

**UGS 302: Science Fiction and Politics**  
**(62550)**  
**Fall 2023, T/Th 9:30-10:45**  
**JES A205A**

**Professor: Terrence Chapman**

**Office: Batts 3.104**

**Office Hours: M/T/Th 1-2 pm and by appt. Virtual meetings available (email Professor Chapman to schedule)**

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**Signature Course Mission:** The Signature Courses at the University of Texas at Austin will connect students with distinguished faculty members in unique learning environments. By way of this rigorous intellectual experience, students will develop college-level skills in research, writing, speaking, and discussion through an approach that is both interdisciplinary and contemporary.

**Course Description:** German Chancellor and statesman Otto von Bismarck once described politics as “the art of the possible.” He was referring most to crafting coalitions and brokering political deals. But taken in a broader context, the quote suggests that political organization, and its implications for how societies function, is as much a product of *imagination* as of detailed design, political expediency, or historical accident. Understanding and explaining the way the political world works requires imagination, thought experiments, and the creation of a mental models of how actors interact with their environment and the rules structuring their interactions with others. And understanding which factors “matter” in producing political outcomes necessitates thinking about counterfactual scenarios; in other words, what would happen under different circumstances? How can one develop and hone these processes?

This course proposes one answer to these questions by drawing on a rich tradition in science fiction to explore ideas about political organization and social order. Science fiction has long served as a form of thought experiment into the possible. Science fiction almost always reflects the culture and politics of the author’s time as well as expectations about how political and social trends will influence the future. Science fiction also provides a useful and stimulating lens through which one can gain insight into contemporary and historical politics, and perhaps some understanding of possible future consequences of political choices we make today.

This course will explore core themes in the study of politics, economics, and social organization through the lens of major works of science fiction. These include, but are not limited to, democracy and autocracy, civil liberties and religious freedoms, race and gender, social movements, interstate diplomacy and conflicts, nuclear weapons, and control over the means of production. The course will draw on literary works as well as insights from social science. The aim is to *use* the genre of science fiction to gain a deeper understanding of central issues facing political organization and the evolution of societies and civilizations.

**Course Objectives:** Social Responsibility, Critical Thinking, Communication Skills -- the course aims to imbue students with an increased ability to contextualize modern politics and political decision-making by exposing them to new ideas and alternate possible forms of political organization. Drawing on fiction helps drive home complex ideas in government and economics and can be an effective way to cement deep conceptual understanding. Students will work on synthesizing and communicating complex ideas through writing and in class discussion leading.

**SIGNATURE COURSE ESSENTIALS AND GRADING:**

**Information Literacy:**

Information literacy session with PCL librarian Sarah Brandt. **October \_\_, during normal class time, 9:30-10:45 am.**

**Writing:**

Please note that this course carries the **Writing Flag**. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Students will write four 2-3 page reaction papers to either the texts or to film we watch. These papers should not be just rote summary; rather, they should serve as opportunities to connect the readings to one another, to real-world events, to previous discussions in the class, or otherwise explore insights that might occur to you while reading. I encourage you to use these as practice, testing out ideas for your longer paper. **These shorter reaction papers will comprise 20% of the final grade in total. These may be submitted through canvas as file uploads. Due dates are listed on the course calendar. Late papers will be assessed with a 5 pt. penalty for each day late.** I'll leave a 30 minute grace period after the official due date/time, but afterward the 5 pt. penalty will operate.

