Reading Guide for *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*

1. Baldwin writes that schools have become the dominant “employers, real estate holders, healthcare providers, and even policing agents,” in major cities across the United States. What are some economic and social effects of this power dynamic, and who does it impact the most?

2. Whether you currently live in a city or not, how have you experienced this transition to the urban planning model that relies on UniverCities that Baldwin describes in your own life? Have you lived in a place where wealthy universities with huge endowments are surrounded by working class neighborhoods and/or poor communities of color? What did you notice about this dynamic? How did it affect you?

3. As Baldwin points out, when we think about and organize around the labor that takes place on campus, we must consider the exploited labor not only of academics—like graduate student workers and adjuncts—but also low-waged security, food, clerical, and maintenance workers. Do you observe certain kinds of work being undervalued at your workplace? What might solidarity with other campus workers mean for students and knowledge workers?

4. How did the Morrill Act and the federal government use higher education policy to help reinforce racial segregation? How do different funding streams affect primarily white institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) today?

5. Shrinking state budgets have forced both public and private schools to become more entrepreneurial to make up for their losses in revenue. Define what Baldwin describes as the “knowledge economy.” Can you identify how these strategies have had both positive and negative impacts on surrounding
communities? What do you think should be done to help schools?

6. Colleges and universities are designated non-profits, most clearly marked by their 501c3 status, which comes with property tax-exemptions. Arizona State and Princeton University, among other schools, use this status to generate revenue. But cities rely on these taxes to pay for public services. Should schools pay their property taxes? What could be some alternatives that help both higher education institutions and their host cities and towns?

7. The Trinity College chapter zooms in on higher education leaders. How do university presidents function as power brokers in cities as they set visions for their schools?

8. Despite community organizing and protest against both Columbia and NYU, campus expansion went forward. What happened in these two campaigns and what does this all say about the democratic authority of neighborhood residents?

9. Universities across the country are finally being forced to reckon with their varying but unavoidable relationship to what was once the country’s dominant economic system—slavery. Yet many contemporary prison and police abolitionists view the policing practices of schools like the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins University as an afterlife of slavery and a way to enforce anti-Black violence. What are your experiences with campus policing? Does the presence of campus police make you feel safe, or deeply unsafe? What does abolition as a campus practice mean to you?

10. To what degree do you think residents ought to benefit from the university amenities placed in their neighborhood, like university hospitals, libraries, and other facilities?
11. Baldwin suggests that colleges and universities should commit to community benefits agreements, including abiding by zip-code–specific guidelines for living-wage job opportunities, fairly-resourced subcontracted work, local access to construction projects, affordable-housing trusts, job training, compensation for campus-expansion displacement, tuition-free education, use of campus facilities. What are some ideas you have for community benefits from universities?

12. What surprised you most from this book?

13. Have you organized against a university before, whether as a student, faculty member, campus worker, or city resident? What was your experience like? If organizing as a student or employee of the university, what limits did you come up against as someone invested in, or reliant on, the university?

14. The 1960s were a revolutionary time when students and residents fought for schools to serve their surrounding communities more directly. What were some of the practices that took place then? Should they be revived in the present?

15. Name some of the organizations, throughout the book, that fought against the unchecked reach of the UniverCity? What were the strategies they chose and what were some of the successes, the challenges?

16. Baldwin cites the University of Winnipeg as one rare present-day campus where rethinking the campus city led to material shifts, including affordable housing, community benefits, and sustainable foodways. Would you be interested in your school implementing similar changes? What might a more ethical relationship to history and to present-day Black and Indigenous people look like? Let’s imagine expansively.