

# THE RESPONSIBLE PROFESSOR: EAPs AND THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

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*Abstract:* Universities commonly engage Employee Assistance Programs to help workers with their problems. In this institutional case study of neoliberalism in action, I analyze the EAP newsletters from one Canadian institution I call “Corporate U” in terms of their implications for full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty. I show how their messaging counterproductively amplifies pressures in today’s university to be *resilient* and *perform* and be *accountable*. I take the EAP to be an agent of the university, and as such, their newsletters demonstrate the rise of neoliberal managerialism in academic life. Of particular concern is their individualising tendency to construct “the responsible professor” as an ideal to which all academic workers must now aspire.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, responsabilisation, higher education, employee assistance, managerialism, resilience, performance

*Résumé:* Les universités font régulièrement appel à des programmes d’aide aux employés (PAE) pour aider les travailleurs et travailleuses à résoudre leurs problèmes. Dans la présente étude de cas institutionnelle sur le néolibéralisme, j’analyse les bulletins d’information des EAP d’une institution canadienne que j’appelle «Corporate U» afin de mesurer leurs impacts sur les professeurs titulaires ou en voie de titularisation. Je montre comment le message de ces bulletins amplifie de manière contre-productive les pressions exercées au sein des universités en vue de produire un corps professoral résilient, efficace et responsable. En tant qu’organe reconnu, ces bulletins illustrent la montée du néolibéralisme managérial dans le monde universitaire. Leur tendance à construire, sur une base individualisante, «le ou la professeur responsable» comme idéal auquel l’ensemble des employés universitaires devraient désormais aspirer est particulièrement préoccupante.

**Mots-clés** Néolibéralisme, responsabilisation, enseignement supérieur, programmes d’aide aux employés, gestion, résilience, efficacité

## INTRODUCTION

With a view to improving their performance and productivity, all Canadian universities, like most large organizations, engage Employee Assistance Programs (“EAPs” or sometimes “EFAPs,” Employee and Family Assistance Programs) to help workers with personal and job-related problems. These employer-sponsored counselling services commonly produce newsletters on a range of topics (e.g., depression, stress) to promote wellness (Dobson 2011) and market their services (Clark 2015: 45-6), effectively shaping a work culture’s health values and norms (Golaszewski et al. 2008: 7). Building on Gill (2009) and Gill and Donaghue (2016), this institutional case study analyses the EAP newsletters from one large, urban Canadian university of approximately 40,000 students and 1,000 faculty that I call “Corporate U,” focusing specifically on the newsletters’ implications for tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Rather than concentrate on this institution’s particularities, I aim to illuminate the role played by EAPs, as represented by their newsletters, in a generalised trend towards academic corporatisation. As the pseudonym “Corporate U” suggests, this trend encompasses an “increasing openness” of post-secondary institutions to corporate interests and business sector management principles (Newson 2000: 184-5).

While EAPs and specifically their newsletters may seem benign, and while the trend towards corporatisation of universities in Canada is less acute than elsewhere in the West, these newsletters nonetheless promote the neoliberal idea that individuals are responsible for their problems and must not rely on the state (or university) – even when those problems are generated by the increasingly intolerable demands of academic work. This is a form of neoliberal governance “that operates through ascribing freedom and autonomy to individuals and agents... while simultaneously appealing to individual responsibility-taking, independent self-steering and ‘self-care’” (Pyysiäinen et al. 2017: 216; see also Barry et al. 1996). Importantly, one’s responsibility for the self is inextricable from one’s responsibility to others, as this paper will show. In the contemporary neoliberalised university, ideal academic workers are self-sufficient (Juffer 2006) and resilient, qualities ensuring their capacity to prioritise their academic responsibilities, i.e., their responsibilities to others.

The newsletters analysed demonstrate these expectations, intensifying the coping problems that many full-time professors experience. Indeed, these newsletters – ostensibly circulated to help employees thrive – pressure readers to be *resilient*, *perform*, and be *accountable* to and for the institution. While some or even many recipients may not bother to look at these newsletters, the reality is that at least some do read them.

Like most forms of advertising, they must be effective to some extent; otherwise, the EAP and university would not bother with the time or expense of preparing and distributing them. Viewed in this light, the newsletters are important to study because they reflect an increasingly pervasive orientation on campus(es). The EAP effectively acts as an agent of the university, which pays for its services; these newsletters, provide evidence not only of the EAP's proactive intent on behalf of the university but they also reflect the rise of managerialism and the neo-liberalisation of university life. And, like the digital apps and resilience workshops analysed by Gill and Donaghue (2016), the EAP's services tend to psychologise employees' experiences as "a deficit in resilience quotient," denying employer accountability (97).

Thus, I begin with a discussion of the neoliberalisation of academia (in the West) and the rise of managerialism at Canadian universities. I then situate the EAP at Corporate U, followed by an outline of my method - Critical Discursive Thematic Analysis. Finally, I discuss 50 newsletters, published about twice per academic year since 1997. Without negating the experiences of those who find the EAP helpful, I analyse both the core message and what is left unsaid, demonstrating that these newsletters disregard the *real* struggles of academic workers by constructing "the responsible professor." This construct adds to the overall message being conveyed to increasingly embattled faculty in Canadian universities – that they have a responsibility *to perform*. In this way, the newsletters directly contribute to the generalised sense of crisis in higher education (Readings 1996). The impact on precarious academic workers notwithstanding, ultimately, I focus exclusively on the implications for tenured and tenure-track faculty because, since the neoliberal university structure has responsabilised secure academic workers, they are uniquely and increasingly facing toxic and unsustainable work relations.

### **“TOXIC ACADEMIA”: NEOLIBERALISM AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

Neoliberalism is characterised by increasing financialisation and privatisation, declining government intervention, weakening of labour market institutions including trade unions, and decreasing state responsibility for social welfare. Brown aptly describes neoliberalism as a “an economic policy, a modality of governance, and [a distinctive] order of reason,” producing “subjects, a ‘conduct of conduct’ and a scheme of valuation” (Brown 2015: 20-21) – a legacy profoundly ideological in its transformation of public institutions (39). Neoliberalism turns the subject into “a responsible self-investor and self-provider,” thereby reconfiguring the

subject to engage “in a particular form of self-sustenance that meshes with the morality of the state and the health of the economy” (2015: 84). She describes how this responsabilisation “signals a *regime* in which the singular human capacity for responsibility is deployed to constitute and govern subjects and through which their conduct is organised and measured, remaking and reorienting them for a neoliberal order” (2015: 133, emphasis in text).