Students will write a longer (roughly) 8-12 page paper, due at the end of the term, on a theme that synthesizes material from the course. I will provide a list of possible themes and in our library session university librarians will show how to conduct research and read about proposed topics. You are welcome to choose any topic from the provided list or come up with your own with my approval. Your paper should pick one theme or topic and discuss (using the primary source material and relevant other sources – secondary criticism, current events examples, etc.) how various authors/works approach the topic. You are also

encouraged to use the paper to the theme to broader contemporary or historical political and economic trends. Throughout the semester components of the 8-12 page paper will be due and I will provide feedback. **These components, including a topic statement (5%), an outline and list of sources (10%), and a draft (10%) will be worth 25% of your final grade. More details to come closer to due dates on what needs to be included in these. The final paper will comprise 20% of the final grade and is DUE FRIDAY 12/10. Here are the due dates for the paper components:**

**\*\*September 21, topic statement due \*\***

**\*\*October 19, outline and list of sources due\*\***

- **A minimum of 10 scholarly sources required. These can be books or journal articles. This does not include online essays, wiki entries, news articles, op-eds, or other non-scholarly sources**

**\*\*Nov 16, rough draft due**

**\*\*December 9, Final Paper due\*\***

On writing, I encourage you to consult with me, your peers, and/or the writing center early and often. Writing, like any skill, requires repetition and practice. Feedback, revision, and iteration is essential. Don't be afraid to offer unfiltered feedback to your classmates as well. You will be doing them a favor. Here is the writing center website: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/uwc>

### **Oral Communication:**

Class discussion is integral to this course. **Overall class participation (outside of discussion leading) will comprise 10% of your grade.** I do not take attendance, but repeatedly missing class will bring down your participation grade. Best practices for receiving a strong participation grade include (i) being on time to class; (ii) being attentive in class, not on devices; (iii) being prepared, having done the reading; (iv) contributing *quality* comments and questions during discussion; (v) be respectful of others – listen and when disagreeing do so respectfully.

**Discussion leading:** you will be required to lead and introduce discussion one day during the semester. I will distribute a sign-up sheet for topics, which will consist of either (a) background on an author, including related works or (b) situating a novel in historical context and connecting to related novels, films, TV shows, etc. **This will comprise 10% of your grade.**

### **University Lecture Series:**

As part of the first-year experience, all signature course students are required to attend ONE of the university lecture series events below. For this course, you will

be required to turn in a 1-page summary of the event you attend. **This will comprise 5% of your grade.**

### **Fall 2023 Herbert Family University Lecture Series**

Designed to create a campus-wide conversation, the Helen and Jeff Herbert Family University Lecture Series gives first-year students an opportunity to interact with leading members of our faculty—scholars, scientists, and civic leaders who are nationally and internationally renowned. All students, faculty, alumni, staff, and community guests are invited, but the events will be aimed at entering first-year students. Please encourage your students to attend one of the lectures below. Although they will not be live-streamed, a video recording of each event will be available on the HFULS website within 5 days of the event.

#### ***The State of Affirmative Action***

*Ms. Lisa R Eskow, JD, Dr. Liliana Garces, JD, and Dr. Peniel Joseph*  
Monday, Sept. 11, 7-8 p.m., Bass Concert Hall

This lecture will define affirmative action and discuss the impacts of this policy using historical, legal and educational lenses. What has the impact of affirmative action been on our democracy thus far?

#### ***For the Love of You: Taking Care of Your Health and Wellbeing at UT Austin***

*Drs. Molly S Bray, Bridget Goosby and Raj Ragunathan*  
Tuesday, Sept. 12, 7-8 p.m., Bass Concert Hall

This lecture will discuss the links between sleep, nutrition, exercise and academic health. The presenters will also address how understanding the motivations to pursue your chosen field of study is key to a fulfilling academic career and a healthy lifestyle. How does seeking purpose as an undergraduate set you up for happiness during college and beyond?

#### **Periodic reading quizzes:**

Throughout the course of the semester, I will administer occasional reading quizzes at the beginning of class. These will not be announced in advance. You may miss up to 2 of these without penalty.

#### **Breakdown of final grade:**

Information literacy session 5%  
University Lecture Series 5%  
Class participation: 10%  
Discussion leading: 10%  
Reading quizzes: 5%

4 short reaction papers: 20%

Long paper:

Topic statement: 5%

Outline and source list: 10%

Rough Draft: 10%

Final Paper: 20%

Grade Scale

Grades will be rounded to the nearest percentage point (i.e. .5 and above will be rounded to the next percentage point).

