

ENGL 3050-001/ AMST 3050-014: Topics in ENGL/AMST “Science Fiction and American Culture”

Fall 2023

Dr. Aaron A. Toscano (atoscano)
Office: Fretwell 255F
<https://pages.charlotte.edu/aaron-toscano/>

Class: Fretwell 205, Mondays & Wednesdays 4:00 – 5:15 pm
Office hours: Mon/Wed 3:00pm-4:00pm and by appt.
Virtual options are also available via Zoom

Course Description and Purpose

No other genre reflects American culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries more than science fiction. In fact, science fiction is more culturally significant than the Western for contemporary American identity. This class explores science fiction as a product of American values in all its exciting, thought-provoking, and entertaining ways. In order to understand both the texts and the cultural contexts, we will watch films, television shows, and even video game segments. We will also read stories to help us understand how important this popular culture genre is to American identity overall.

Course Objectives and Biases

I have a bias that drives my pedagogy, and I want to make this absolutely clear: **I believe that education for the sake of education is good in and of itself.** I don't make any claim that you will learn anything practical that you may directly apply to a 9-to-5 job, and I hope we engage only in abstract theoretical endeavors. This course questions the "truths" we hold; truths that are culturally mediated. There are no correct answers, but, as a rhetorician, I have a bias that your discussions will be sound, well-thought out, and resemble a commitment to logical reasoning. Another huge bias I have is that a university education is not about reinforcing student beliefs; instead, students should consider how their own biased perspectives have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a new (preferably broader) intellectual appreciation of science fiction in American culture. Students can also expect the course to demonstrate how science and technology play a role in these often-speculative works. Science fiction is not simply a prediction of the future; instead, this genre critically examines the social, economic, and aesthetic conditions surrounding its creation. “Good” science fiction is a product of the culture and time period from which it comes as opposed to being solely about different universes.

Texts and Materials

Required Books
Butler, Octavia. *Dawn*. {9781538753712}
Delany, Samuel R. *Babel-17*. 1966. {9780375706691}
Gibson, William. *Burning Chrome*. {9780060539825}
LeGuin, Ursula. *Dispossessed: A Novel*.
Wells, Martha. *All Systems Red: The Murderbot Diaries*. {9780765397539}
Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One*. {9780307455178}
Readings on [Canvas](#)

Required Media	Films The Wachowskis. <i>The Matrix</i> (1999) Softley, Iain. <i>Hackers</i> (1995) Nolan, Christopher. <i>Inception</i> (2010) Nolan, Christopher. <i>Interstellar</i> (2014) Stanton, Andrew. <i>Wall-E</i> (2008)	TV Shows <i>Firefly</i> “Jaynestown” (2002) <i>Black Mirror</i> “Fifteen Million Merits” (2011) <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i> “The Measure of a Man” (1989) <i>The Twilight Zone</i> “Eye of the Beholder” (1960) <i>The Twilight Zone</i> “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street” (1960)
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I’ve done my best to choose easily accessible material. If you have access to Hulu, Netflix, or Amazon Prime, you’ll already be able to watch all the material; otherwise, you can rent the films or TV shows for \$1-\$3 often on YouTube. You may also be able to do a 30-day free trial for some streaming services. If you learn of free (legal) places where one can view the TV shows or films, please let me know. {See Calendar section for other options for accessing these media if available—*remember, things get dropped from streaming.*}

Optional Films
The Purge. James DeMonaco, 2013.
Get Out. Jordan Peele, 2019.

Expectations

I expect students to be prepared when they come to class. The reading in this course is manageable if you plan your school-work-life needs. Don't just look at the words on the page: reflect on what you're reading. Have the readings completed for the class meeting prior to coming to class and post a reflection on Canvas (weekly) after class. This course demands active, critical engagement with the texts. Although one's tastes and convictions, often mistaken as "opinions," are appropriate for personal ways of knowing, we will emphasize identifying (as accurately as possible) broader cultural patterns that will help guide our analyses of this material. Our experiences should help us (re)think our assumptions. Critical thinking is expected, and **be ready to reference our readings in every class period.**

This 3-credit course requires 150 minutes of classroom or direct faculty instruction and 300 minutes of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks. Out-of-class work may include but is not limited to the following: reading, researching, doing assignments, and studying for exams. The above outside-of-class work expectations are derived from [Academic Affairs, II. Policy Statement](#).