In this neoliberal environment of responsabilisation, Western academe has undergone massive changes in recent decades (Brownlee 2015; Readings 1996). In Canada, the neoliberal turn began in the 1980s, and today, “market forces permeate all facets of academic life” (Brownlee 2015: 29). Neoliberalism’s economic ethos has resulted in the commercialisation of the Canadian university (Peake and Mullings 2016) and, like elsewhere in the West, the rise of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Leslie 2001).

Academic capitalism refers to “the way public research universities [have responded] to neoliberal tendencies to treat higher education policy as a subset of economic policy.” Universities and faculty engage in market-like behaviours and increasingly “must expend their human capital stocks in competitive environments” (Slaughter and Leslie 2001: 154). Academic capitalism has both structural and behavioural elements such that “[n]early all aspects of higher education...are embedded in the political economy with links to the market, nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, and the state” (Cantwell and Kauppinen 2014:3, also 5). Universities, in other words, have effectively become businesses (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) whose “institutional practices and self-representations have become isomorphic with those of private sector corporations” (Newson 2000: 185).

This transformation has laid bare the politics of time, which is always in short supply. The way time operates now has shifted to become “reified and utilized to promote the interests of capitalism” (Walker 2009: 505), with significant implications for higher education institutions and academics’ daily lives (Walker 2009: 506; 2014: 56). Efficiency and productivity have become core values (Walker 2009: 505); there is pressure to use one’s time *productively* (Walker 2009: 498-9), and the concomitant expectation to publish *more* in less time (Walker 2014: 60). Academics work ever longer hours yet spend less *quality* time on each task (60); to be sure, the compression of time has intensified demands on their time (Walker 2009: 496). There is also a sense in which the academic capitalist time regime “means freedom within a context of being more controlled” (Walker 2014: 61), owing to managerialism and other “neoliberalisations.”

Driven by this corporatism and the economic rationality of academic capitalism (or “knowledge capitalism,” as others have also described it; see Olssen and Peters 2007), today’s Western academic is no longer empowered to align with “ideals of discovery, enquiry and intellectual advancement” (Fanghanel 2012: 82). Instead, the “administrative university” (Berg and Seeber 2016) has become a toxic site of hegemonic struggles, competition, and knowledge marketisation (Shear and Hyatt 2015). An inexorable managerialism (Deem et al. 2007) has had numerous deleterious effects, especially pernicious respecting social inequalities (Brabazon 2014; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Sifaki 2016). Its effects include: ever-expanding administrations (Brownlee 2015: 107), decreasing investment in higher education (Wyile 2013), worsening faculty/student ratios, increasing precarity and casualisation of academic labour, fewer tenure-track positions, growing dissociation of teaching from research (Lorenz 2012: 605-6), standardising curricula (Giroux 2010: 285), ceaseless demand for auditability, accountability and benchmarking by faculty (Denzin and Giardina 2017: 5; Shore 2008; Shore and Wright 2000; Strathern 2000a and 2000b; Tuchman 2009), self-interested (Peters and Jandrić 2018: 554) and instrumentalist career planning (Cannizzo 2018: 6-7), destabilising collegial relationships (Polster and Newson 2015: 4), and just an overall intensification, “extensification” (Gill and Donaghue 2016), and industrialisation (Musselin 2007) of academic labour.

We are seeing increasing commercialism and entrepreneurialism in university administrations in Canada (Tudiver 1999: 4, 155; also Conlon 2000; Giroux 2010, Wyile 2013; Brownlee 2015; Mountz et al. 2015; Polster and Newson 2015; Berg and Seeber 2016; Heatherington 2017; Spooner and McNinch 2018). As Tudiver has observed, “[Canadian] university management is larger and more hierarchical than ever, [...] appropriating power from faculty and academic bodies” and “following a business model” that capitalizes “on research as an *investment*” (1999: 4-5; emphasis in text). The situation in Canada has intensified since Tudiver wrote these words two decades ago, but to put this in some perspective, Canadian universities have been better positioned than elsewhere (e.g., the US, UK, and Australia) to resist the pressures to “marketize” (Tudiver 1999: 2). For one thing, higher education policy has historically been less centralized in Canada (Slaughter and Leslie in Tudiver 1999: 3) and there are fewer opportunities for commercialization. In addition, as Tudiver also noted in 1999, most Canadian faculty are unionised (3) unlike in the US, for example, where most are subject to “managerial rights” without similar protections deriving from (strong) Collective Agreements (Robinson, David; personal communication,

October 27, 2020). And finally, our universities historically have been publicly funded, enabling their greater independence from government and corporate interference. As Tudiver described it, government funding – around 80 percent of universities’ operating budgets when he was writing in the 1990s – provided Canadian universities with a certain measure of “insulation.” Today, however, government funds comprise less than 50 per cent. Thus, privatisation has played an increasingly prominent role in Canada, where our universities rely more and more on private donors, tuition revenues (witness the ubiquity of university marketing campaigns), and outsourcing of technology, food services, and even teaching (Robinson, David; personal communication, October 27, 2020). These tendencies are all in evidence at Corporate U and Canadian universities generally are becoming more, not less, academically capitalist in these respects.

As a consequence, many scholars denounce the “ruined university” (Rolfe 2013) for undermining the ethos of collegiality, academic freedom, and university autonomy (Brownlee 2015; Bruneau 2000; Kallio et al. 2016). In contrast with scientific management (Taylorism), which dominated in the first half of the twentieth century, the new regime of “performance management,” a neoliberal technique for making academics into governable, optimally productive subjects (Morrissey 2013), produces a new, disempowering reality (Kallio et al. 2016: 690, 703) in which academics are increasingly “managed” by their administrations in ostensibly “uncertain” economic times (Morrissey 2013: 798). Increasingly, faculty members are treated as “subservient workers” rather than “autonomous professionals” (Shaw 2000: 153; see also McKenzie 2006: 34-5, and Peters and Jandrić 2018: 557). Audit, vis-à-vis ostensibly neutral metrics and performance indicators, has emerged as a key instrument of government particularly in the UK, but is growing in its appeal to Canadian provincial governments and university administrators (Bruneau 2000; CAUT 2020a; Shore and Wright 2000; Spooner 2019). And although it has not yet fully taken hold, performance-based funding for higher education is an “old idea” that is “gathering new steam” in Canada (CAUT 2020a; see also Spooner 2019 on Ontario’s and Alberta’s plans).

