

English 3900F: Special Topics in English
“Girls on Fire: Constructions of Girlhood in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction”*
***Cross-Listed with Women's Studies 3315**
Course Outline

Fall 2016

*Please note this outline is tentative and may change prior to start of classes.

Instructor: Dr. Miranda Green-Barteet
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Office Hours: T & Th 11-12:15
By Appointment

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Class Time: T 12:30-1:30, Th 12:30-2:30
Location: AHB 2R21

*Email is the best way to contact me. Please allow at least 48 hours for me to respond to you. Be sure to put our course number into the subject line and to use your UWO email to contact me.

Course Description and Objectives:

In *Girl Power: Girls Redefining Girlhood*, Dawn H. Currie, Deirdre M. Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz point to the fact that “until recently, girlhood has been ‘the other’ of feminism’s womanhood: girlhood was defined negatively, against womanhood” in ways that present adult femininity as the successful abandonment of young or adolescent womanhood (4). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz’s thesis holds that girls in Western civilization at the turn of the twenty-first century are “reinventing” girlhood to suit their own ideas and desires in the face of the dueling narratives of *Reviving Ophelia* and *Girl Power*, which have positioned young women in a space that simultaneously highlights their vulnerability and proclaims their strength. While these two discourses do consider transformations of gender, its meanings, and the power to be gleaned from such transformations, they also re-work and re-code gender in familiar ways. In other words, while both *Reviving Ophelia* and *Girl Power* have drawn attention to the status and potential of the adolescent young woman, these movements have also, quite paradoxically, reinforced cultural expectations and limitations. YA dystopian novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Cinder*, and *Delirium*, among countless others published in the last ten years, feature strong female protagonists who openly rebel against the totalitarian societies in which they live. The circumstances of these dystopian futures enable characters like Katniss, Tris, Cinder, and Lena to be strong, active young women who willingly challenge authority, transgress gender norms, and even confront injustice when compelled to do so. Although these characters think little of the gendered stereotypes that limit their real life counterparts, they often end up reaffirming those gendered stereotypes in the conclusion of the series in which they are featured. In this course, we will consider how the recent spate of Young Adult dystopian fiction simultaneously subverts and affirms gendered expectations facing many young women in the 21st century. We will consider a variety of topics, including:

- How do the concerns of YA lit featuring female protagonists match the concerns of feminism?
- How does YA dystopian fiction lend itself to examinations of gender constructs, heteronormativity, and sexuality?
- What socio-cultural, philosophical, and/or artistic purposes does dystopian fiction serve, particularly when such books are written for an implied audience of young people?
- What particular kinds of definitions and/or portrayals of femininity, masculinity, and adolescence does YA dystopian fiction tend to offer?

- Why do so many of these books simultaneously challenge and reinforce constructs of gender and sexuality, and what implicit messages do these "mixed" signals impart to readers of all ages?

Throughout the semester, in addition to gaining and sharing knowledge through the assigned readings, you will

- apply rigorous critical thinking and analysis by engaging productively with new ideas;
- gain an understanding of literary genres and periods, specifically of Young Adult literature and dystopian fiction;
- have a sense of the way literature influences and is influenced by social constructions of gender;
- apply theory to literature;
- research, assess, and synthesize information;
- and locate, evaluate, and critique sources using appropriate disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary research skills and tools.

Tentative Reading List

- *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins
- *The Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler
- *Cinder*, Marissa Meyer
- *Orleans*, Sherri L. Smith
- *Delirium*, Lauren Collins
- *Pure*, Julianna Baggott

In addition to these novels, we will also be reading secondary source material, which I will post to OWL.

