

UGS 302: Science Fiction and Politics
(62185)
Fall 2018, T/Th 11:00-12:30 am
Main Building 220F

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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 to the craft of forming coalitions and ushering through political and economic reforms. 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. Where can we find source material for imagining the possible? What are reasonable thought experiments that could help us think through the human and social consequences of political decisions?

This course proposes one answer to these questions by drawing on a rich tradition in science fiction to explore ideas about political and economic organization. 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, 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 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 a deep understanding of ideas. 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 2nd, during normal class time, 11:00-12:15 am. Location: PCL, Learning Lab 4. Attendance is required mandatory at will comprise 5% of your final grade.**

University GEM:

During our information literacy session you will learn about the various library resources available on campus. As the flagship public university in Texas and one of the top public research institutions in the country, UT-Austin has a host of resources for researchers across disciplines. I encourage you to avail yourselves of access to this information and at times throughout the semester I will highlight how to access these resources.

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 4 2-3 page reaction papers. 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 25% of the final grade. These may be submitted through canvas as attachments. Please turn these in the week we are discussing the work that you write about. E.g. if you write on *Brave New World*, please turn that in no later than the last class for which we discuss that work.** If you forgot to write during the semester and expect to turn in 5 papers the last week of class, I will only grade the one for the text we are covering the last week in class.

Students will write a longer 8-12 page paper, due at the end of the term, on a theme that synthesizes material from the course. I will provide examples of possible themes and in our library session university librarians will show how to conduct research and read about proposed topics. The goal of this paper is to pick one theme or topic, such as authoritarianism, and discuss (using the source material) how various authors/works approach the topic. You are also encouraged to use the paper to the theme to broader 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, an outline, and a draft will be worth 10% of your final grade. The final paper will comprise 25% of the final grade. Here are the due dates for the paper components:**

****September 25, topic statement due****

****October 25, outline due****

****Nov 15f, rough draft due (need not be complete but better if more complete)****

On writing, I encourage you to consult with me, your peers, and/or the writing center early and often. **Students are required to visit the office hours of Professor Chapman at least once during the semester to discuss writing and/or other aspects of the course. Fulfilling this requirement will comprise 5% of your grade.** Writing, like any skill, requires repetition and practice. Reaction, feedback, and iteration is essential. I write for a living, and if I can find someone willing to spend the time to read my work and offered extensive, unfiltered criticism, I am extremely grateful because that is how I improve what I'm trying to communicate. 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 required. Each student will choose a topic for which they will serve as a discussion leader. Think of this as becoming an "expert" on the particular work for that week/topic. Students are highly encouraged to do their own research on the work. For instance, when we discuss *The Handmaid's tale*, the student discussion leaders are encouraged to search for extra commentary on the book online or, perhaps, find commentary on the current television version of the series. When we discuss *The Man in the High Castle* you may similarly look at the recent Amazon Prime streaming series. For the topics in which you are discussion leader, I will ask you to provide a 5-minute overview of the work in which you can summarize the key plot elements and comment on how they speak to various political or economic themes. This need not be long; it is intended merely to start our discussions and provoke further thought, not provide the audience with a complete analysis of the work. You will need to coordinate, at

least by email or Canvas discussion, with the other students who are also signed up for that day. **Discussion leading will be comprise 10% of the grade. Overall class participation (outside of discussion leading) will comprise 10% of your grade.**

University Lecture Series:

Students are required to attend one of the two fall University lecture series:

Keep Calm and Grow Your Mind • September 24 | 7-8 p.m. | Bass Concert Hall
Featuring

Dr. Keffrelyn D Brown (Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education)

Dr. Robert Crosnoe (Department of Sociology, College of Liberal Arts)

Dr. Robert Duke (School of Music, College of Fine Arts)

OR

Turning Points • September 25 | 7-8 p.m. | Bass Concert Hall

Featuring former UT Presidents

William Cunningham

and

William Powers, Jr.