The restructuring of academia appears to be fuelled by a conviction among administrators that professors are inherently irresponsible (Amit 2000: 217). Consequently, a new class of administrators – “knowledge managers” – has emerged to “maximize returns from research” (Peters and Jandrić 2018: 559) by ensuring professors’ quality, accountability, and transparency. To that end, at my institution, for example, administrators require faculty to provide a regular tally of publications, grants, and

supervisions at least annually and to answer quality assurance surveys about the university's "services" and "reputation." We are also regularly subjected to ranking (e.g., in results of internal and external funding applications) as we compete for resources within and outside the university. The "new academic subject," Sifaki argues, is "constantly monitored and evaluated by external policing and managerial practices which...have instilled new norms of conduct and behavior" (2016: 115). This behaviour, she notes, is one of complacency.

Sifaki is reflecting on the UK context, which is by all accounts further down the rabbit hole than Canadian academia, where there have been moments of resistance (Robinson, David; personal communication, 27 October, 2020), including a strike at the University of Manitoba in 2016 that was in part over workload and performance metrics (Ubokudom 2016) and the Ontario college strike in 2017 that was in part over academic freedom (Chiose 2017). These examples notwithstanding, a culture of complacency has emerged to some extent in Canada as well, however. For example, faculty often feel compelled to accommodate the corporatism of academia into their practice. We have seen this in the recent turn towards remote teaching since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, during which most, if not all, faculty have had no choice but to use Big Tech (such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams) just to be able to teach their classes – even if it has meant completely reconfiguring their courses to fit the constraints of the platform. Or for example, as governments channel research funds away from independents and toward industrial partnerships, "many academics adjust their research programs...hoping to squeeze their own research agendas into the plans of others" (Polster 2000: 195). Fearing they will otherwise be excluded, "many academics," Polster writes, "participate in various forms of university consultation and planning" that circumvent "established governance structures," thereby undermining collegial decision-making. She goes on to say that many academics support online courses instead of fighting class cancellations at satellite campuses "in the hopes of preserving access." And finally, rather than opposing performance indicators and other external mechanisms, Polster underscores that "many academics actually contribute to their production in the forlorn hope of making them either as meaningful or as harmless as possible" (Polster 2000: 195).

These compliances on the part of faculty may reflect the persistent feelings of "guilt, shame, and indebtedness" to a system beset with structural problems that Sifaki identifies in her own milieu (2016: 115). Gill (2009), also writing in the UK, ascribes academics' complacency to their exhaustion and bewilderment (241). Indeed, it seems impos-

sible to escape the demands of such a university system, partly because academics' accountability, quality, and transparency seem like perfectly reasonable expectations (Shore 2008: 291). This is especially true when taxpayers' money is involved, as it is in Canada, where the spectre of performance indicators looms large in spite of Collective Agreements and active resistance on the part of faculty unions (Bruneau 2000; CAUT 2020a; Robinson, David; personal communication, October 27, 2020; Spooner 2019). But even if performance-based funding has yet to be substantially implemented in Canada, on some level, as individuals and departments, there are nevertheless the "micro-aggressions" of everyday academic managerialism to which faculty do acquiesce. This is because invariably the "choice" is between complying and relinquishing access to resources, scuttling a promotion, passing up a new full-time hire to shoulder some of the work, or foregoing some other perceived benefit that seems otherwise unattainable.

The result of all this compliance is a professoriate trapped in a persistent state of overwhelm (Gill and Donaghue 2016: 95), and it is taking a psychosocial toll. Rising stress levels (Catano et al. 2010) and mental and emotional distress are "the new 'normal'" (Peake and Mullings 2016: 253) in the wake of austerity, growing performance-based managerialism and metric surveillance, increasing workload, work-life conflict, precarity, and other realities of contemporary university life (see also Berg et al. 2016; Chandler et al. 2002; Gill 2009; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Gillespie et al. 2001; Kinman 2014; Shin and Jung 2014; Tytherleigh et al. 2005). A recent UK report (Morrish 2019; Morrish and Priaux 2020) corroborates the sense that neoliberalism has assumed a psychic life (Scharff 2016), affecting academics' insecurities and identities (Knights and Clarke 2014). As Canadians Peake and Mullings observe, "Universities may be sites of privilege, but they are increasingly high-risk...for many of their inhabitants" (2016: 276). This is certainly true in Canada, where professors' stress rates, especially among female academics, are high when compared with both the general population and other white-collar workers (Catano et al. 2010). Notably, the pivot to remote working since the start of the pandemic, and the accompanying increase to professors' workloads, has further exacerbated academics' stress (CAUT 2020b). (Thus, a thorough consideration of EAP newsletters' role during COVID is also important, but beyond the scope of the current article.)

As we shall see in the next sections, rather than mitigating some of the risk identified by Peake and Mullings, EAPs appear to be contributing to it. I argue that EAPs and specifically their rhetoric of resilience, responsibility, and self-care embodied in the newsletters, are a part of



the problem in that they convey and promote the neoliberal university's vision of the neoliberal professorial subject.

### EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: SITUATING CORPORATE U'S EAP AND NEWSLETTERS

Geared to employees, EAPs offer counselling, workshops, problem assessment, and treatment referral for a range of personal issues that obstruct work (e.g., stress, addiction, family/marital problems, financial problems, workplace violence). Services such as health promotion (e.g., physical fitness) as well as financial and retirement planning (Gust 2009: 105; Employee Assistance Programs 2007: 381) also now fall under the purview of EAPs. Their services may be available on-site but are more often delivered through an external provider that arranges for structured assistance via a hotline (Highland 2007: 238), as is the case at Corporate U. While some EAPs tend to be single-issue programs, Corporate U is not alone in providing assistance with a range of problems, such as those listed above (Highland 2007: 237). Most EAPs provide their services confidentially, and all work from the principle that "a happy, healthy worker is likely to be a productive one" (Highland 2007: 239; also May 2016: 199). Thus, EAPs have the dual (and ethically dubious) responsibility of serving the divergent interests of both their clients – the employer paying for the service *and* the service users, the employees (Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll 2011: 341). May (2016) highlights additional ethical concerns, including the risk of profiling unhealthy employees, the monitoring of employee behaviour and the encroachment on employees' private lives (199).