Masks/Facial Coverings/Testing

Facial coverings are no longer required to be worn in classrooms, but you may certainly wear one without fear of ridicule. Based on CDC and [related expert guidelines](#), wearing an N95 or equivalent mask is preferred. Masks work when worn consistently and properly, meaning over your mouth AND nose. COVID-19, because of mutations and vaccinations, is now endemic, but you should seek out experts' guidelines and determine your level of acceptable risk.

If you experience COVID or flu-like symptoms, do not attend class. Follow all [University COVID protocols](#), which may include quarantining and follow-up testing. You will be asked to leave class if you display COVID- or flu-like symptoms. Students who cannot be in class because of COVID-related symptoms, will need proper documentation for having their absences not count against them (see "Attendance" section below).

Work Requirements

Students in this course are expected to be able to compose unified, coherent documents nearly free of mechanical, logical, or structural errors. Students should also strive for writing clear and concise prose. The ability to read advanced college-level texts critically is also a requirement. I will provide additional requirements on the class website. Our final exam meeting day/time is **Monday, December 13, 2023, from 5:00-7:30 pm**. Please let me know ASAP if there are any other exam conflicts with your schedules.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Assignments	pts.	Grading Scale
Essay #1	100	A= 90 – 100
Midterm Exam	200	B= 80 – 89
Essay #2	100	C= 70 – 79
Final Exam	200	D= 60 – 69
Participation (in-class)	200	F= Below 60
Weekly Discussion Posts (Canvas)	200	
Total	1000	

Definition of A, B, C, D, and F Grades

Remember, your final grade is a combination of the six (6) assignments above. An 'A' means your work was excellent—not mediocre, average, or just good. A 'B' means your work was good—not quite excellent but definitely above average and thoughtful. A 'C' means your work was barely adequate enough to satisfy the assignment—showing a lack of effort or

thought for the assignment guidelines. A 'D' or 'F' usually means assignments were late, missing, or incomplete—often this work does not demonstrate appropriate college-level work for a 3-level course.

Late Work

An assignment is due at the beginning of the class for which it was assigned. Honestly, there is no excuse for assignments being late in a 3000-level class, but I have a policy anyway: **all late work will reduce the assignment by 10% (an entire letter grade) for each class period it is late.** Late Canvas posts will not be accepted. If you will not or cannot be in class on the day an assignment is due, the assignment is still due on Canvas by the deadline, **often before class.** I will not accept assignments attached to emails. If Canvas is down, submit your work when it's back up. Please discuss any problems you may have regarding attendance or late work before class if at all possible. Remember, you are responsible for making up all work missed. Something I've learned from past semesters is that if you don't turn things in on time early in the semester, you end up not turning other things in on time (or at all). Do your best to get all your work in to me on time. If you are absent, get the information from another student. Do not expect me to e-mail the class notes to you.

Participation

This is not a drill-on-skill type of course. I expect everyone to be involved in class discussions, which are extremely important for critical thinking. You must contribute to class discussions. Twenty percent (20%) of your grade is based on participation. This is not a large-lecture class, so there will be ample opportunity to contribute. Although you might be thinking when you are silent, this "assignment" requires you to contribute, so I suggest writing things down. Contributions AND questions both count as participation, so, if you're confused, please ask. Also, the Midterm Exam is based on the reading, so you might want to make sure you're clear on the concepts from the reading (and other media).

Please see me ASAP if you're concerned about your participation grade because you're shy or if you don't understand these requirements. Telling me at the end of November that you didn't participate because you're the quiet type or because you didn't understand what "thoughtful" meant will be too late. Even worse, emailing me after the semester is over to complain that participation isn't a "valid" class assignment is too late. The purpose of discussions is for students to have control over their own learning and to reinforce critical thinking generally and dialogic exchange of ideas specifically. I will call on you at times, so you must be ready to join the conversation and exchange ideas, which is an extremely important component of critical thinking. Alternative assignments are rare and based solely on my discretion.

