

Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction

English 2071FG (650)

Distance Studies, Summer 2018

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Office: AHB 1G33 (before July 1); UC
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Weekly review session: Tues 10-11, on
Blackboard Collaborate

Office Hours: by appointment

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 questions about humanity’s privileged position in the 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 systems of racial inequality and gender oppression and wonders whether communication can address them. 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 non-human 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 Eileen Gunn 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
- Analyze individual works using appropriate literary terminology (for example, plot, character, point of view, theme, setting, imagery, symbols, tone, and diction)
- Explain the qualities of individual works in relation to their historical, political, and cultural context; compare how different works of science fiction critique their respective societies
- Communicate ideas clearly 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.

COURSE MATERIALS:

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

Recommended texts:

For students unfamiliar with the principles of literary analysis, I would recommend picking up any edition of a glossary of literary terms or a handbook of literary studies such as the following:

Roberts, Edgar V. *Writing About Literature*. Boston: Pearson, 2012. (This book is an especially good resource for those students who have little experience writing essays on literature. It contains sample student essays and a glossary of literary terms)

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford, 2004.

These have not been ordered as official textbooks for the class given that many students already have them, but they are widely available in libraries, used and new bookstores, and online vendors.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

Essay # 1 (5 pages, double-spaced)	20%
Essay # 2 (7-8 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 24 hours during the week, 48 hours on weekends. I'm happy to make an appointment for an office hour by request. I can hold office hours appointments in person in my office, on Blackboard Collaborate, or over the phone. My phone 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 appointment.

Weekly review session:

Every Tuesday from 10-11 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 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.

NB: all times listed are in the Eastern time zone.

UNIT 1. Introductory Stories and <i>Frankenstein</i>	
Mon. May 7 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. May 14: Week 2	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> Discussion forum for Unit 1 locks on Sunday, May 20 at 11:55 pm
UNIT 2. <i>The Time Machine</i>, <i>The War of the Worlds</i>, and Utopian/Dystopian Stories	
Tues. May 22: Week 3	(Monday May 21 is Victoria Day) Wells, <i>The Time Machine</i> Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i>
Mon. May 28: Week 4	Joanna Russ, "A Few Things I Know About Whileaway" (NBSF) Cordwainer Smith, "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 2 locks on Sunday, June 3 at 11:55 pm
UNIT 3 <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i> and New Concerns	
Mon, June 4: Week 5	Walter M. Miller, <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>

Mon, June 11: Week 6	Essay #1 due on Tues, June 12 at 11:55 pm Paul Preuss, "Half-Life" (NBSF) Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Elbow Room" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 3 locks on Sunday, June 17 at 11:55 pm
UNIT 4 <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> and Alien Encounters	
Mon, June 18: Week 7	Ursula Le Guin, <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i>
Mon, June 25: Week 8	Margaret Atwood, "Homelanding" (NBSF) Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (NBSF) Philip K. Dick, "Frozen Journey" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 4 locks on Monday, July 2 at 11:55 pm given that July 1 is a holiday
UNIT 5 <i>Forever Peace</i> and the Body	
Mon, July 2: Week 9	Essay #2 topics given out today Joe Haldeman, <i>Forever Peace</i>
Mon, July 9: Week 10	Molly Gloss, "Interlocking Pieces" (NBSF) Eileen Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management" (NBSF) Discussion forum for Unit 5 locks on Sunday, July 15 at 11:55 pm I would advise everyone to start <i>Neuromancer</i> and <i>He, She, and It</i> this week given the heavy reading load in the next unit and the early closing of the Unit 6 discussion forum.
UNIT 6 <i>Neuromancer</i>, <i>He, She and It</i>, and Conclusion	
Mon, July 16: Week 11	William Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> Essay #2 due on Wed, July 19 by 11:55 pm
Mon, July 23: Week 12	Marge Piercy, <i>He, She and It</i> Review Discussion forum for Unit 6 locks on Friday July 27 at 11:55pm (please note that it's not locking on a Sunday given the timing of the last day of classes)

Sat, July 28:	Discussion forum for exam review will open. Participation will not be graded.
Mon, July 30- Thurs, Aug 2	Final exam period. Time and date of our exam TBA.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Discussion forums:

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.

The discussion forum for each unit will close every other Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Specific dates are listed above in the timetable. I will calculate your mark based on the best 5 units out of the 6, and I'll be grading the forum as we proceed through the semester. Your discussion forum grade is worth 10%.

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.

Essays:

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (5 pages, double-spaced, or roughly 1500 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.

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. Papers that are more than 14 days late will not be accepted

without academic accommodations.

Exam:

This course will have a cumulative 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 the Western calendar. 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_underg

[rad.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