Despite the apparent conflict of interest, EAPs are widely considered to be a "best practice" of human resource management. In fact, all universities in Canada – even the smallest ones – have an EAP. About ninety-two per cent, including Corporate U, are currently served by the two major national providers that have long dominated the market: Home-wood Health (about thirty-two percent) and Morneau Shepell (about sixty percent; formerly Warren Shepell). When Corporate U's EAP was implemented in 1992, their provider was a small local company but for most of its history their contracts have been with one or the other major national firm. Interestingly, not all employee groups were on board with starting an EAP at Corporate U; three unions withdrew their support in the first year, citing concerns about confidentiality and the possibility that the EAP would be used as a coercive management tool (Letter, November 11, 1992). In light of this, and the fact that EAPs are considered

a “best practice,” we can infer that the EAP at Corporate U was initiated by the administration rather than coming about as a result of collective bargaining.

The EAP Annual Reports (which provide percentages to two decimal points, leading to a rounding error) show that on average 28.71% of EAP users were Corporate U faculty, as compared with 61.6% non-academic staff and 9.7% unspecified “others,” which could refer to the family members of faculty and staff and/or members of the administration who, as members of the university health plan, are also eligible to use the EAP. The Reports also show, however, that faculty’s use of the EAP has increased (albeit unevenly) over time, from 24% of all EAP users in 1995-6 to 32% in 2014-5 (the last reporting year), with the number peaking at 38% in 2013-4 (usage statistics for all years were not kept or not found in the archival materials). The most common reasons for accessing the EAP’s services as reflected in the Annual Reports were personal/emotional stress, marital/family relations, and work. Greater social acceptance of therapy generally as well as need arising from the negative impact of managerialism and the neoliberal changes to the university described above undoubtedly contributed to faculty’s increased usage. Another likely factor, however, was increased awareness of the EAP’s services, owing to the program’s marketing efforts that included the EAP newsletters.

Most of the 50 newsletters I examined were distributed in paper format and although intended for a readership of employees, they were personally addressed and distributed to everyone at Corporate U including faculty, staff, and administrators (EAP Coordinator, personal communication, November 9, 2020). The newsletters reached them through internal mail semi-annually most years though it took some time between when the EAP Committee, comprising representatives from employee groups and management at Corporate U, took the decision to increase publicity and when they actually started distributing the newsletters (Annual Report 1992-3). With the help of Corporate U’s marketing staff, and under the rubric of EAP advertising, the EAP Coordinator began working to produce the first newsletter with a view to increasing the EAP’s users and demonstrating its value to the university (Annual Report 1997). Subsequent Annual Reports continued to include the newsletters under “publicity” and by 1999, the EAP webpage was also launched. Most recently, the EAP newsletters have also appeared periodically on the university’s intranet. In short, the marketing exposure has been significant.

A review of the newsletters available on the Morneau website reveals many newsletters that are very similar in scope and tone to those I have examined (and often adapted entirely to the Corporate U newsletter tem-

plate; see <https://www.workhealthlife.com/home/Archives>). Given that there was nothing in the archival materials to suggest that Corporate U's EAP contract was especially bespoke, we can infer that newsletters of this type are a standard feature of the EAPs' services at other institutions and likely very common. Significantly, from the outset the newsletters have foregrounded employee lifestyle choices and their implications for productivity over workplace-based illness and injury (cf. James and Zoller 2017: 1086). To that end, an internal memorandum accompanying the 2005-6 Annual Report, states: "employees are faced with...a confusing maze of decisions to make about themselves, their families and their work." With the help of an "EAP, they learn to deal with some of their personal and professional issues and learn to better manage their levels of stress, depression and anxiety." The memo continues: "an EAP [thus] becomes a strategic partner in offering support services and creating a healthy environment for the University overall" (25 July 2006: 3).

Csiernik observes that most EAPs have historically "focused upon individualising...problem[s] and seeing the worker as a troubled employee." This places the onus on employees to better themselves for the benefit of the workplace (Csiernik 2005: 4). Another internal memo, included in the Annual Report for 2008-9, makes this connection explicit: "The...EAP Committee continued to play a unique role in maintaining a vibrant and productive workforce. By promoting optimal health and wellness within the organisation, it empowers employees to lead more productive lives in a positive and high-performance environment." The same document continues: "[a]s employees learn to cope with personal and professional problems, their work performance, productivity, contribution and loyalty improve" (Annual Report 2009: 1, 3; my emphasis). In other words, *performance* is key, and individual coping is the mechanism by which performance is enhanced and loyalty is established. As for the positive effects of a "high-performance environment," well, that is debatable (Godard 2004).

#### **MATERIALS AND METHOD: CRITICAL DISCURSIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

With a view to illuminating the stress many Canadian faculty experience (Catano et al. 2010), I examined how the EAP newsletters' overarching message of responsabilisation might contribute to the neoliberalisation of Corporate U. I used Thematic Analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006); that is, I identified, analysed and reported patterns within the data (79). However, I took an expressly critical, deductive, and discour-

sive approach, seeking to situate these patterns in their larger social context – neoliberalism generally, and the neoliberal academy specifically.

To that end, I aimed for a rich, thematic description of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 83), i.e., all 50 of Corporate U's EAP newsletters published (usually) semi-annually, from the first newsletter of 1997 to the last newsletter of 2018. Authorship is usually unspecified though occasionally the EAP provider is cited as the sole source. Each newsletter is 1-3 pages and addresses a single topic (e.g., depression, work-life balance).

I began by coding the newsletters according to six central themes extracted from the data through iterative readings. These themes were largely consistent with the overall themes planned and chosen by the provider: emotions; work; money; health and fitness; family and relationships; and the EAP itself. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's definition of a theme - that which captures "something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning (82, emphasis in text) - I based a theme's importance on its relationship to the research question as opposed to its prevalence. I did not use research software; I made notes about each newsletter (including initial questions and critical reflections), marked sections relevant to the research question using colour-coded flags, manually recorded their locations and substantive messages, and cut and sorted the excerpts into thematic groupings that I then analysed one by one. Analysis was always recursive between the data set, the coded extracts and my explorations.

I then revisited each newsletter, coding them according to what was *not* being said and interrogating their meaning by opposition or absence. I focused on the "*underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84, emphasis in text). "Latent sub-themes," in other words, reflected the newsletters' overarching message(s) and objective(s) and by drawing them out vis-à-vis the silences, I was able to reflect on their implications for faculty specifically. Following review and refinement, these sub-themes were grouped (along with exemplary extracts) into five categories: normative; directive; educational; responsibility to others; and responsibility to self. Formal analysis and writing up of the data were driven mainly by these latent sub-themes, with the major themes listed above serving as a frame of reference.

I initially regarded the newsletters as documentary sources requiring citation, but soon realised that, in representing Corporate U and its EAP, they were the equivalent of human informants. As such, to ensure the

anonymity of Corporate U and its employees, the newsletters needed to be treated with the same level of care that I would use with human participants. Thus, I cite the newsletters minimally, by date and topic only.