- A 92-100
- A- 90-91
- B+ 88-89
- B 82-87
- B- 80-81
- C+ 78-79
- C 72-77
- C- 70-71
- D+ 68-69
- D 62-67
- D- 60-61
- F Below 60

**Required Texts:** The following is a list of books we will cover during the class. These should be available from the University Co-op, but you may also purchase these on your own. Please bring the relevant texts to class so you can consult it during discussion. All other readings will be either provided as .pdf files on Canvas or through hyperlinks. I reserve the right to send or post additional short readings if I encounter something that I think is relevant to the course and will further discussion.

Frank Herbert, *Dune*  
Ann Leckie, *Ancillary Justice*  
Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*  
Cixin Lu, *The Three-Body Problem*  
Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*

**Religious holy days:** A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Students with Disabilities:** Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You may find out more

information on the Services for Students with Disabilities website:

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/> and/or <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/how-to-register-with-ssd/>

**Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/>.

All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student's original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the faculty member will make the final determination as to whether or not a paper has been plagiarized. If you would like more information on how to avoid plagiarism, see the video and exercise on [this page](#).

**Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:** No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

**University of Texas Honor Code:** "As A Student Of The University Of Texas At Austin, I Shall Abide By The Core Values Of The University And Uphold Academic Integrity."

**Class Recordings:** Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

**Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students:** All students should be familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

**Generative AI Use:** The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class shall be permitted on a very limited basis. You will be informed as to the assignments for which AI may be utilized. You are also welcome to seek my prior-approval to use AI writing tools on any assignment. In either instance, AI writing tools should be used with caution and proper citation, as the use of AI should be properly attributed. *Using AI writing tools without my permission or authorization, or failing to properly cite AI even where permitted, shall constitute a violation of UT Austin's Institutional Rules on academic integrity.*

**COVID Caveats:** To help keep everyone at UT and in our community safe, it is critical that students report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to [University Health Services](#), and faculty and staff report to the [HealthPoint Occupational Health Program](#) (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this [link](#) to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor or TA) tests positive for COVID, see this [University Health Services link](#). Stay home if sick and contact me to see about work missed.

**Course Schedule (subject to change as needed):**

**Tuesday, August 22:** Introduction, review syllabus, watch [BREAKING IT DOWN](#) video

**Thursday, August 24:** Scifi as commentary/reaction to politics and as thought experiment

A.M. Gittlitz, “‘Make it So’: Star Trek and Its Debt to Revolutionary Socialism,” *New York Times* 24 July 2017. ([link](#)) (also on canvas)

Robert Sawyer, “The Purpose of Science Fiction: How it teaches governments, and citizens, how to understand the future of technology,” *Slate* 27 January 2011. ([link](#)) (also on canvas)

David Barnett, “It’s not Climate Change, it’s Everything Change: sci-fi authors take on the global crisis,” *The Guardian* 9 June 2023.

**Tuesday, August 29:** *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor. New York: Tor Books and Tom Doherty Associates.

*Please read entire novella by this date*

**Thursday, August 31:** In-class presentations on Nnedi Okorafor and her related work

Read the following

[Afrofuturism](#)

[Binti and Afrofuturism](#)

**\*Short Paper Due (if writing about Binti)\***

**Tuesday Sept. 5:**

**Writing Discussion** – transitioning to college level writing. Clarity, organization, do’s and don’t’s. Art Markman and Bob Duke ([2 Guys on Your Head](#)) on the psychology of writing, editing, and procrastination.

[Common myths about writing](#)

[Procrastination](#)

[Editing](#)

**Thursday Sept 7:** *Dune* by Frank Herbert. *Read Part 1*



Daniel Immerwahr, 2020, "[Heresies of Dune](#)," *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

**Tuesday Sept 12: Dune** Read part II

Hari Kunzru, 2015, "[Dune, 50 years on: how a science fiction novel changed the world](#)," *The Guardian*.

