

Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction
English 2071G (650)
Winter 2018

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In-person Office Hours: Wed 11:00-12:30, Thurs 10:30-12:00, and by appointment

Weekly online review session:

Tues 1:45-2:45 (please log in using the Blackboard Collaborate tool on OWL)

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. A futuristic dystopia by Octavia Butler (“Speech Sounds”) critiques current systems of racial inequality and gender oppression. We will finish the course with 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. Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It* comes full circle to re-examine many of the ideas about artificial life and intelligence brought up in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* a century and a half earlier. 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 written contexts such as 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 comments, and produce formal essays that have a clear, persuasive, well-argued thesis supported by appropriate textual evidence.

Important information about this online course

This course demands as much time and effort from you as a conventional lecture-based university course in literature. You are expected to read the assigned work and to engage with the material, the instructor, and the other students in the course. You are required to participate in the course regularly, as you would in a regular classroom. To be successful, you will need to read the course materials carefully and very actively, ask questions in the course review session when you need extra information, and contribute to online discussions. **All of this means that in addition to reading the books, you have to devote a minimum of three hours per week (the equivalent of the teaching hours you'd normally receive in a bricks-and-mortar classroom) to reading the lecture material and responding to your class on the discussion forum. You will also need to dedicate time for essay-writing.** Assignments will be submitted online, so be sure to work out any technical problems quickly by contacting ITS at 519-661-3800.

This course is designed for OWL, which operates as an online classroom. Ten percent of your grade depends on regular participation (more on participation below). You must have regular online access to do this; this access can be from home, from a computer lab on campus, or from a public library, **but you must ensure that you have access to the internet on a regular and consistent basis.** (This means that, in the event of a service interruption to your internet connection at home, you are expected to find another way to access the course materials.)

COURSE MATERIALS:

All of these books are available at the university bookstore. I've included the ISBN numbers to help you get the correct editions if you want the same pagination as the rest of the class.

You may buy other editions of these texts EXCEPT for *Frankenstein*. This edition of *Frankenstein* contains Mary Shelley's original version (i.e. the text of her first edition) and the story varies in its portrayal of free will compared to later editions. Most trade paperbacks are based on her second edition. Therefore, please order this Broadview edition if you can afford it.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3rd ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. 978-1554811038

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

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

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

Marge Piercy, *He, She, and It*, Fawcett, 978-0449220603

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

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

Essay # 1 (5 pages, double-spaced)	20%
Essay # 2 (6-8 pages)	35%
Discussion forum posts	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:

One of the major challenges of an online course is communication. Please do not hesitate to contact me to talk or ask questions about any topic or issue.

I try to respond to emails within 48 hours. I'm happy to discuss your ideas during my in-person office hours; if you can't come in person, I am available by phone, but it's usually best to arrange an appointment time for a phone call during my office hours because I may have people waiting. My number is at the top of the syllabus. Please note that I can't return long-distance calls.

Email is most appropriate for short questions; if I read one of your questions over email and feel that it is too long to answer appropriately by that method, I will request an in-person or phone appointment.

Weekly review session:

Every Tuesday from 1:45-2:45 I will be holding a review session/virtual office hours using Blackboard Collaborate, which is a tool available through OWL. You can use the Blackboard Collaborate tool to drop in and chat about any issues that have come up in that week's reading (or any other questions you may have). Note that other students may spontaneously join in a group chat and/or listen in, so this would be a group review session similar to what would happen if I had, say, a table booked at a library for our class. If you have something you'd like to discuss privately such as an essay, a phone or in-person appointment would be a better choice.

COURSE TIMETABLE:

Given that this is an online course, you may choose to proceed with readings at the speed that you wish. However, the discussion forum posts will be posted according to the schedule below. I will post the questions for the upcoming unit 1 week before that unit begins. You are expected to have completed the assigned reading prior to reading the lecture materials in which a work is being discussed, and obviously, prior to commenting on the forum.