In addition to the systematic critical and discursive Thematic Analysis of the newsletters, archival materials (e.g., Annual Reports and university newspaper items) helped provide a history of Corporate U's EAP and its evolution. They also evinced faculty members' experiences because they often included the results of anonymous workshop evaluations. Thus, I draw on these materials to provide context, as appropriate, but cite them minimally to preserve anonymity.

Before turning to my findings, I should like to reiterate the *caveat* that as communications addressed to a diverse audience of employees, the materials did not speak specifically of the "responsible professor" *per se*. To be clear, rather than dissecting the newsletters at a granular level as one might do in a project using content analysis, I read the newsletters discursively – in terms of their overarching themes, messages, and implications. At the discursive level, their generic orientation towards responsabilization was very clear. When read in the context of, and against the nature and demands of, academic work in the neoliberal university, they evoked an imperative of responsabilization that arguably any average employee reading the newsletters would internalise through the lens of their particular experiences and circumstances. One could equally do an analysis of the implications of these newsletters in terms of the "responsible support staff person," for example, as well; indeed, I think that would be a useful exercise.

### **(IT SHOULD BE) LIKE WATER OFF A DUCK'S BACK**

The range of newsletter topics was limited, and themes were frequently recycled. Their content was determined not by the types of calls for assistance received by the EAP, as one might expect, but in accordance with the provider's monthly themes (EAP Coordinator, personal communication, March 28, 2019). That there was no connection to the reasons people called the EAP is reflected in the data: Every newsletter between 2012 and 2016 stated that the "[m]ost requested services were for personal relationships, work and mental health issues" and according to the EAP Annual Reports, work-related calls, for example, began trending upward in 2005. Yet, as Figure 1 below reflects, only 4 of 50 newsletters, or 8%, have "work" as the topic. Eighteen newsletters, or 36%, dealt with emotions including but not limited to mental health but of these, only one dealt with emotions in the context of work (workload

survival 2016). The disparity between the newsletter topics and people's reasons for calling the EAP is important because, again, it underscores the one-size-fits-all approach that the EAP takes on behalf of the university in constructing the ideal – responsible – employee. It suggests that the newsletters were not geared to meeting employees' needs but rather to shaping them in the provider's image of the ideal worker. Thus, given the centrality of "performance" in the current climate, the disparity also suggests that what these newsletters *do not* address is at least as important as what they *do*. Accordingly, in this section I describe what the newsletters do talk about; in the next section I describe what they omit. Figure 1 summarizes the major themes, newsletter topics, and the latent sub-themes, the latter orienting my analysis. In brief, the newsletters' messaging was normative, educational, directive and ultimately responsabilising.

**Figure 1**

n = 50

Major themes (context)	Newsletter topics included	Latent sub-themes (analysis)
<b>Emotions</b> (18; this figure refers to the number of newsletters in each major category. In the discussion, topics are indicated in parentheses whenever evidence from the newsletters is quoted or paraphrased.)	stress, depression, anger, overwhelm, self-confidence, resilience, happiness, mindfulness, trauma, women's mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Normative</b> (100%; this percentage refers to the proportion of newsletters displaying these characteristics.)</li> <li>▪ <b>Directive</b> (84%)</li> <li>▪ <b>Educational</b> (72%)</li> <li>▪ <b>Responsibility to others</b> (68%)</li> <li>▪ <b>Responsibility to self</b> (78%)</li> </ul>
<b>Family and Relationships</b> (15)	work-life balance, communication, divorce, romance, conflict resolution, eldercare, happiness in relationships, parenting	
<b>EAP</b> (6)	introduction to EAP, addiction recovery, asking for help	
<b>Work</b> (4)	job enthusiasm, time management, dealing with change	
<b>Money</b> (3)	budgeting, debt reduction, saving	
<b>Health and Fitness</b> (3)	staying fit, nutritious eating, addictions	

**Figure 1: Major themes, newsletter topics and latent sub-themes.**

Before turning to my findings, I should note that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between “educational” and “directive” and in these instances the newsletters were coded as both. I should also note, with regard to the n-value, that a few newsletters fit into more than one major theme. I classified these according to the primary topic, cognisant that, in classification, many arrangements are possible, and that what suits in one situation may not in another. There is also some repetition across the sample, and several (six) of the newsletters are devoted (ostensibly) to promoting the EAP. I include these and the repeated newsletters in the n-value because they did their normative and regulative work. That is, while the promotional newsletters have little that is substantive, they nevertheless have a responsabilising message: “Having a problem? You should call us so we can help you fix yourself.” I turn now to my findings.

*Normative:*

I classified newsletters as *normative* when they implicitly or explicitly stated how individuals *should* behave or feel, what is considered *normal*, etc. For example, one newsletter stated, “[i]t is normal to feel disappointed and angry when things do not unfold as we would expect” (anger 2000). Another advised readers to “[s]et and achieve small goals” because “[p]eople often make the mistake of shooting for the moon.” Readers should “[s]trive for something achievable instead” (confidence 2011). In another, readers were advised to develop resilience, something “you can continually develop and improve on with every curveball... thrown your way” (resilience 2012). Resilience is thus situated as an individual and universal quality; everyone has the potential to be resilient, and everyone can become better at it over time. The newsletters also made normative assumptions, such as presupposing all readers celebrate Christmas (e.g., holiday stress 2017; post-holiday depression 2019) or were romantically and financially involved (healthy relationships 2011; budgeting 2013) and have children (parenting 2012). Given their regulative purpose, all of the newsletters were fundamentally normative.

*Directive:*

Eighty-four percent of the newsletters told readers what they should do to solve their problem(s). They all suggested calling the EAP for assistance, but also gave other directives. To combat stress, readers were told, for example, to get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning. They were cautioned to “really make an effort to apply” the recommendations to increase their “stress resistance” (1998). The tone was often paternalistic.

tic; one newsletter, for example, even directed readers to be “grateful” despite an increased workload (workload 2016).

*Educational:*

Newsletters were educational when they *explained*. For example, a newsletter on depression stated (without citations) that 10-15% of people will experience depression at some point and may experience “[a]ny number of...symptoms,” which it went on to list (1998). Another newsletter elucidated that anxiety is “one of the most common types of mental health issues in Canada” (2017). Enough newsletters (72%) were educational to suggest that the EAP must perceive edification to be strategically important for getting buy-in.

