

## Department of English &amp; Writing Studies

**Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction**  
**English 2071F (001)**  
Fall 2017

**Instructor:** Alyssa MacLean  
**Email:** [alyssa.maclea@uwo.ca](mailto:alyssa.maclea@uwo.ca)  
**Tel:** (519) 661-2111 ext. 87416  
**Office:** AHB 1G33  
**Office Hours:** Wed 11:00-12:30, Thurs  
10:30-12:00, and by appointment

**Course Location:** KB K106  
**Course Time:** Mondays 6:30-9:30 pm  
**Antirequisites/Prerequisites:** None

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Science fiction is a speculative art form that deals with new technologies, faraway worlds, and disruptions in the possibilities of the world as we know it. However, it is also very much a product of its time—a literature of social criticism that is anchored in a specific social and historical context. This course will introduce students to the genre of science fiction, starting with three highly influential works from the nineteenth and early twentieth century—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* and Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*—that are preoccupied with humanity’s place in an inhospitable universe. Next, we examine Walter Miller’s novel *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, a Cold War novel that reflects both the apocalyptic sensibility of the era of nuclear confrontation in the sixties and the feelings of historical inevitability that marked the era. Building on these important precedents, our next texts use discussions of alien species and alternative futures to explore the nature of human identity. Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* uses the trope of alien contact to explore the possibilities of an androgynous society unmarked by the divisions of gender. *Arrival*, a film portraying the appearance of mysterious spacecraft on Earth and the subsequent threat of war, revisits many of the concerns raised by Wells in a postmodern context, and poses new questions about identity, language, and free will. Futuristic dystopias by Octavia Butler (“Speech Sounds”) and Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid’s Tale*) critique current systems of racial inequality and gender oppression. We will finish the course with two novels examining the relationship between humans and technology. Joe Haldeman’s *Forever Peace* examines the utopian possibility for achieving peace and eliminating war in the mid twenty-first century, while William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* foregrounds what many critics see as a crisis in defining human identity. Short stories by authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, Phillip K. Dick, and Molly Gloss will round out our exploration of prominent narrative conventions and tropes of science fiction.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify different generic qualities of science fiction, recognize the evolution of the genre, and situate individual works within wider debates about the genre
- Appreciate and analyze the aims and accomplishments of individual works using appropriate literary terminology (for example, plot, character, point of view, theme, setting, imagery, symbols, tone, and diction)
- Analyze individual works of science fiction in relation to their historical, political, and cultural context; compare how different works critique their respective societies

- Communicate ideas clearly and succinctly in multiple contexts, including oral discussions, written discussion boards, and literary analysis essays. This course will focus especially on the development of effective written communication skills. Students will learn to frame a research question, respond constructively to peer review, and produce formal essays that have a clear, persuasive, well-argued thesis supported by appropriate textual evidence.

**COURSE MATERIALS:**

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. 978-1554811038 [n.b. please buy this edition of this text; any other edition based on the **1818 version** of the text would be acceptable.]

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. Toronto: Del Rey, 1968. 978-0449300435

Walter M. Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Toronto: Bantam, 2007. 978-0553273816

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace, 2010. 978-0441478125

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto: Emblem, 2017. 978-0735253308

Joe Haldeman, *Forever Peace*. New York: Ace, 1997. 978-0441005666

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 1984. 978-0441569595

*The Norton Book of Science Fiction*, ed. Ursula K. Le Guin and Brian Attebery. New York: Norton, 1993. 978-0393972412

Villeneuve, Denis. *Arrival*. 2016. [N.B. this is a recommended purchase. We will have a screening in class. Students who would like to write an assignment on this film are highly encouraged to acquire their own copy for private screening.]

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:**

Essay # 1 (5 pages)	20%
Peer review session for Essay #2	(pass/fail)
Essay # 2 (6-8 pages)	30%
4 posts on the OWL discussion board	5%
Class attendance and participation	10%
Final Exam	35%

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

I try to respond to emails within 48 hours. I'm happy to discuss your ideas anytime during office hours; if you can't come in person, I am available by phone (my number is at the top of the syllabus). If you can't attend my regular office hours please contact me and we can set up an appointment.

**TIMETABLE:**

You are expected to have completed the assigned reading **prior to the first class** in which a work is

being discussed. Readings are subject to change. Please bring hard copies of assigned readings to class.

N.B.: we may discover that we want to spend more time on certain readings and less time on others. I'll consider changing the schedule if such a change would benefit most students' learning in this course. If readings are modified, they will not vary significantly in page length.

Mon. Sept 11: Week 1	Introductions. Arnason, "The Warlord of Saturn's Moons"; Dick, "Frozen Journey"; Atwood, "Homelanding"
Mon. Sept.18: Week 2	Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>
Mon. Sept. 25: Week 3	Wells, <i>The Time Machine</i> ; Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i>
Mon. Oct. 2: Week 4	Miller, <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>
Mon, Oct. 9: Week 5	<b>THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS. Fall Reading Week from Oct 9-13.</b>
Mon, Oct. 16: Week 6	Le Guin, <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> <b>Essay #1 due</b>
Mon, Oct. 23: Week 7	<i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> con't. <i>Arrival</i> screening (2 hours) <b>Last chance to post on discussion forum in first half of course</b>
Mon, Oct 30: Week 8	<i>Arrival</i> discussion. Butler, "Speech Sounds"; Smith, "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard". <b>Submit your best 2 discussion posts from Weeks 1-7, with explanation, for grading</b>
Mon, Nov.6: Week 9	Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> . <b>Essay #2 topics given out today</b>
Mon, Nov. 13: Week 10	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> con't. Haldeman, <i>Forever Peace</i>
Mon, Nov. 20: Week 11	Haldeman, <i>Forever Peace</i> con't. Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management"; Gloss, "Interlocking Pieces." <b>Draft of Essay #2 due for peer review</b>
Mon, Nov. 27: Week 12	Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> <b>Essay #2 due</b>
Mon, Dec. 4: Week 13	Bradley, "Elbow Room", another story TBA <b>Last chance to post on discussion forum in second half of course (submit by noon)</b> <b>Submit your best 2 discussion posts from Weeks 8-13, with explanation, for grading on Tues. Dec 5 in my box</b>
Date TBA	Final exam