Attendance

I will take attendance every day. It is very important that you attend every class in order to keep up with the work and reading. Your grade will be lowered after missing **4** classes. Your final grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each day missed beyond **4** absences. After **8** absences you will receive a failing grade for the course. Please make an effort to come to every class on time. Don't just skip class because you feel you have four "free" days. Save your absences for emergencies. There are no such things as excused absences. Only students participating in UNC Charlotte sponsored activities (with the proper documentation) will not be penalized for missing class. I will ask you to request a meeting with the Dean of Students if you have situations that you feel should allow you an exception to missing more than 4 classes. Cars break down, parking is limited, students get sick, and traffic is brutal, but class still happens. Your participation may also be lowered for excessive tardiness. (See "Masks/Facial Coverings/Testing" above for more details on students and sickness)

Please note that UNC Charlotte is under a federal mandate to comply with a financial aid rule that requires professors to identify the last date of attendance for students receiving unsatisfactory grades. Please visit the following webpage for more information: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/gradingholds/last-date-attendance>.

Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule on the last two pages has important dates for readings and assignments. Students are responsible for not only knowing course deadlines but also knowing UNC Charlotte deadlines (drop/add, billing, vacation, etc.). Please visit the following link for the registrar's calendar: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/printable-calendar>.

Academic Integrity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is an academic community dedicated to teaching, scholarship, service, inclusion, and the holistic development of Students. Academic integrity is a cornerstone value of the University's intellectual community. It is important to nurture an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and mutual responsibility. **Integrity is essential because it ensures that Students fairly benefit from their educational experience and pursuits of knowledge.** Violating the principles of academic integrity damages the reputation of the University and undermines its educational mission and goals.

The University recognizes that Academic Misconduct detracts from the value of a UNC Charlotte degree and has influence beyond the University community, including relationships with employers, other educational institutions, the business community, the UNC system, and the community at large.

The purpose of [the Code](#) is to:

1. support and promote an ethical learning environment;
2. create consistent standards for all members of the academic community;
3. **assist Students in learning responsibility for one's own academic work;**
4. protect the academic environment of the University community; and
5. **clarify Student values and how they relate to the behavior in question.**

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty (From University Policy: 407, Ch. 6—<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-407#c6>)

- A. **Cheating** means using or attempting to use materials, or giving assistance or materials without Authorization to another in any academic exercise that could result in gaining or helping another to gain academic advantage.
- B. **Fabrication** means providing fabricated information, including inventing or counterfeiting information, in any form in an academic exercise.
- C. **Falsification** means altering without Authorization any data or information, regardless of communication method (e.g., e-mail or other electronic communication), in an academic exercise.
- D. **Misuse of Academic Materials** means sharing, distributing, altering, acquiring, damaging, or making inaccessible academic materials without Authorization, that could result in gaining or helping another to gain an academic advantage.
- E. **Multiple Submission** means submitting academic work or substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) in more than one academic exercise without Authorization.
- F. **Plagiarism** means presenting the words or ideas of another as one's own words or ideas, including failing to properly acknowledge a source, unless the ideas or information are common knowledge. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism, which is the use of one's own previous work in another context without indicating that it was used previously.
- G. **Unauthorized Collaboration** means sharing the work or effort in an academic exercise with another Student or Students without Authorization.
- H. **Research Misconduct** means a determination that Research Misconduct has occurred under [University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship](#) and its [Supplemental Procedures](#).

If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source—you will receive an 'F' in this course. If you use non-sanctioned resources (e.g., other classmates) to complete assignments, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

In addition to the above identification of Academic Dishonesty, students should be aware of technology-mediated concerns related to Academic Integrity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "integrity" as "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety." A second definition states that integrity means, "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness." Therefore, anything that draws students' attention away from course activities and goals violates the essence of academic integrity because it corrupts the soundness and condition of learning. For instance, engaging in critical thinking/awareness is a sound, perfect state activity for this course; on the other hand, devoting attention to social media, texting/messaging, non-class-related internet activities (e-mailing, etc.) violates or corrupts the learning goals of

this course. Although we may point to the internet in general and social media sites specifically in our discussions of technology, engrossing oneself in them during class to "catch up with friends" divides your attention and may be distracting to members of this class. This violation is as serious as plagiarism and will result in an 'F' in participation (20% of your overall grade) the first time and an 'F' in this course for a subsequent violation. This syllabus section is your warning. Yes, it is obvious when you are using laptops and handheld devices to take notes or when you use them to corrupt the learning environment.

