

ENGL 3051-085

Seminar in American Studies: Science Fiction in American Culture

Summer Session I—2020

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| Dr. Aaron A. Toscano Office: Fretwell 280F Office hours: variable via Webex, Zoom, Google Meets, or Google Hangouts | Classroom: NONE Internet (100% online)* Time: You have deadlines but no class time http://pages.uncc.edu/aaron-toscano/amstsummer2020/ |
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*Online course delivered through a combination of class website and Canvas. Learn to use Canvas at <http://canvas.uncc.edu/>.

Course Description

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. This is a 100% online asynchronous Writing Intensive (W) course, so students will write essays and post reflections on Canvas.

Text and Materials

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| Required Reading | Asimov, Isaac. <i>I, Robot</i> . {Any Edition} Gibson, William. <i>Burning Chrome</i> . {9780060539825} Short Stories not in the Gibson book are on the course calendar at the end of this syllabus and will be available online or on Canvas Willingness To Learn |
| Required Watching | The calendar section of this syllabus has the dates for the readings, films, and TV shows. I've done my best to choose material easily accessible. 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. |

Please let me know ASAP if you have trouble accessing any of the course materials. I can suggest similar programs that will help you think about science fiction and American culture.

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 do not make any claim that you will learn practical 9-

to-5 job skills, and I hope we engage only in abstract theoretical endeavors. This writing intensive (W) course predominantly assesses your understanding of the material and concepts through writing. You will make arguments and comment thoughtfully on the course material. There are no correct answers, but, as a rhetorician, I have a bias that your essays and reflections 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/experiences have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a new (preferably broader) intellectual appreciation of science fiction in American Culture. This class explores science fiction as a product of the culture and time period from which it comes. 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.

Work Requirements

This class does not simply measure what you read, watch, and regurgitate; instead, I try to evaluate how you negotiate the course material through your writing. The material might not be new to you—films, TV shows, stories, etc.—but this course asks you to rethink your ways of knowing in order to become more culturally aware critics of science fiction and society in general.

The ability to read college-level texts critically is a major requirement. In addition to the books listed below, you have short readings on Canvas and TV shows and a few films to watch. Although some might claim to be able to "get by" without having read or watched the content assigned, do not assume that you can get a decent Canvas participation grade without having read. In addition to reflections on Canvas based on the course material, students will complete two written essays that will go through the writing process: a required draft for comments and a revised draft for a grade.

Although we do not have face-to-face meetings, I will have prompts for you due nearly every Tuesday and Thursday (by 11:00 pm). We will not have a final exam (unless I think there was not enough reading done), so your final essay will be due on the last day of class, June 22nd. It might seem odd for an online, asynchronous class to have dates on the calendar portion of this syllabus and the class webpage (<https://pages.uncc.edu/aaron-toscano/amstsummer2020/>), but I've organized the class this way to help keep you on top of what you need to do. You may be able to devote your entire Monday to all the week's material, and that's fine. I have the course separated into days so that it's easier to manage than if I just lumped everything together. Please go to both Canvas and the course webpage—yes, they are two separate entities—for important class assignments and activities.

Grading Policy

Your final grade is supposed to reflect your entire work for the semester and will be based on the percentages below:

| Grading Scale for Graded Assignments and Final Grade: | | | | |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| A= 90 - 100 | B= 80 - 89 | C= 70 - 79 | D= 60 - 69 | F=Below 60 |

Assignments/Grade Distribution

| Assignment | Pts. |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Essay #1—Draft | 100 |
| Essay #1—Final | 100 |
| Essay #2—Draft | 100 |
| Essay #2—Final | 200 |
| Canvas Reflections (twice a week) | 500 |
| Total | 1000 |

All of the above must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course.

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

Remember, your final grade is a combination of the five assignments above in the assignment percentage table. 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 3000-level course.

Late Work

Assignments are due on specific dates listed in the calendar section on this syllabus. All late essay work—drafts and finals—will reduce the assignment by 25% for each class period it is late. Therefore, an assignment worth 100 points that is one class meeting late will not be able to have a grade higher than 75. All Essays will be submitted on Canvas. I will not accept Canvas reflections late. **Expect to have reflections due every Tuesday and Thursday by 11:00 pm.** Do yourself a favor and set twice-a-week reminders for every Tuesday and Thursday, so you don't miss a Canvas reflection.