Term Work

Daily Reading Post, participation	10%
Book Review	10%
Annotated Bibliography & Paper Proposal	20%
Research Paper	30%
Final Exam	20%

Forum Posts: In my opinion, the most successful college classrooms have students and instructors equally engaged in a discussion about the readings. Prior to each class (except on days written assignments are due or exam days), you will post a question, comment, or observation on the day's reading to the Class Forum, which is available through OWL. The entire class will be able to see the posts, and you will be able to respond to each other. I will read at least one post at the start of each class discussion as a way to stimulate discussion. You will be expected to post even if you miss class.

The timeliness and quality of your discussion questions form one part of your overall participation grade for the year. Participation also includes reading each day's assignment, making insightful comments during discussion, and actively listening. I reserve the right to give reading quizzes as a part of the participation grade if it seems necessary (i.e., if class members do not keep up with the readings). No single portion (participation, reading posts, etc.) determines your participation grade.

Book Review: For this assignment, you will select a YA dystopian book, featuring a strong female protagonist that is NOT on the course syllabus, and write a review of it. The purpose of the assignment is to get students thinking about how to review literature, as well as to get students to consider books they read for pleasure critically. We will read and analyze several book reviews together. Students will receive a detailed prompt several weeks before the assignment is due.

Annotated Bibliography & Paper Abstract: Students will be required to complete a paper abstract of for their research paper, as well as an annotated bibliography. The bibliography must include 4 sources: one focusing specifically on YA literature, on focusing specifically on dystopian literature, and one focusing specifically on gender in literature. The fourth source may be of the students' choosing. None of the sources in the bibliography can be from course materials. Students will receive a detailed prompt several weeks before the assignment is due.

Research Paper: Students will be expected to complete a research paper of 10 pages using a minimum of 5 secondary sources. As part of this project, students will also be expected to secure topic approval from the course instructor. A detailed assignment prompt will be distributed the first few weeks of class. The Annotated Bibliography & Paper Abstract assignment are linked to this assignment.

Final Exam: Students will take a final exam during the exam period. We will review exam format in class well ahead of the exam.

Course Policies

Academic Accommodation: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

The full policy is available here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive medical documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons (e.g. to explain an absence from class which may result in a grade penalty under an 'Attendance' policy in the course). **All** medical documentation **must** be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.

Submitting Assignments: All assignments are due in-class on the date stated on the class schedule. You are expected to turn in both a hard copy of the assignment as well as to submit an electronic version to Turnitin.com (see below).

Late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances. It is your responsibility to turn assignments in on time. Should you need an extension for any reason, please contact me by email at least 48 hours prior to the day an assignment is due to discuss an extension. Extensions may be granted for the writing assignments, but not for the Forum Posts. If you have a medical or personal emergency, notify me as soon as possible to request an extension (see above). In-class assignments cannot be made up unless the absence is excused.

Attendance Policy: The very nature of this course requires that you attend regularly to do well. You are, therefore, expected to attend all scheduled class meetings. Should you have more than four unexcused absences, you may receive up to a 5% deduction off of your final grade. See also: ‘**Academic Accommodation Policy**’ above.

Electronic Devices: Due to the size of our classroom and the discussion focused nature of our class, you may NOT use a computer in class to take notes. You may not use a cell phone or similar electronic device in class at any time. Should you, for any reason, need to receive a phone call/text during class time, I ask that you keep your phone on vibrate and step out of the classroom to take the call/respond to the text.

Owl/Sakai: The use of Owl/Sakai is necessary for successful completion of this course. This includes accessing readings as stipulated in the course outline, downloading instructions and guidelines for assignments, and submitting assignments to Turnitin.com. All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website.

Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism: The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).”

Please consult the Department of English Studies "Information for Students" page for more information: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>.

Prerequisites: The University Senate requires the following statement to appear on course outlines: "Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, and Aegrotat Standing: All requests for Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, or Aegrotat Standing must be made by the student, with supporting documentation, to the Dean of Arts and Humanities Academic Counselling Office. The Dean's office reserves the right not to sign INC and SPC grades without the proper paperwork. Special examinations must be written at the University or an Affiliated College no later than 30 days after the end of the examination period involved.