Periodically, I may chime in with a recorded video clip tying up loose ends, summarizing where I think we are in the course, or connecting issues that have come up during forum discussions to the texts covered in a particular unit. These video clips will be short (less than 15 mins each, and between 0-2 per unit) but they will be mandatory and will contain material that may be tested on the exam. Because these clips are so dependent on class discussion, I can't tell how many there will be, and therefore they are not listed here under the readings. However, I will make announcements to tell you to watch them.

UNIT 1. Introductory Stories and <i>Frankenstein</i>	
Mon. Jan. 8 Week 1	William Gibson, "The Gernsback Continuum" <i>The Norton Book of Science Fiction</i> (NBSF) Eleanor Arnason, "The Warlord of Saturn's Moons" (NBSF) Barry N. Malzberg, "Making it all the Way into the Future on Gaxton Falls of the Red Planet" (NBSF)
Mon. Jan 15: Week 2	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> Greg Bear, "Schrodinger's Plague" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 1 locks on Sunday, Jan. 21 at 11:59pm

UNIT 2. <i>The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds, and Utopian/Dystopian Stories</i>	
Mon. Jan 22: Week 3	Wells, <i>The Time Machine</i> Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i>
Mon. Jan 29: Week 4	Joanna Russ, "A Few Things I Know About Whileaway" (NBSF) Cordwainer Smith, "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" (NBSF) Howard Waldrop, "... the World, as we Know't" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 2 locks on Sunday, Feb 4 at 11:59pm
UNIT 3 <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz and New Concerns</i>	
Mon, Feb 5: Week 5	Walter M. Miller, <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>
Mon, Feb 12: Week 6	Paul Preuss, "Half-Life" (NBSF) Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Elbow Room" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 3 locks on Sunday, Feb 18 at midnight. Midterm discussion forum grade will be calculated based on Units 1-3. Essay #1 due by 11:59 on Thursday, Feb. 15
Mon, Feb 19-Fri, Feb. 24 READING WEEK	
UNIT 4 <i>The Left Hand of Darkness and Alien Encounters</i>	
Mon, Feb 26: Week 7	Ursula Le Guin, <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i>
Mon, Mar 5: Week 8	Margaret Atwood, "Homelanding" (NBSF) John Kessel, "Invaders" (NBSF) Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (NBSF) Philip K. Dick, "Frozen Journey" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 4 locks on Sunday, Mar 11 at 11:59pm
UNIT 5 <i>Forever Peace and the Body</i>	
Mon, Mar 12: Week 9	Essay #2 topics given out today Joe Haldeman, <i>Forever Peace</i>

Mon, Mar 19: Week 10	Molly Gloss, "Interlocking Pieces" (NBSF) Eileen Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management" (NBSF) Candas Jane Dorsey, "(Learning About) Machine Sex" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 5 locks on Sunday, Mar 25 at 11:59pm
UNIT 6 <i>Neuromancer</i>, <i>He, She and It</i>, and Conclusion	
Mon, Mar 26: Week 11	William Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i>
Mon, Apr 2: Week 12	Essay #2 due on Thurs, Apr. 5 by midnight Marge Piercy, <i>He, She and It</i> Discussion forum for Unit 6 locks on Sunday Apr. 8 at 11:59pm
Mon, Apr. 9	Ursula Le Guin, "The New Atlantis" (NBSF) Review Discussion forum for review will open. Participation will not be graded.
Date TBA	Final exam (cumulative)

OVERVIEW OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:**How to Proceed:**

Begin by visiting the "Getting Started" page on our OWL site, which has a procedure for completing the work in each unit. For each unit in this course, you should begin by reading the assigned text(s) (listed above). When you have finished the text(s), you should click on the learning module for that unit (these can be found on the left-hand menubar on the OWL course site, near the bottom—you need to scroll down). Within the learning module, you'll find a document containing notes on the assigned readings. These notes are designed to play the role that a lecture would play in an on-campus course. Sometimes I will also include a video of me talking about the unit—as I stated above, I include these when we need to tie up loose ends, make connections to everyday events, or highlight student contributions. If there is a video it will be clearly indicated in the unit instructions.

