

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 2071F (650)
Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction
Fall 2024

Instructor: Prof. Alyssa MacLean

Course Time: Asynchronous online class (no scheduled class period).

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 narrative conventions and tropes 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. A series of short stories by authors such as Ray Bradbury will reflect the apocalyptic sensibility of the era of nuclear confrontation in the 1960s. 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. Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* portrays the horrors of colonialism in an apocalyptic future and offers an Indigenous response to systems of oppression.

We will finish the course with novels examining the relationship between humans and technology. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* foregrounds what many critics see as a crisis in defining human identity in a technological age. Victor LaValle’s graphic novel *Destroyer* comes full circle to re-examine many of the ideas about artificial intelligence brought up in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, repositioning the creature’s desires for love and vengeance in the embittered atmosphere of the contemporary United States. Short stories by authors such as Phillip K. Dick and Octavia Butler will round out our exploration of prominent ideas and tropes of science fiction.

Course delivery: this course is an asynchronous online Distance Studies course. Units of the course material will be distributed as Word downloads on OWL. Please see the “Getting Started” tab on Brightspace to learn how to proceed through the units of the class. Our class discussions will take place asynchronously on Brightspace discussion boards.

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
- 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 discussion boards and literary analysis essays. This course will focus especially on the development of effective written communication skills. Students will learn to answer an essay question, analyze literary texts independently, and produce formal essays that have a clear, persuasive, well-argued thesis supported by appropriate textual evidence.
- Demonstrate academic integrity in all research processes—i.e. show an understanding of how new knowledge is created in the discipline, cite sources ethically and transparently, acknowledge the ideas that are theirs and not theirs, and make that difference clear to their readers.

Course Materials

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3rd ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. 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*. Del Rey, 1968. 978-0449300435

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ace, 2010.

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*. Dancing Cat, 2017.

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. Ace, 1986.

Villeneuve, Denis. *Arrival*. 2016. [N.B. this is available on the *Criterion on Demand* database via the UWO library website.]

Lavalle, Victor. *Victor Lavalle's Destroyer*. Illustrated by Dietrich Smith with Joana Lafuente. BOOM! Studios, 978-68415-055-7.

Additional course readings will be posted on OWL under “Course Readings.”

Methods of Evaluation

Academic Integrity tutorial on OWL (certificate submission required)	pass/fail
Essay # 1 (5 pages)	20%
Essay # 2 (8 pages)	30%
OWL Discussion posts (best 7 of 12)	20%
Final Exam	30%

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/Student%20Information.html>.

General Information

Land acknowledgement:

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Chonnonton peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population.

Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

OWL Brightspace:

Students are responsible for checking the course site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. Students may access the OWL Brightspace Learner Support site for assistance: <https://brightspacehelp.uwo.ca/>

For IT related issues, they may contact Western Technology Services Helpdesk directly: <https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/>.

Technical requirements:

This course requires you to have a reliable high-speed internet connection and a computer that meets the technical requirements for writing online timed assessments.

Electronic devices in the final exam:

The only aids permitted in the final exam will be paper translation dictionaries. All other aids (calculators, electronic translation dictionaries, cell phones, smart watches, etc.) are not permitted.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence:

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unacknowledged use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Google Translate, to create content that is submitted as one's own. In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for **research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines**, and other materials used in **preparing assignments**. Students are expected to **retain** these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible, ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking and independent inquiry, and allows them to produce original written contributions.

Intellectual Property/Copyright:

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Contact information:

The class TAs and I will normally respond to emails within 48 hours. We would be happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss your ideas.

Office hours:

We will be holding online office hours this semester mostly via Zoom. Prof. MacLean will be holding office hours in her office, with the ability to hold them on Zoom from there. Panteleimon, Melanie, and Samantha will be holding their regularly-

scheduled office hours on Zoom by default; however, Panteleimon and Samantha would be able to make in-person appointments for students who want to talk in person. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you'd like to meet!

A note on our class content:

Our course readings and discussions will often focus on serious, difficult, and potentially challenging topics that may ask you to step out of your normal comfort zone. Almost every work on our syllabus depicts mature, provocative, or even deliberately offensive content of some kind, such as trauma and gender-based violence, racist ideology, racial epithets, suicide, substance abuse, and forms of self-harm.

Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings. Nonetheless, we are all responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful, and I ask all students to come to class and participate in discussions in a spirit of intellectual curiosity, honesty, and empathy. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

Please consider approaching me ahead of time if you'd like spoilers for certain kinds of content or other information that would help you feel more able to appreciate the readings or class discussion. If you think a particular reading or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, I encourage you to reach out to campus counselling services; if need be, your counsellor can contact me to discuss the situation.

Overview of Course Requirements and Assignments

Attendance and illness policy:

This class will not have any synchronous elements such as attendance. All class participation will take place on discussion boards on Brightspace. That said, if there is a reason why you're not keeping up with the class, please speak to us. The process for requesting academic accommodation on medical or other grounds is described in the "Accommodations" section near the end of this syllabus.

Academic Integrity Tutorial on OWL:

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Learner Resources unit in the course OWL site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday Sept. 20. This tutorial is mandatory and must be completed to pass the course. If you've already completed the tutorial for a previous course, please upload your certificate from the past time you completed it.

Discussion post participation and engagement:

This class depends upon regular and active engagement and participation from all students: this involves reading the course texts and our course content on time, reading actively, participating on our OWL discussion board, and responding thoughtfully to other students.

We will be diving the class up into "Learning Pods" for group discussion on OWL. Each Learning Pod will be led by Dr. MacLean or one of the class TAs. Students will be asked to contribute to the discussion board in at least 7 of 12 weeks. Discussion post deadlines are noted in the

timetable below; in most cases, the discussion for a given week's readings will be posted on a Monday and will close at 11:55 pm on the following Sunday.