### OVERVIEW OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

#### **Attendance:**

Attendance is graded, and if you want to do well, you need to come to class regularly. If there is a reason why you are not attending class, please come and speak to me about it. The process for requesting academic accommodation on medical or other grounds is described in the "Accommodations" section near the end of this syllabus. Students who miss more than two classes may be barred from taking the final examination.

Students anticipating an absence for a major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays as soon as possible, and no later than one week before a test or two weeks before a major exam. Information regarding dates of major religious holidays may be obtained through departmental, Deans' and Faculty advising Offices.

**Participation:**

This class depends upon regular and active participation from all students: this involves reading the course texts carefully before class, **bringing texts to class**, listening actively, and responding thoughtfully to other students. You must bring a paper copy of your assigned text to class (please print out documents distributed via OWL). Good decorum and civil behavior is expected from all students at all times. In this class we will often be discussing difficult or sensitive topics. Please be collegial and understanding towards your peers.

Your participation mark is designed to measure your attendance, participation, and evidence of consistent preparation and active learning. Unannounced in-class participation assignments may be given over the course of the year and will be used, along with your oral participation, to determine your participation grade. In-class assignments cannot be made up.

**Discussion board posts:**

Each student will be asked to contribute to the class discussion board at least four times over the course of the semester—twice before Oct 23, and twice afterward. By each Friday, questions will be posted on the discussion board that cover the next Monday's readings. You can choose to reply to the questions I post, or to reply to the responses of other students. These discussion board posts are meant to do a few things: a) ensure that everyone is finishing the readings prior to class; b) encourage you to think independently about the texts prior to our class discussion; and c) occasionally, give the class more of a chance to consider questions from the last week's material that we did not have time to cover in class. **The discussion board for a given week's reading will close at noon on the Monday when that reading is scheduled.** This means that you must complete the reading well before Monday to give yourself enough time to post on the discussion board.

You may post as many times as you want (in fact I encourage you to do so, so you have more material to choose from later). However, only four of your discussion posts will be graded. On October 30 and December 4, I will ask you to print out your two best discussion board posts from Weeks 1-7 and 8-13, respectively, and submit them for grading. Along with each of your chosen posts (which you may copy or screenshot as you see fit), you must include a typed paragraph explaining why you feel that that particular post was especially successful and/or why it represents your best work. Did this post inspire a good discussion in class? Did it prompt you to think in more complex ways about the work? Did it help you practice a particular approach to reading or interpreting literature that you hadn't tried before? While a thoughtful, reasoned answer with textual examples is more likely to be successful, the discussion board is a much more informal form of writing than a literary analysis essay; perfectly polished prose is not as important as curiosity and intellectual enthusiasm. A rubric for discussion board posts will be provided in class.

**Essays:**

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (5 pages) and a research paper (6-8 pages) which will require a draft exchange. Papers in English should be written in MLA format. Further details of these papers will be announced later in the course. I encourage you to discuss your

papers with me in office hours as you work on them. On the day the essay is due, please submit a hard copy of your essay in class and upload a copy of it to Turnitin.com via OWL.

**Late policy:**

The penalty for late assignments will be 5% per day. Extensions may be granted in the case of a documented personal or medical emergency; I do not give extensions for computer or printer problems.

**If you are submitting a paper late**, you must upload it to Turnitin.com via OWL (which functions as the official timestamp) and put an identical copy in the essay drop box outside the English department in AHB 2G02. Both copies must arrive on the same day. Late penalties will be applied for each day of the week, including weekends and holidays.

**Exam:**

This course will have a final exam. Students must pass both term work and the final examination in order to pass the course. Students who fail the final examination (regardless of their term mark) automatically fail the course.

**MORE COURSE POLICIES:**

**Electronics in the classroom:**

Please be respectful by turning off your cellphone (unless you're responsible for a dependent or you're dealing with a family emergency; if this is so, alert me before class begins). The use of laptops and other electronics in class is forbidden unless these devices are being used to engage with class material. If you want to use a computer to take notes, please request an appointment to discuss the matter with me. Any use of electronics for non-course-related purposes will result in one warning and, should a second incidence arise, removal from the course.

**Intellectual property:**

The sale or distribution of class notes, handouts, slides, rubrics, and other material to individuals or groups who are not registered in the class (including commercial websites) is prohibited.

**Accommodations:**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 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 UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at [http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

**Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):**

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

For further types of academic accommodation including accommodation for students with disabilities, students in reserve forces, students observing religious holidays, please see <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2015/pg111.html>. If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see the SSD to arrange for a formal request for

accommodation and inform me as soon as possible. We can then discuss the best solution.

**Academic Offences:**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage 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.

**Plagiarism Checking:**

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>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

**If you need help:**

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.

Other services:

Wellness Centre: [www.wec.uwo.ca](http://www.wec.uwo.ca)

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Office of the Ombudsperson: [www.westernu.ca/ombuds](http://www.westernu.ca/ombuds)