You will also receive an 'F' in the course for other academic integrity violations. Do not expect another warning—this is it. Please see me if you need further clarification regarding cheating, fabrication or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, or complicity in academic dishonesty. Again, so there's no confusion, you will most likely fail the course if you violate any part of the academic integrity code.

Title IX Mandated Reporting

{This section is often subject to change based on federal changes that could happen during the semester. We will abide by any new regulations.}

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that many UNC Charlotte employees, including all faculty members, are considered [Responsible Employees](#) who are required to relay any information or reports of sexual misconduct they receive to the Title IX Coordinator. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must [report the information to the Title IX Coordinator](#). Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, please contact any of the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator: (1) University Counseling Center (caps.charlotte.edu, 7-0311); (2) Student Health Center (studenthealth.charlotte.edu, 7-7400); or (3) Center for Wellness Promotion (wellness.charlotte.edu, 7-7407). Additional information about your options is also available at the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX](#) under the "Students" tab.

Safety and Security Information

UNC Charlotte's Emergency Management offers the following safety tips. Visit emergency.charlotte.edu for more information, and Download the [Livesafe app](#), which connects you to campus police via phone or text 24/7.

- 911 dialed from a mobile phone connects to CMPD and can slow down response.
- Alternatively, you can put the UNC Charlotte Police emergency number in your phone: 704-687-2200.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and know the quickest escape routes: exit doors, windows, etc.
- Safety and Security offers a variety of trainings to students. For more information, visit: <https://police.charlotte.edu/safety>
- Remember: Personal pepper spray is allowed on campus. [These weapons are prohibited.](#)

Action Directives included from Emergency Management's "Preparedness":

Run-Hide-Fight is the individual's Action Directive for an active assailant.

- **RUN:** If outside or in a building and it is safe to flee, run and leave the campus if possible.
- **HIDE:** If you are in a building and unsure of where the threat is, find the closest room in which to hide. Close, lock and/or barricade doors if they do not lock. Do not huddle in one location. Remain quiet.
- **FIGHT:** This is a last-resort option. Do not seek the assailant. If you come into direct contact with the individual, use any means necessary to defend yourself.

A **Seek Shelter** directive is normally issued during severe weather or hazardous material releases.

If a Seek Shelter is ordered:

- Stay inside if you are indoors.
- If outside, quickly go to the nearest building.
- Once indoors, find a fitting room or space in the building to shelter. Stay away from windows.

An **Evacuation** can be for either a single building, area, or the entire campus. Further information and direction will be included in the NinerAlert.

Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to their own tastes and convictions (but don't mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think texts have single, objectively reasoned meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, etc. influence how we perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the Disabilities Resource Center (ds.charlotte.edu/) to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. I don't need specifics about a condition, but I will need to know what specific accommodations you will need.

Inclement Weather/Building Issues/Apocalypse

Some buildings can have HVAC problems. Occasionally, the powers that be close buildings and classes are canceled because it is too brutally hot to remain inside. If a building related "issue" cancels class, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and [Canvas](#) posts. The library has lots of space and many computers. We'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus when we return to class. This also goes for inclement weather and other situations that cancel class.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(have readings and assignments done before class)