The lowest 5 discussion post grades, including missed posts, will be dropped from consideration when calculating your final overall grade for quizzes (your best 7 out of the 12 weeks of the course will be counted). As a result, requests for academic consideration for these posts will be denied.

Please note that this timetable means that you must keep on top of the readings in this course! You will need to complete the reading well before the end of the unit to give yourself enough time to write a post on the discussion board.

The bulk of your grade will be determined by your direct reply to the questions we post. We encourage you to read the posts of other students before you write your own post. If other students have informed your thinking, you can even credit them by including quotations from your peers' posts in your own response to the question. Discussion posts are meant to do a few things: a) encourage a simultaneous discussion about the class texts, b) ensure that everyone is keeping on schedule with the readings; c) encourage independent thought about the texts, and d) give learners the opportunity to discuss course content with other learners, and to consider new questions arising across different units.

Try to consider the following questions as you try to assess the strength of your own post:

- do you have an original thesis statement in your answer?
- Have you included textual support in your post? Have you explained how that textual support supports your thesis?
- Will your answer inspire a good discussion based on the posts other students have already written?
- Did writing it prompt you to think in more complex ways about the work (or will it help others think in more complex ways about it)?
- Did it help you practice a particular approach to reading or interpreting literature that you hadn't tried before?

Discussion posts are necessarily less formal and polished than a standard essay. However, a good post will often be curious, well-reasoned, and **well-supported with concrete textual support** (i.e. textual quotations or concrete examples in the case of film). A good Discussion board post will often involve at least one well-structured paragraph. A rubric for discussion board posts will be provided on our OWL page.

General considerations of "netiquette":

- Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course. We have students from all cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations, and identities in the class. **Be mindful of who you mean when you use the word "we."**
- Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. Flaming is never appropriate.
- Given that the OWL discussion board is our learning space (and therefore private given that you need a password to log in), it is inappropriate to share the posts of other students or discuss the learning of other students in other non-scholarly contexts such as social media.
- Be professional and scholarly in all online postings. Cite the ideas of others appropriately and use textual evidence (with page references!) to support your answer.

Essays:

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (5 pages) and a research paper (8 pages). Papers in English should be written in MLA format; this method of documentation is described in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 9th ed, which is available as a digital download on the university's library website: [https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/r0c2m8/alma991045045545305163](https://ocul.uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/r0c2m8/alma991045045545305163) . It's also available for purchase at the bookstore. The OWL at Purdue website also has an abbreviated guide to MLA guidelines at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

Further details of these papers will be announced later in the course. I encourage you to discuss your papers with us in office hours as you work on them. On the day the essay is due, please upload a copy of your assignment to the "Assignments" page in OWL. Details about how to submit a paper in MLA format (i.e. how to format in-text citations and your bibliography) are listed in the MLA handbook and the "Learner Resources" section of our OWL page.

Late policy:

In this course, your written assignments have a no-questions-asked 2-day grace period. As the attached schedule of readings and assignments shows, each paper has an **official deadline and a "flex deadline" allowing for an automatic 48-hour extension**. As a result, the standard Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs, which allows students to apply for automatic extensions without documentation, i.e. https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf, will not be applicable to the paper deadlines in this course. Students who are submitting their work after the original deadline but before the flex deadline do not need to notify us in advance.

Students who need an extension beyond the flex deadline may still seek out academic consideration, but they will be required to go through academic counselling to have their extension request approved.

After the flex deadline passes, the penalty for late papers and assignments will be 2% per day. Late penalties will be applied for each day of the week, including weekends and holidays. Assignments that are submitted late may receive fewer comments.

Exam:

This course will have a closed-book, 3-hour **in-person final exam** that will cover all of the material of the course. Further details will be provided later in the course.

If you miss the Final Exam, please contact the Academic Advising office of your Faculty of Registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam). The Special Examination will be held in the first weeks of January.

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/definitions.pdf

Academic Integrity and AI Use

Statement on Academic Integrity:

We (i.e. students in this course, Professor MacLean, the Department of English and Writing Studies, Western University, and the scholarly community at large) share an understanding of the ethical ways that we use to produce knowledge. A core practice of this shared value of academic integrity is that we acknowledge the contributions of others to our own work. However, it also means we produce our own contributions that add to the scholarly conversation: we don't buy or copy papers or exams, or have someone else edit them, or rely on AI to create them. We also don't falsify data or sources, or hand in the same work in more than one course.

One of the learning outcomes of this course is to cultivate a clear sense of what academic integrity is: what academic integrity means for this discipline, why it matters, and how to practice it in our research. Please come and see me any time you have questions about how or why we engage in the practices of attribution and citation. See "[Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism](#)" from UBC's Chapman Learning Commons, and use the MLA handbook to learn how to use MLA citation style.

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.

AI Use:

The use of AI software such as ChatGPT to draft or write assignments is strictly prohibited in this course. Any assignments that have been produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence will be considered instances of plagiarism.

For all assignments completed in this class, Prof. MacLean may require you to attend an in-person interview to discuss your work before the mark is finalized. The purpose of such an interview is to confirm that the work you have submitted is your own. If you are unable to speak meaningfully and coherently about your written work, we may judge the work in question to be plagiarized.

Accommodation Policies

Religious Accommodation:

Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be "given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test."

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education:

Academic Accommodation is "a means of adjusting the academic

activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program."

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with **Accessible Education** at the earliest opportunity. Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students.

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Support Services

Academic Advising:

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

Mental Health Support:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and Sexual Violence:

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success:

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC:

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.

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.