**Thursday Sept 14: Dune** Read Part III

In class presentations on Frank Herbert and the Dune series

**\*Short Paper Due (if writing about Dune)\***

**Tuesday Sept. 19: Dystopias, Technology, Authoritarianism**

1984 or Huxley's Brave New World?" *New York Times* book review 13 February 2017. ([link](#))

Gideon Lewis-Krause, "How Harmful is Social Media?" June 3, 2022, *The New Yorker*.

Rick Shenkman. "The Shocking Paper Predicting the End of Democracy." *Politico* 8 Sept. 2019

"Creating the Coronopticon." *The Economist* 25 March 2020 (pdf in Files on Canvas)

Jean Twenge. 2017. "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" *The Atlantic* September. ([link](#))

Ted Chiang, "Will A.I. Become the Next McKinsey?" *The New Yorker* 4 May 2023 (posted in Canvas)

**Thursday Sept. 21:** watch *Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams* episode "Kill All Others" in class

**\*Topic Statement Due\***

**\*1-page summary of University Lecture series Due\***

**Tuesday Sept. 26:** Presentations on PKD and his other work

**Short Paper Due (if writing about Kill All Others)**

**Thursday Sept. 28: Information Literacy Session**

Meet in PCL Learning Lab 4 (walk past the circulation desk and take a left to get

to the learning labs).

**Tuesday Oct. 3: The Dispossessed, discuss Chapters 1-5**

**Thursday Oct 5: The Dispossessed, discuss Chapters 6-8**

**Tuesday Oct 10: The Dispossessed, discuss remainder**

**Short Paper Due (if writing on TD)**

**Thursday Oct. 12:** Watch *Worlds of Ursula Leguin* in class

[https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=01UTAU\\_INST:SEARCH&docid=alma991058603386706011](https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=01UTAU_INST:SEARCH&docid=alma991058603386706011)

**Tuesday Oct 17: Gender and Science Fiction**

Constance Grady, “The Handmaid’s Tale is a Handbook for Surviving Oppressive Systems,” *Vox* 26 April 2017. ([link](#))

Megan Garber, “Slouching Toward Gilead,” *The Atlantic* 16 June 2021.

Annalee Newitz. 2012. “What does science fiction tell us about the future of reproductive rights?” i09 Gizmodo ([link](#))

watch Neil Gaiman interview Margaret Atwood in class ([link](#))

**Thursday October 19:** The Three Body Problem, read Ch. 1-6

Read: <https://www.history.com/topics/china/cultural-revolution>

**Outline and source list Due**

**Tuesday October 24:** The Three Body Problem, read Ch. 7-14

**Thursday October 26:** The Three Body Problem, read Ch. 15-25

**Tuesday October 31:** The Three Body Problem, read Ch. 26-34

**Thursday Nov 2:** In class presentations on Cixin Liu, *Remembrance of Earth’s Past*

Read: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n03/nick-richardson/even-what-doesn-t-happen-is-epic>

Read: <https://www.schwarzmanscholars.org/events-and-news/remembrance-chinas-past-review-three-body-problem/>

**Short Paper Due (if writing on TBP)**

**Tuesday Nov 7: Watch *The Orville*, Season 1 episode 7 “Majority Rule”**

**Wed Nov 9: Read Ancillary Justice, Chapters 1-5**

**Tuesday Nov 14: Ancillary Justice, Chapters 6-11**

**Thursday Nov 16: Tuesday Nov 28: Ancillary Justice Ch. 12-19**

**\*\*Rough Draft of Final Paper Due\*\***

**Monday Nov 20 – Friday Nov 25, Fall Break, no class**

**Tuesday Nov 28: Ancillary Justice, remainder**

**presentations on Ancillary Justice and Anne Leckie**

**\*Short Paper Due if writing on AJ\***

**Thursday Nov 30: last day of class, wrap up, watch TBA**

**\*\*\*\*Final Paper Due Dec. 9th\*\*\*\***