August 21	Introduction to the Course Go over the syllabus Discuss the following materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asimov, Isaac. "Cult of Ignorance." <i>Newsweek</i>, 21 Jan 1980, p. 19. (on Canvas) • Red Hot Chili Peppers. "Californication." Video and Lyrics}
August 23	More Introduction Discuss the following materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jefferson, Thomas et. al. "The Declaration of Independence," 4 July 1776. (National Archives) • Video Game: GTA: San Andreas "Black Project" walkthrough (2005) here
August 28*	Tiptree, James, Jr. "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" (1972) online Russ, Joanna. "When It Changed" (1972) on Canvas
August 30	Asimov, Isaac. Asimov, Isaac. "Reason" (1941) Heinlein, Robert A. "All You Zombies—" (1959) Canvas
*August 28 th —Big day for the semester: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last day to add, drop with no grade * 11:59 PM • If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course 	
September 4	Labor Day—No Class Meeting
September 6	Weinbaum, Stanley. "A Martian Odyssey" online Delany, Samuel R. "Aye, and Gomorrah." online Delany, Samuel R. "Racism and Science Fiction," <i>New York Rev. of SciFi</i> , no. 120, August 1998. online
September 11	Gibson, William. Preface by Bruce Sterling in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. xi-xviii Gibson, William. "Johnny Mnemonic" in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. 1-23
September 13	Gibson, William. "New Rose Hotel" in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. 109-123 Gibson, William. "Burning Chrome" in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. 179-204 Plan your reading of Martha Wells's <i>All Systems Red</i>.
September 18	Film—No Class Meeting The Wachowskis. <i>The Matrix</i> (1999)—lots of availability
September 20*	Film—No Class Meeting Softley, Iain. <i>Hackers</i> (1995)—several places... this version has Greek subtitles ESSAY #1 DUE on Canvas
*September 22 nd — Deadline for ALL students to apply for December 2023 graduation	
September 25	TV Shows—No Class Meeting <i>Firefly</i> "Jaynestown" (2002) Season 1, Episode 4— poor quality stream <i>Black Mirror</i> "Fifteen Million Merits" (2011) Season 1, Episode 2—Netflix
September 27	Wells, Martha. <i>All Systems Red</i> .
October 2	No Class Meeting—MIDTERM Exam on Canvas Participation Grade—1 st half of the semester Plan your reading of Colson Whitehead's <i>Zone One</i> and Samuel Delany's <i>Babel-17</i>.
October 4	Postapocalyptic SciFi Whitehead, Colson. <i>Zone One</i> .
October 9	Whitehead, Colson. <i>Zone One</i> .
October 11*	Whitehead, Colson. <i>Zone One</i> .
*Unsatisfactory Midterm Grades Due (10/13 @ Noon)—more of a note for me	
October 16	Delany, Samuel R. <i>Babel-17</i> . 1966.
October 18*	Delany, Samuel R. <i>Babel-17</i> . 1966.

*October 19th: Last day to withdraw from courses with a "W" grade
 Please review the [Withdrawal Policy](#) before considering withdrawing from any course.

October 23	FALL BREAK—No Class Meeting
October 25	Film—No Class Meeting Nolan, Christopher. <i>Inception</i> (2010)—several renting options Plan your reading of Octavia Butler's <i>Dawn</i> and Ursula LeGuin's <i>The Dispossessed</i>.
October 30 ESSAY #2	Film—No Class Meeting Nolan, Christopher. <i>Interstellar</i> (2014)—even more renting options than the previous ESSAY #2 DUE on Canvas
November 1	Butler, Octavia. <i>Dawn</i>.
November 6	Butler, Octavia. <i>Dawn</i>.
November 8	Butler, Octavia. <i>Dawn</i>.
November 13	LeGuin, Ursula. <i>The Dispossessed: A Novel</i>.
November 15	LeGuin, Ursula. <i>The Dispossessed: A Novel</i>.
November 20	TV Shows—No Class Meeting <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i> "The Measure of a Man" (1989) Season 2, Episode 9—Paramount+ <i>The Twilight Zone</i> "Eye of the Beholder" (1960) Season 2, Episode 6—Paramount+ {start free trial}
November 22	THANKSGIVING BREAK
November 27	Film—No Class Meeting <i>Wall-E</i> (2008)—Disney+ and many rental options
November 29	<i>Wall-E</i> and technology Whitley, David. "Wall-E: Nostalgia and the Apocalypse of Trash." <i>The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation: From Snow White to Wall-E</i> . Routledge, 2012, pp. 141-159. Ellison, Katherine. "Talking Trash." <i>Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment</i> , vol. 6, no. 8, Oct., 2008, p. 456. (on Canvas)
December 4	Witch Hunt Politics Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery," <i>The New Yorker</i> . 26 June 1948. (Available here with an audio version) Cheever, John. "The Enormous Radio," <i>The New Yorker</i> . 17 May 1947, p. 28. (on Canvas)
December 6 Last Class	"The Monsters are Due on Maple Street." <i>The Twilight Zone</i> . 1960. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1214318911920543 {No Facebook account needed}
December 13 Final Exam	Final Exam on Canvas

Commencement December 15th & 16th