*Responsibility to Others:*

Ultimately, the newsletters were normative, directive, and/or educational so as to convey to readers their responsibility to the self and others. When newsletters assumed, described, or prescribed how readers’ actions may affect others or inferred the obligation to consider others, they were coded under the “responsibility to others” sub-theme. For example, one newsletter cited readers’ responsibility to a “friend of family” who may be depressed: in such a circumstance, “one of the most helpful things that you can do for them is to encourage them to get professional help” (depression 1998). Of course, our daily responsibilities (to others) could impede our capacity to observe another’s depression: “Our busy days seem to fly by as we juggle demanding jobs, parenting responsibilities, social commitments, household chores etc. Consequently, we may fail to see when someone we care about needs our attention” (mindfulness 2015). Another newsletter, one devoted to women’s mental health, observed that these daily obligations are gendered:

On top of a duty to take on the constant care of others, women are typically expected to take care of all the unpaid work of maintaining a household as well. ...Women are often busy helping everyone else. ...[W]e can help to encourage broader access, break down stigma and help women develop the mental health strength and resiliency they need in order to diminish the challenges they face (mental health 2019).

Sixty-eight percent of the newsletters conveyed responsibility to others. Although this theme was the least prevalent, these examples reflect the newsletters’ ideological tendency to explicitly responsabilise readers not only to the self, which we examine next, but to others as well. Responsibility to others can also be inferred since the point of having employees



read the newsletters is to optimise their productivity and performance *for the university*.

### *Responsibility to Self:*

When newsletters assumed, described and/or prescribed that readers practise self-care, be self-sufficient, etc., they were classified in the “responsibility to self” sub-theme. Recurring topics here were resilience, choice and the inextricability of one’s responsibilities to both self and others. Seventy-eight percent of the newsletters communicated that resilience is imperative – it is *our* responsibility and hinges on *our* choices. One newsletter defined resilience as the ability to become stronger and help oneself “find better, healthier ways to cope with life’s everyday challenges” (resilience 2012), reflecting the importance of taking responsibility for one’s behaviours and perspectives and underscoring readers’ obligation to *choose* resilience. Notably, for the first two years of publication, each newsletter’s masthead stated that it “will give you the information you need to make healthy choices” (1997-9). By year three, this statement was removed, but the sentiment remained: A recent newsletter on positivity stated that “life doesn’t always go as planned. You have the choice to brood or adapt” (2014). Another issue reminded readers: “We can’t change events that have happened in our lives. ... Fortunately, we can obtain help to find new ways and perspectives to look at these experiences. ... We can obtain...help learning skills in an effort to make healthier choices” (EAP 2018). As if to drive home the point, promotional posters distributed throughout Corporate U reiterated: “Do you think well-being is the luck of the draw? Think again! Well-being is about making good choices and taking the right action.” Finally, newsletters in this category demonstrated how helping oneself facilitates helping others: “Above all, remember that self-care is not ‘selfish’.... *When you put aside some ‘me’ time, you are much more available to be there for others too*” (self-care 2016, my emphasis).

### **DISCUSSION: WHAT THE NEWSLETTERS DO NOT SAY**

I now turn to the newsletters’ silences.

One important obfuscation is that when the EAP’s communications talk about helping others, even then the focus remains on the personal realm. Recall the newsletter discussed above that mentions “a friend of family [who] is depressed” (depression 1998). Read against the overarching message of responsabilisation in these newsletters, a perhaps cynical interpretation is that what readers are *really* being advised is to

*help others help themselves.* Any sense of compassion or solidarity is eclipsed, in fact, by the literally overwhelming imperative of individual responsabilisation, which arguably, evidently, also entails fostering self-care in one's friends. In this respect the editorial choices about content in these newsletters smack of "privatization by familialization," as described by Brown (2019), who observes that "dismantling public provision is routinely coupled with extended private sphere norms to delegitimize the concept of social welfare provision..." She explains: "As everyday life is marketized from one direction and 'familialized' from the other by neoliberal rationality, these twin processes challenge... democratic determination of a common good" (Brown 2019: 52). In this scenario, as Brown writes (citing Margaret Thatcher), "there is no such thing as society...only individuals and their families" (2019: 55).

The same newsletter also rather conspicuously avoids making any link between (the public world) of work and despair. After all, this newsletter might equally have mentioned supporting a depressed colleague, for example, but focuses instead on family friends. Thus, there is no sense that the complexification of academics' jobs in the neoliberal university might be contributing to their challenges. Though one recent newsletter vaguely mentioned "the complicated responsibilities we struggle with today" (stress 2015), the newsletters never acknowledged the particularities of Corporate U, the exigencies of academic work generally, or how the university's administration could possibly ameliorate the situation. They overlooked the long hours required of faculty to teach, research, publish, and acquiesce to every professional demand, with most Canadian academics averaging 48-49 hours per week and some working as many as 59-60 (see Brownell 2018; Menard et al., nd).

Yet even as one early newsletter introducing the then-new EAP to staff stated its aim was to "relieve home- and work-related stress" (1992), subsequent newsletters completely ignored work-related stress. The first newsletter specifically dealing with stress (1998) merely explained how to identify it and offered stress reduction tips. Another issue, on overwhelm (2002), offered ideas for streamlining one's life and relaxing, namely cleaning house, being mindful, and adjusting one's expectations. Yet another addressed holiday-related stress, failing to recognise that for academics much of that stress pertained not to "gift-giving challenges" and difficult family gatherings (2017), but to meeting December grading deadlines, dealing with students' reactions to their final grades, and preparing January courses. Their lack of specificity indicates the newsletters were generic, meant for audiences in a variety of employment sectors. As one might expect, then, the newsletters are silent on the demands of academic work as such. But I contend that their generic content is

consistent with faculty's growing disempowerment in an increasingly corporatized governance context.

Relatedly, there was also no sense in the newsletters of the exigencies of working under austerity, even though the EAP Committee anticipated the stress of budgetary constraints (Annual Report 1993). One newsletter from the late 1990s stated that "when change is imposed upon us...[w]e may feel threatened and fearful and focus heavily on negative outcomes" (change 1999). It explained there were "varied reasons why people may resist or struggle with change," but carefully avoided referencing the massive government cuts to Corporate U's operating budget. At that time, there was enormous pressure on faculty both provincially and federally to "secure grants as a necessary supplement to the incomes of their cash-starved institutions" and to produce marketable knowledge with "immediate economic, social or commercial 'value' for money" (Amit 2000: 218). Significantly, this same newsletter implored readers to "adapt to uncertainty [and] ambiguity" and to keep a "positive attitude" while taking "special care of ourselves. This means ensuring that we get enough rest, eat healthy foods and participate in activities...that can help us relieve everyday stress" (change 1999). A comment by one EAP Lunchtime Seminar participant from that period demonstrated how these pressures were felt on the ground: "I'm convinced University Management is operating this institution with too few resources. Thus, much of my excessive workload is beyond my control unless I wish the system over which I preside to collapse. ...I expect the situation to only worsen" (Annual Report 1995-6).

