

## Department of English &amp; Writing Studies

**English 2071F (650)**  
**Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction**  
Spring/Summer 2026

**Instructor:** Professor Joshua Schuster  
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Office Hours: contact by email or arrange  
Zoom chat

**Course Delivery:** Online asynchronous

Course Description

This course offers a selection of readings in science fiction, from the origins of the genre in works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* to later examples by Ursula Le Guin and Rebecca Campbell (a Western alum). Our aim will be to provide a historical and intellectual context for thinking about science fiction as a literary genre that combines science and imaginative plots. Science fiction arose out of modernity and the transformative effect of new inventions. Today, we can see that science fictional effects are embedded in our daily lives, as we are witnessing a new technological revolution with artificial intelligence, digital culture, and the second space race. Together we will reflect on what science fiction means to us when it asks us to think of narratives that begin "what if..." or "if this goes on...". We will be able to turn to science fiction stories to help us think about some of the most profound issues of being human, such as: what might be the limits of the human, what will happen to us in the deep future, how will technology redefine life on Earth, what happens if we encounter aliens.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Think critically about science fiction as a genre and understand the historical and literary contexts of works.
- Develop further the ability to analyze texts critically, and to formulate and produce essays which have a clear, well-articulated intent, and a logical argument supported by adequate evidence from the text(s) under discussion.
- Develop communication and thinking skills regarding the relation of literature to issues of science, technology, environmentalism, and scenarios of the future.

Course Materials**Required Texts:**

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Broadview, 2012. (Please buy this edition or any other edition based on the **1818 version** of the text.) \$35.50

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*. Penguin. \$15

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ace, 2010. \$15

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

Rebecca Campbell, *Arboreality*. Stelliform Press, 2022. \$19

All other learning materials, lectures, and all assignments will be posted to **Brightspace**.

### Methods of Evaluation

Essay #1 (500 words)	15%
Essay #2 (1500 words)	30%
Podcast (in groups of three)	15%
Final Exam (online)	40% <b>Date TBD</b>

### **Assignment Questions**

All assignment questions and instructions will be posted on Brightspace.

### **Submitting Assignments**

Submit your essays on Brightspace via the associated "Assignment" folder for the course, or if you have difficulties, email your paper to my address.

### **Late Assignments**

Essays submitted late will receive a penalty of 1% per day, including weekends.

### 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.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence is **not allowed**. AI 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, grammar checkers, 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.

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.

### Statements

#### **Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

### Support Services

Registrar 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/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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.

### Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student’s Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
  - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
  - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
  - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the final exam **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

### Western University Land Acknowledgment

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron 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).

## Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Week 1 – May 4

Margaret Atwood, "[Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet](#)"

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Week 2 – May 11

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Week 3 – May 18

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

**Essay #1 due**

Week 4 – May 25

E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops"

Pamela Zoline, "The Heat Death of the Universe"

Begin: Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Week 5 – June 1

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

Week 6 – June 8

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

Ursula K. Le Guin, "[Is Gender Necessary? Redux](#)"

Week 7 – June 15

Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence"

*Arrival*, director Denis Villeneuve

Week 8 – June 22

Isaac Asimov, "Runaround"

Richard Brautigan, "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace"

William Gibson, "Burning Chrome"

**Podcast due**

Week 9 – June 29

Philip K. Dick, "Frozen Journey"

Eileen Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management"

Nikki Giovanni, "Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea (We're Going to Mars)"

Week 10 – July 6

Drew Hayden Taylor, "I am ... am I"

Drew Hayden Taylor, "Why I write Indigenous Sci-Fi"

Aliette de Bodard, "Immersion"

**Essay #2 due**

Week 11 – July 13

Rebecca Campbell, *Arboreality*

Week 12 – July 20

Rebecca Campbell, *Arboreality*

**Final Exam Date TBA**