After attending, you will submit an outline of the topics discussed at the lecture. Use the opportunity to think about outlining as a first step in planning out a longer writing assignment, and then apply this approach to mapping out your 8-12 page paper later in the semester **This will comprise 10% of your grade and is due the next class meeting after the lecture you attend.**

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.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Iain Banks, *The Player of Games*

Philip K. Dick, *Man in the High Castle*

Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* **OR** Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*.

Technology in the classroom: NO TEXTING DURING CLASS. You can use devices for the purposes of class only.

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/>.

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> .

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."

Course Schedule (this is a rough outline; I will give guidance as to what we will cover from class to class. We will also take occasional days to talk about the process and craft of writing):

1. Preliminaries: 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)

Jutta Weldes, “Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics: Exploring Intertextual Relations,” in Weldes, ed. *To Seek Out New Worlds: Exploring Links between Science Fiction and World Politics*, pp. 1-27.

Ha-Joon Chang. 2018. “Economics, Science Fiction, History and Comparative Studies.” In William Davies ed. *Economic Science Fictions*, pp. 31-40. London: Goldsmith Press.

2. Civic Nationalism, War, Enfranchisement

Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*

Andrew Liptak, “Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* and the Cold War.” ([link](#))

Barry R. Posen. 1993. “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power.” *International Security* 18(2): 80-124.

Snyder, Jack. 2002. “Anarchy and culture: insights from the anthropology of war.” *International Organization* 56(1): 7-45.

Klingler, Jonathan D. and J. Tyson Chatagnier. 2014. “Are You Doing Your Part? Veterans’ Political Attitudes, and Heinlein’s Conception of Citizenship.” *Armed Forces & Society* 40(4): 673–695.

Gary Gutting. 2016. “Should Everybody Vote?” *New York Times* April 15. ([link](#))

3. Dystopian futures, technology, complacency

Choose **EITHER**

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

OR

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Amy E. Boyle Johnston, "Ray Bradbury: Fahrenheit 451 Misinterpreted," *LA Weekly* 30 May 2007. ([link](#))

WE WILL HAVE A CLASS DISCUSSION IN WHICH PRESENTERS WILL PRESENT ON THEIR CHOICE OF THESE BOOKS AND THE REMAINDER OF TIME WILL BE SPENT DISCUSSING/COMPARING THEIR VISIONS OF THE FUTURE/POLITICS

And the following are required for all:

Charles McGrath and Siddhartha Deb, "Which Dystopian Novel Got it Right? Orwell's 1984 or Huxley's Brave New World?" *New York Times book review* 13 February 2017. ([link](#))

Ezra Klein. 2018. "Amusing Ourselves to Trump." *Vox.com* August 6 ([link](#))

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

4. Authoritarianism, human rights, and gender in society

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

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

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

Coleman, Isobel. 2004. "The payoff from women's rights." *Foreign Aff.* 83: 80.

5. Alternate histories

Philip K. Dick, *Man in the High Castle*

Aaron Brady, "Philip K. Dick's Vision for Resisting Fascism in America," *The New Yorker* 17 January 2017. ([link](#))

Laura Miller, "No Heroes: the Mournful Philip K. Dick masterpiece behind Amazon's splashy new series *The Man in the High Castle*," *Slate* 24 November 2015. ([link](#))

Rosenfeld, Gavriel. 2002. "Why do we ask "what if?" Reflections on the function of alternate history." *History and Theory* 41(4): 90-103.

Fearon, James D. 1991. "Counterfactuals and hypothesis testing in political science." *World politics* 43(2): 169-195.

6. The Utopian-dystopian juxtaposition; anarchy as social order

Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*.

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. 2011. *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and Its Evolution*. Chs. 1 & 3 (pp. 1-7, 19-42). Princeton University Press.

7. Post-scarcity, empire, strategic expansion

Iain Banks, *The Player of Games*

Nye Jr, J.S., 2009. "Get smart: Combining hard and soft power." *Foreign affairs*, pp.160-163.

Zielonka, Jan. 2008. "Europe as a global actor: empire by example?" *International affairs* 84(3): 471-484.