A later newsletter effectively claimed resistance to change is futile (2004) but included nothing resembling an acknowledgement of what change meant in real terms. The problem according to the newsletters was not that things were changing too quickly and in unpleasant ways, but that employees were not accepting and adjusting: "We each have an active role to play in how we respond and adapt to the changes in life. Understanding this will make it much easier to take advantage of the opportunities for learning and personal growth that exist" (change 1999).

One major source of all this stress, of course, is the ever-increasing workload one must carry in the neoliberal university. (Another source of stress is money, but unsurprisingly there is no sense in the relevant newsletters that Corporate U's salaries may be too low; budgeting and finances: 1999; 2010; 2013). The autonomy and flexibility of academics' schedules often means longer working hours as noted above, which as Gill (2009) observes, "often simply means that universities end up extracting even more labour from us for free, as we participate in working lives in which there is often no boundary between work and anything

else (if indeed there is anything else)” (241). Accordingly, a recent newsletter told readers that “learning how to handle an increased workload can teach you to be more content and less stressed.” “Survival” advice included establishing boundaries, delegating work, and getting outdoors; more egregious suggestions included learning how to manage stress, not working late, and volunteering (workload 2016).

This particular newsletter was published two years after a “voluntary” retirement program at Corporate U and in the leadup to another round of retirement buyouts later that year, but there was no meaningful acknowledgement of what retirement buyouts meant for the people staying behind. Even fitting in one of the EAP’s resilience workshops could be a burden, as one participant wrote in an anonymous evaluation: “I felt stressed because I am having a busy day and the speaker took more than 45 minutes. I need to get back to work, plus have lunch” (Annual Report 1995-6). Throughout, readers were encouraged to “stay resilient and grateful.” As declared by a previous newsletter, published before the era of buyouts but in the early years of austerity at Corporate U, time management in the new “academic capitalist time regime” (Walker 2009) was “really about ‘self-management’...about learning how to leverage the time you have, and how to plan, prioritise, delegate and organise your daily activities” (time management 2005). That perhaps the problem was not readers’ poor time- or self-management but, rather, the growing demands of the job on account of fewer people available to share the load, was not raised.

Similarly, the newsletter devoted to women’s mental health (2019) mentioned above underscored their multiple responsibilities to others but failed to include working for the university among them. Nor was there any acknowledgement of the disproportionate amount of “service” work that academic women do (Guarino and Borden 2017). In fact, this newsletter tacitly accepted women’s responsibilities as an immutable fact of women’s lives and offered strategies for surviving them. There was no challenge to the unequal division of academic (or domestic) labour despite recognition that the “burden of all of these responsibilities greatly increases [women’s] rates of stress.”

Above all, newsletter readers were simply advised to learn to handle an increased workload without referencing that the job itself was becoming *too much* or that the university was in any way answerable to employees. That some readers accepted total responsibility was reflected in the words of one EAP workshop participant who articulated the workshop’s lesson about the “personality traits that cause the problem” and self-blame: “How do *I* communicate? How can *I* be a better communicator? Make[s] me look at *me*” (Annual Report 2008-9).

Rather than acknowledging the university's role in all this stress, the newsletters pre-empted any negativity about the workplace. One advised rekindling workplace zeal: "You can infuse your work with the same excitement, enthusiasm, and spirit you had when you started." It suggested "giving your current position a little lift and sprucing up a tired routine with a mini makeover" (work 2008). There was no recognition that academic work has changed significantly or that academics have legitimate reasons to be demoralised or angry (anger 2000 and 2008). None examined how to cope with feeling disempowered, ashamed and undermined, all common experiences in contemporary academic life (see Gill 2009). Rather, positivity was normative in these newsletters: They were vacuous and completely disconnected from faculty's lived reality. As one newsletter (not included in the n-value due to its recency) suggested: "Find reasons to smile more often. ...if you do not have a reason to smile, try smiling anyway" (positivity 2019).

Not surprisingly, then, in the few newsletters devoted to promoting the EAP's services, structural/institutional reasons for readers' problems were at best a rhetorical question. For example, in the first newsletter readers were told: "however minor or complicated you feel your concern is, your EAP is always there for you, particularly in these times of stress and uncertainty" (EAP 1997). One might query what exactly these times of stress and uncertainty are, and how to reconcile this notion with the expectation that scholars in the neoliberal university show no hint of vulnerability or need (Juffer 2006). A more recent newsletter stated that "[l]ife isn't always as straightforward as it might seem in your social media feed" (EAP 2017). This is certainly ironic given how expertly these newsletters avoided any of the messiness of the problems they purported to help employees solve. They just have one unifying, implicit, and consistently generic message: *your* [insert life challenges here] are entirely within *your* control; *your* performance is *your* responsibility; and any structural realities that may have led to *your* difficulties have no place in these discussions. In sum, these newsletters are not the venue for critically examining the stressful realities that are the consequence of the academy's neoliberal transformation. That the unique circumstances of faculty's academic work and problems are not specifically acknowledged by the newsletters reflects that they are not so special but rather a generic group within a neoliberal regime whose productivity needs to be managed and optimized like that of any other employee group. This is an attitude and governance strategy anathema to intellectual pursuit.

## CONCLUSION

What makes neoliberalism so unreasonable for managing the academic workforce? What accounts for the antagonism between university employers and academic employees? The shift to neoliberal governmentality does not look altogether different from the previously existing social democratic model of university governance; even in the neoliberal university there is still a degree of autonomy and self-governance operating through bodies such as the Senate. Yet, the academy's neoliberalisation has de-professionalised and disempowered faculty in important ways. From increasing their workloads and responsibilities to making their role in the university progressively more administrative and bureaucratic – and concomitantly less academic and intellectual – academics' control over their own working conditions has diminished considerably. No longer driven by professorial control, universities today, at least in the West, are models of corporate management and centralised power, operating according to economic and administrative principles previously unseen in the academy.

