

UGS 302: Science Fiction and Politics
(62380)
Fall 2021, M/W 9:30-10:45
BUR 212

Instructor: Terrence Chapman

Office: Batts 3.104

Office Hours: T/Th 9-10:30 and by appt. Office hours will be held virtually, over zoom.

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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 mainly referring 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. It requires thought experiments and the creation of a mental model of how actors interact with their environment. It requires thinking about counterfactual scenarios about what would happen under different circumstances. Where can we find source material for imagining the possible?

This course proposes one answer to this question 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, virtual synchronous (zoom meeting info TBA). A recording of the session will be made available, but synchronous attendance is highly encouraged.**

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 attachments. Please turn these in the week we are discussing the work that you write about.**

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 (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 22, topic statement due ****

****October 27, outline due****

****Nov 17, 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 hold virtual office hours with 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. 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 15% of your grade.**

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 usually 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.**

The Helen and Jeff 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. The Helen and Jeff Herbert Family University Lecture Series is made possible by a generous gift from the Herbert Family.

Fall 2021 Events

When Texas Froze Over

Dr. Kasey Faust, Department of Civil, Architectural, and Environmental Engineering; Professor Troy Kimmel, Department of Geography and the Environment; and Dr. Varun Rai, Associate Dean for Research and Director of the UT Energy Institute

October 11, 7-8 p.m., Bass Concert Hall

Professor Troy Kimmel will talk about the forecasts leading up to this historic winter storm and how accurate those forecasts actually were. In addition, are forecasts (and watches, warnings, and advisories, for that matter) all there is to communicating weather hazards to the general public? You may be surprised by the answer to that question!

Dr. Faust will consider the cascading impacts of Winter Storm Uri on the water infrastructure system in Austin. This includes understanding the response and recovery across the city, as well as the impacts on our most vulnerable residents (e.g., mothers with children, elderly populations). Importantly, she will discuss how we can rethink water infrastructure in Texas to be better prepared for weather extremes in the future.

Dr. Varun Rai, topic TBA

COVID-19: A Retrospective from Campus Leaders

Dean Clay Johnston, Dell Medical School; Dean Alexa Stuijbergen, School of Nursing; and Dean Luis Zayas, Steve Hicks School of Social Work

October 12, 7-8 p.m., Bass Concert Hall

Dean Johnston will give insight into the timelines of the pandemic and what Dell Medical School was doing on the ground, and explore what lasting impacts might be expected from the pandemic, particularly in healthcare and research.

Dean Stuijbergen will discuss the impact of the pandemic on the School of Nursing undergraduate and graduate students and how faculty creatively managed the challenges of the pandemic – especially related to “in-person” clinical learning. On Dec. 15, 2020 School of Nursing faculty and students administered the first COVID vaccines in central Texas. During the subsequent months, a strong interprofessional partnership between the School of Nursing, College of Pharmacy, Dell Medical School, and the Steve Hicks School of Social Work faculty and students has delivered almost 150,000 vaccines in the historic effort to stop the pandemic. We know that the pandemic has had a greater impact on persons with fewer resources and Dean Stuijbergen will describe current efforts to

make vaccines available for those with limited access and greater barriers to health care.

The pandemic has had a global impact on economies, political systems, and societies, and families. At the personal level, COVID has created stress, anxiety, isolation, depression, and many other psychosocial issues in the lives of high school and college students (and their professors, too). In some instances, it has meant losses of family members, friends, and neighbors. What have been the effects on our mental wellbeing? What can we do at UT and at home to repair from this historic year? Dean Zayas will talk about mental well-being in the age of COVID and how social workers are helping.

Break down of final grade:

4 reaction papers: 20%
Topic statement: 5%
Office hours visit: 5%
University Lecture Series 5%
Outline: 10%
Rough Draft: 10%
Final Paper: 20%
Class participation: 10%
Discussion leading: 15%

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*
Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*
Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*
Tochi Onyebuchi, *Riot Baby*
Frank Herbert, *Dune*

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.

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> .

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](#).

Finally, *I strongly urge mask wearing in class*, even for those of us who are vaccinated. As of the beginning of the semester, Austin is at Stage 5 with respect to covid cases, the highest state of alert, and is essentially out of ICU beds. The latest CDC data suggests that vaccinated individuals can spread the Delta variant, even when asymptomatic. And vaccinated individuals can contract covid, though vaccination has been shown to dramatically lessen the severity of symptoms. Please be courteous and wear a mask, at least until local public health authorities and the CDC recommend otherwise.

Course Schedule (this is a rough outline; I will give guidance as to what we will cover from class to class.):

1. Preliminaries: Scifi as commentary/reaction to politics and as thought experiment (8/25 & 8/30)

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. Nationalism, War, Enfranchisement (9/1, 9/6, 9/10)

Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers: please read pp. 1-164 for Monday, 9/1. Then complete book by 9/6.*

We will discuss these articles on 9/8:

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. (in canvas)

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](#))

Monday 9/13, watch *Black Mirror* episode “Men Against Fire” in class

3. 9/15 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.

[Editing](#)

[Procrastination](#)

[Writer’s block](#)

4. Colonialism, natural resources, religion and empire, charismatic leadership (9/20, 9/22, 9/27)

Dune by Frank Herbert. *Read Part I* by 9/20, *Part II* by 9/22, *Part III* by 9/27.

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

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

*****9/22 Topic Statement Due*****

Information Literacy Session (10/4)

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

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

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](#))

"Creating the Coronopticon." *The Economist* 25 March 2020.

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

Gender and Women's Rights (10/11, 10/13)

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](#))

Monday 10/18, watch Neil Gaiman interview Margaret Atwood in class ([link](#))

Wednesday 10/20, watch Philip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams* episode "Kill All Others" in class

6. The Utopian-dystopian juxtaposition; anarchy as social order (10/25, 10/27, 11/1)

Ursula Leguin, *The Dispossessed*. Chapters 1-5 by 10/25; 6-8 by 10/27; the remainder by 11/1.

Read the by Wed 11/3; pdf posted in Canvas

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.

*****Outline Due 10/29*******

7. Race, inequality, social movements, policing (11/8, 11/10, 11/15)

Tochi Onyebuchi, *Riot Baby*, first half by 11/8, second half by 11/15

*****11/10, tour of exhibition *The Black Index* at the Galleries at Black Studies with Kendyll Gross, Curator of Public Programs**

Read the following by 11/22

Frank Baumgartner, Leah Christiani, Derek Epp, Kelsey Shoub, and Kevin Roach. 25 June 2020. "Ten Years of Study and the Protestors are Right: What Traffic Stops Tell Us About Bias in Policing." ([link](#))

Hannah Walker and Michael Leo Owens. 21 September 2018. "What gets ex-prisoners politically and civically involved?" *Washington Post: The Monkey Cage*. ([link](#))

Optional:

Frank Baumgartner, Leah Christiani, Derek Epp, Kelsey Shoub, and Kevin Roach. 2017. "Racial Disparities in Traffic Stop Outcomes." *Duke Forum for Law & Social Change* 9(21): 21-53.

*****Nov. 22, Rough Draft of paper due*******

Thanksgiving Break 11/24 – 11/26

Nov 29 – Dec. 1 TBD

Last day of class 12/6

******Final Paper Due 12/10*******