Discussion forums:

The success of this class will depend a lot on your discussion forum conversations. Your participation in these discussions is worth 10% of your grade.

Each student is required to contribute to the class discussion forum **at least three times in each two-week unit**. Together, those posts must address **at least one reading from each of the two weeks** in the unit. You may post more than that if you want to, as long as it doesn't erode the quality of your posts. One week before the scheduled start of each unit, questions will be posted on the discussion board that cover the next unit's readings. In addition, **one of your answers must reply to a question I posted; one must reply to the response of another student; and the third one is up to you**, as long as it responds to the forum for that unit.

These discussion board posts are meant to do a few things: a) ensure that you're all keeping pace and finishing the readings in a timely way, b) encourage you to think dynamically about the texts and lecture materials (and each other's ideas), and c) direct your attention to specific passages in the texts that are particularly important or controversial.

The discussion forum for each unit will close every other Sunday at 11:59 pm. Specific dates are listed above in the timetable. This means that you must complete the reading well before the end of the unit to give yourself enough time to post on the discussion board. I will calculate half of your discussion forum grade at midterm, and the other half at the end of the semester.

Remember, these discussions replace in-class discussions and should, therefore, be analytical, thoughtful, and textually-based. Although I share and encourage your enthusiasm about sci fi, the level of discourse we're aiming for in the forum will be more analytical than you'd find on a typical fan site or a blog. Avoid using the forums just to state whether you liked or disliked a text or to simply agree or disagree with a previous post. I will be checking the forums at least twice a week, and I expect you to do likewise. Your participation grade will also consider whether you read the forum posts of your peers. Posting responses to questions without first reading the posts written by your fellow students is not discussion: it's a monologue, and it does not meet the criteria of this on-going assignment. You'll get the most out of this assignment by treating it as an academic conversation. A rubric for discussion board posts will be provided in OWL.

I will also be interjecting in discussion forums with my comments and thoughts, especially near the beginning of term when we're just getting started. For example, I'll be speaking up if a student has posted a problematic reading or an error, if I want to emphasize a particular point or issue that has been raised, or if someone has raised a tentative point that could be pushed further.

I will be locking the discussion threads at the end of each unit so that the discussion stays on track. For example, the discussion thread for Unit 1, which corresponds to the first two full weeks of classes, will be locked on **Sunday, January 21 at 11:59 pm EDT**. I will lock the next unit's discussion thread two weeks later, and so forth.

Good decorum and civil behavior is expected from all students at all times. Science fiction is often thought to be escapist, but the point of this course is to show how sci fi confronts

some of the most complex and even upsetting issues in society. As a result we will often be discussing difficult, sensitive, and even ethically challenging topics. Respectful and considerate behavior and language is required on the discussion forum and in all assignments. Reread your forum posts with your classmates in mind before you post anything; be mindful of how difficult it is to convey tone—and how easy it is to be hurtful—in forum posts. Finally, please remember that any message posted in the forums can be read by any other member of the class.

Essays:

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (5 pages, double-spaced, or roughly 1250 words) and a research paper (7-8 pages, double-spaced, or roughly 2000 words). 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 as you work on them.

Assignments must be submitted online. Go to the Assignments tab and click on the appropriate assignment to see the attachment with instructions and essay topics. When you're ready to submit your essay, you can upload an attachment of your assignment to Turnitin.com via OWL. Check to ensure your paper has uploaded properly. It is your responsibility to ensure its delivery.

I will be using software to comment on papers and I will explain how to see your paper comments and your grade once the first essay is graded and papers are released.

Late policy:

The penalty for late assignments will be 2% per day. Extensions may be granted in the case of a documented personal or medical emergency; I do not give extensions for computer or upload problems. 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:

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.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

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.

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.

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

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

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