conservatives. This diversity reflects the broad range of courses that assign Hayek—from First-Year Seminar Courses (“Philosophy & Dystopian Novels” and “Ideas of the Twentieth Century”), to Classics of Social Theory, to history courses (e.g., “Globalization”), and to a civics course (“Democracy and Capitalism”). In a range of classes, then, Hayek appears to be a helpful interlocutor for thinking through the controversies of the twentieth century. In only one course, however, is Hayek put in sustained dialogue with other conservatives such as Nozick and C.S. Lewis. The class is “Arguing with Conservatives,” a rare course focusing on American conservatism. In addition, Hayek is taught with other foundational economic thinkers such as Smith.

Table 2.20. Texts Most Commonly Assigned Alongside *The Road to Serfdom*, 2011–25 (top 11)

Author	Text	Count	Percent
Adam Smith	<i>Wealth of Nations</i>	19	40%
John Locke	<i>The Second Treatise of Government</i>	15	31%
Karl Marx	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	14	29%
Robert Nozick	<i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>	13	27%

C.S. Lewis	<i>The Abolition of Man</i>	13	27%
David Hume	<i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>	11	23%
Leszek Kolakowski	<i>Main Currents of Marxism</i>	11	23%
André Breton	<i>Nadja</i>	11	23%
Fyodor Dostoevsky	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>	11	23%
Agatha Christie	<i>The Murder of Roger Ackroyd</i>	11	23%
Jean-François Lyotard	<i>The Postmodern Condition</i>	11	23%

Note. Denominator in “percentage” refers to number of courses in database (n=48).

In sum, contrary to what many critics of higher education might lead one to expect, the traditional canon is very much intact at Texas. Students have ample opportunities to take courses on Plato and Shakespeare. In some cases, especially in some core areas of philosophy, they have even more opportunities to read classic texts than they did before the “great awakening.” Moreover, many of the old canonical authors are taught in conversation with newer voices from the world of critical theory.

But, as we have shown, there are signs of a weakening canon. This is especially true of the teaching of literary classics, which is in precipitous decline. Students also have dwindling opportunities to read epics from antiquity through the Renaissance together, as part of a tradition. Meanwhile, conservative thinkers, like Burke, are also neglected.

Conclusion

This report has offered a mixed portrait of the humanities and social sciences at UT Austin. While the assignment of many literary classics has declined markedly, the teaching of great works of philosophy is on the rise. And while the curriculum includes more critical theory than it once did, it has hardly come to dominate UT's course offerings. With the exception of the marginal status of conservative intellectuals, then, students have many opportunities to encounter great thinkers at UT Austin.

On the whole, course offerings in American politics and history seem more sectarian. In this area, the curriculum has become more narrowly focused and often treats contentious topics in one-sided ways. The curriculum would benefit from the inclusion of more center-left and conservative perspectives.

UT Austin has announced plans to reform its core requirements. Currently, the core curriculum comprises “a haphazard grab bag of classes,” as university president Jim Davis recently put it.¹⁶ This may be an opportunity to arrest the decline of canonical literature, especially the older classics.

Nationally, much of the reform energy in higher education has been directed toward teaching more great books, especially important works of political philosophy. At UT, those efforts may help account for the enduring vitality of the canon. This report, though, suggests that UT's curriculum on America itself—its people, history, institutions, and controversies—needs more attention. And, insofar as what is sometimes called the civics movement is primarily

¹⁶ Michael T. Nietzel, “University of Texas Unveils Complete Overhaul of Its Core Curriculum,” *Forbes*, August 14, 2026, www.forbes.com/sites/michaelt Nietzel/2026/08/14/university-of-texas-unveils-complete-overhaul-of-its-core-curriculum/. Our analysis of the Signature Course program—one of the key elements of the core curriculum—entirely substantiated President Davis's remarks, though we did not include that analysis in our report.

focused on making sure students are reading Plato and Locke, it will do little to correct some of the problems we identify in this report.