This shift has engendered a dynamic of competition, effectively rendering today's university a "quasi-market." The social democratic model on which the public university was once based (Peters and Jandrić 2018) has been trumped by academic or knowledge capitalism (Olssen and Peters 2007; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; 2001; see also Brownlee 2015); they are now run according to principles of performance management. Consequently, professors are stressed out, not least because of the increased and expanded workload this transformation has created. While it is true that the newsletters I have discussed here go to members of the administration as well as faculty (and staff), I contend this merely underscores what Althusser (1971) has already demonstrated: paraphrase, we are all subject to the same ideology, regardless of one's position within (the university's) structure.

As both a case study and a cautionary tale, this paper has examined an insidious source of neoliberalisation in the academy that seems to have slipped entirely under the radar. Acting on behalf of "high performing" universities, EAPs "help" faculty and other staff with their problems to ensure productivity. But, as I feel this critical examination of EAP newsletters from one Canadian institution shows, EAPs serve as an "adjunct of managerial control" (Goss 1997) and neoliberal university governance (cf. Vander Schee 2008). They serve as a powerful mechanism for carrying out the EAP's neoliberal mission in support of the university: ensuring the *responsible* professor performs despite personal problems. Unfortunately, these EAP newsletters are disconnected from

the realities of working in higher education today. By imagining an impossibly resilient generic worker, they demonstrate an ignorance about the true nature and demands of academic work. (And though I have not been able to examine this in depth here, save for the odd reference to women's caregiving role, they equally have no sense of the sexism, racism, and other power relations framing academics' experiences). The "responsible professor" is a corporate ideal consistent with the university's market-oriented values.

Where the entrepreneurial, performance-fixated university fails to motivate faculty to meet expectations, the EAPs step in, teaching them to make "better choices" leading to optimal performance. Addressing any personal problems by availing oneself of the EAP as needed to become healthy, fit and, most pertinent to this discussion, less stressed, has thus become both an ethical and a professional responsibility (cf. Kelly and Colquhoun 2003). I have taken up elsewhere (Reuter 2018) the elision of responsibility to the self with responsibility to others, demonstrating that ethics of responsibility to the self and others intersect and coexist; my notion of "responsible ambivalence" captures the neoliberal academic context, which constrains academics' experiences in very particular ways (106). I contend these newsletters not only responsabilize readers to help themselves *and* to help others help themselves, but they also forcefully cultivate responsible ambivalence. Their messaging clearly compels individuals to take responsibility for the state of their lives and suggests this is the means to fulfil one's responsibility to others – particularly the university (cf. Reuter 2018: 100). The EAP exists to "help" employees fulfil that responsibility by helping them to adapt to the employer's values, needs, and orientation. As Allender et al. assert in their analysis of how workplace health programs constitute an ethical project of alignment of corporate and personal goals, "[w]orkplace health discourse regulates the health conduct of employees toward the most suitable end for the organisation" (2006: 140).

It follows that the EAP and its newsletters would "require each individual to work on the self to better manage proliferating workloads" (Gill 2009: 236). In a regime of performance management, the responsible professor accepts this call to optimisation and seeks help from the EAP when necessary; what constitutes an optimal *performing* subject is at the heart of these newsletters. They seek to persuade (responsibilise) readers to work on themselves, ostensibly for their own good as individuals, but really for the sake of the institution. Through ubiquitous performance management strategies, including the newsletters, academics are thus constituted as governable subjects with a new subjectivity defined by performance and responsabilisation. This new subjectivity

means faculty members and their choices are to blame (cf. James and Zoller 2017: 1088) for any failure to perform as “model neoliberal subjects” (Gill (2009: 241), especially if they *choose* not to seek the EAP’s help: As Hansen notes, EAPs “rely upon the willingness of workers to *want* to manage their work and family responsibilities, with the assistance of these programs” (2004: 159; emphasis in text).

Employee assistance is a managerialist discourse (cf. Zoller 2003) that puts employees between a rock and a hard place; stressed faculty turn to the EAP for help; they may well get help and even feel helped, and they may well share the EAP’s goal of working at full capacity. But at the same time the EAP responsabilises them (further), creating more stress. Extrapolating from Rose’s conception of “freedom” that, owing to structural and historical constraints, is not really very free at all, the EAP’s help is “articulated into norms and principles for organizing our experience of our world and of ourselves [...], articulated into certain rationales for practising in relation to ourselves” (1999: 65). Thus, the newsletters admonish readers to make better choices and “carry on, no matter how trying or terrible the situation” (resilience 2012). Significantly, readers should change their perspective on their circumstances, not the circumstances themselves (cf. Aubrecht 2012): “We always have choices in life. We can choose to look at life negatively...or we can choose to be positive and live a happy and fulfilling life” (positivity 2019). Sidestepping any sense of the structural or institutional, newsletters intimate resilience as a learnable and mandatory skill, demonstrating that resilience training is requisite “for life in neoliberalism” (Gill and Donaghue 2016: 97).

The prioritising of “resilience” is dangerous, however, because it emphasises, in truly neoliberal fashion, personal responsibility over structural failure. Though some have called, in the face of this neoliberal reality, for the “embed[ding of] a culture of self-care” into academic space as a means to “slow things down” (Peake and Mullings 2017: 272), such a solution does nothing to challenge the problems inherent in the neoliberal university. Rather, it precisely aligns with the EAP’s – and the university’s – endeavour to turn employees into self-sufficient, optimised and performing neoliberal subjects.

In conclusion, our shared experiences as faculty are at least partially constituted in and through the neoliberal discourse represented in these newsletters. Self-care in university culture is not the answer: a collective refusal to *perform* is – but this is just one possible solution. Polster (2000), for example, makes a compelling case for “creative resistance” to the corporate agenda vis-à-vis a public serving university that makes the knowledge its scholars produce freely available rather than a mat-



ter of intellectual property for sale (198). Her suggestion alludes to the current regime's being comprised of management techniques centred on regulation (Shore 2008: 292). Thus, faculty unions must broaden their scope to include critical reflection on EAPs and stronger contract language pertaining to both workload and health and safety, while academics must question the framing of EAPs as a "perk" (cf. Vander Schee 2008: 871). EAPs have too powerful a role in stoking the neoliberalisation of academia today; they mask the erosion of working conditions and the growing toxicity of contemporary academic life.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Vered Amit, Chris Hurl, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback, to Alia Nurmohamed for her research assistance and feedback as well, and to Julie Sutherland for her editorial assistance. I also wish to thank the archivist at Corporate U for facilitating access to the EAP's Annual Reports and other related materials, as well as the EAP Coordinator who kindly answered all of my questions about Corporate U's program. Finally, I wish to thank David Robinson for his feedback and especially for helping me understand university corporatisation in Canada.

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