

**UGS 302: Science Fiction and Politics
(60620)
Fall 2019, T/Th 9:30-12:15
Garrison 1.134**

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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 to either the texts or to film we watch in class. 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 attachments. Please turn these in the week we are discussing the work that you write about.** .

Students will write a longer (roughly) 10-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 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 (5%), and a draft (5%) will be worth 15% 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 25% of the final grade and is DUE 12/9. Here are the due dates for the paper components:**

****September 26, topic statement due****

****October 22, outline due****

****Nov 19, 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. **Overall class participation (outside of discussion leading) will comprise 15% of your grade.**

Moreover, the last week of class we will hold a mock constitutional convention for a hypothetical Mars colony. This will directly build off our discussion of K.S. Robinson's *Red Mars*, the first in a trilogy of novels about the colonization and terraforming of Mars. The class will be divided into groups, representing factions with various political, economy, religious, or cultural interests. We will then discuss how to create governing institutions and attempt to draft a constitution. Groups will need to prepare presentations on their positions or proposals for the constitution. This group project will be worth **15% of your grade.**

University Lecture Series:

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

(1) Sept. 23 | 7-8 p.m. | Bass Concert Hall

Defendant...How Do You Plead? A Look Into the American Justice System

Dr. Jim Patton, Department of Special Education

Prof. Jordan Steiker, School of Law

Dr. Mary Rose, Department of Sociology

Professor Steiker's talk will focus on the past, present, and future of the American death penalty. Professor Steiker will focus on topics such as – the role of race in the American death penalty; the substantial withering of American capital practice; the changing discourse in the American death penalty debate; the prospects for abolition in the U.S.; and the American death penalty in comparative/international perspective.

Dr. Rose's talk will suggest that defendants "plead" far too often. Specifically, she will talk about the important role of juries in the American legal system. She will argue that, although juries are by no means perfect decision makers, they were integral to the Founders' vision of a fair legal system, and particularly within the last half-century, we have permitted powerful others to seize the jury's power, making the system less fair.

Prof. James Patton's talk will focus on how the death penalty applies to individuals who have, or are believed to have, intellectual disability (ID). In 2002, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled that the death penalty could not be used with individuals who have an intellectual disability. his talk will focus on the realities and issues associated with this exemption. Prof. Patton will share his experiences serving as an intellectual disability specialist in over 60 cases in which an ID claim has been raised. Specifically, he will highlight the ongoing issues in demonstrating that someone has ID in death penalty cases.

(2) Sept. 24 | 7-8 p.m. | Bass Concert Hall

One Giant Leap: 50th Anniversary of the First Moon Landing

Dr. Moriba Jah, Department of Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics

Dr. Caitlin Casey, Department of Astronomy

Dr. Wallace Fowler, Department of Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics

Dr. Jah will speak about the current state of space traffic and why we possibly face a "tragedy of the commons" in near Earth space and what he suggests we need to do to try and prevent such a thing, promoting space security, safety, and

sustainability.

Dr. Fowler will discuss selected memories of the preparations for Apollo. The past fifty years have been special for our relationship and evolving understanding of the cosmos. While we have taken our first steps beyond our Earth, we have set our eyes on a horizon almost incomprehensibly vast: the Universe itself. Astronomers and Astrophysicists have learned so much from the development of modern cameras and space-based observatories, from the formation of planetary systems around other stars to the most distant specs of light that have traveled billions of years to reach us.

Dr. Casey will look back on some of these profound discoveries and how difficult they were while also providing an outlook for the future of astronomy and its relationship to space exploration.

After attending, you will submit a 1-2 page summary of the lecture. **This will comprise 5% 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*

Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*

Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars*

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 (9/3-9/5)

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.

2. Civic Nationalism, War, Enfranchisement (9/10, 9/12, 9/17)

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.

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](#))

Thursday 9/19, watch *Black Mirror* episode "Men Against Fire" in class

3. 9/24, Writing center presentation: Transitioning from High School to University-Level Writing

4. Authoritarianism, human rights, and gender (9/26, 10/1, 10/3)

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](#))

Tuesday 10/8, watch Neil Gaiman interview Margaret Atwood in class ([link](#))

5. Information literacy session? 10/10

6. Dystopian authoritarian futures, technology (10/15)

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](#))

Thursday 10/17, watch *Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams* episode "Kill All Others" in class

7. The Utopian-dystopian juxtaposition; anarchy as social order (10/22, 10/29, 10/31)

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.

****No class on 10/24****

8. Post-scarcity, empire, strategic expansion, hierarchy, moral authority (11/5, 11/7, 11/12)

Iain Banks, *The Player of Games*

"Moral authority or national interest? Senate weighs both in Saudi relations." *Christian Science Monitor* 13 December 2018 ([link](#))

Jayshree Bajoria and Robert McMahon. "The dilemma of humanitarian intervention." *Council on Foreign Relations* 12 June 2013 ([link](#))

Daniel Immerwahr. "How the U.S. has hidden its empire." *The Guardian* 15 February 2019 ([link](#))

9. The future of space colonization, tragedy of the commons (11/14, 11/19, 11/21)

K.S. Robinson, *Red Mars*

Kate Wheeling, 2019, "Outer space treaties didn't anticipate the privatization of space travel. Can they be enforced?" *Pacific Standard* 14 August 2019.

Iain Thompson. 2012. "NASA: The Future of space is public/private partnerships." *The Register* 8 March 2012.

Michael J. Cohen. 2016. "As Silicon Valley lays plans to colonize Mars, researchers offer a plan for governing it." *Quartz* 10 June 2016.

10. Martian Constitutional Convention (12/3, 12/5)