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.uncc.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](#). (See Chapter 3, Section III of the Code.)

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 tests and exams, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

I am fully aware of this website and others like it: <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/>. If I find a sentence or two in your essays that seem familiar, I google them, and, if that website comes up, I know you've acquired your essay in a way that violates the academic integrity code.

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.

Attendance

Class is 100% online, so there's no attendance required. Keep up with the syllabus, class website, and Canvas page.

Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule below has important dates marked. 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](#).

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 professionals to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. Please inform me about circumstances as soon as possible. I do not need specifics, but I do need to know what accommodations to make. For information and assistance, contact the Disabilities Resource Center: <http://ds.uncc.edu/>.

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 his or her own tastes and convictions. 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. I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for campus-wide Internet issues, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(I expect you to have the course material read or watched before the day assigned. Your Canvas reflections will be based on readings, films, TV shows, and video game sequences.)

| WEEK 1 | |
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| May 18 | Welcome to Class; Get on Canvas Check out our Class Website: https://pages.uncc.edu/aaron-toscano/amstsummer2020/ |
| May 19* | Jefferson, Thomas et. al. "The Declaration of Independence" 4 July 1776. National Archives Online Asimov, Isaac. "Cult of Ignorance" (1980) on Canvas Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| May 20 | The Wachowskis. <i>The Matrix</i> (1999)—I assume you can find this if you haven't seen it. |
| May 21 | 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 You should begin reading Isaac Asimov's <i>I, Robot</i> (1950) Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| *May 19 th : Last Day to Add or Drop a Class with no grade by 11:59 PM | |
| WEEK 2 | |
| May 25 | Keep reading Isaac Asimov's <i>I, Robot</i> (1950) Technically, today is Labor Day, so there's no class, but we're virtual, so |
| May 26 | Have finished Isaac Asimov's <i>I, Robot</i> (1950) Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| May 27 | Film: Softley, Iain. <i>Hackers</i> (1995)—several places...I found it at the link below: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cf8al |
| May 28 | Film: Nolan, Christopher. <i>Inception</i> (2010)—many places including Netflix Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| WEEK 3 | |
| June 1 **DUE** | Essay #1 Draft DUE TV show: <i>Firefly</i> "Jaynestown" (2002)—Hulu, YouTube, Amazon, VUDU, others Season 1, Episode 4 |
| June 2 | 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 Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| June 3 | Gibson, William. "New Rose Hotel" in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. 109-123 |
| June 4 | Gibson, William. "Burning Chrome" in <i>Burning Chrome</i> . pp. 179-204 Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| WEEK 4 | |
| June 8* **DUE** | Essay #1 Final DUE TV show: <i>Black Mirror</i> "Fifteen Million Merits" (2011)—Netflix Season 1, Episode 2 |

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| June 9 | TV Show: <i>The Twilight Zone</i> "Eye of the Beholder" (1960)—Netflix, Hulu, SyFy Channel https://www.cbs.com/shows/the_twilight_zone/ (free 30 day trial) Season 2, Episode 6 Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| June 10 | Film: Nolan, Christopher. <i>Interstellar</i> (2014)—YouTube, Amazon Prime, Vudu, and Google Play, iTunes Weinbaum, Stanley. "A Martian Odyssey" (Online) |
| June 11 | Asimov, Isaac. <i>Bicentennial Man</i> (1976) on Canvas Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| *June 8 th : Last day to withdraw from course; grade subject to Withdrawal Policy: Policy Information | |
| WEEK 5 | |
| June 15 **DUE** | Essay #2 Draft DUE TV Show: <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i> "The Measure of a Man" (1989)—Netflix, Hulu, CBS Season 2, Episode 9 |
| June 16 | <i>Wall-E</i> (2008)—YouTube, Amazon Prime, Vudu, and Google Play Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm |
| June 17 | <i>Wall-E</i> and technology Ellison, Katherine. "Talking Trash." <i>Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment</i> , Vol. 6, No. 8 (Oct., 2008): p. 456. on Canvas |
| June 18 | Music Video: Red Hot Chili Peppers "Californication" (1999) here Video Game: GTA: San Andreas "Black Project" walkthrough (2005) here Canvas Post Due by 11:00 pm —last post |
| WEEK 6 | |
| June 22 **DUE** | Essay #2 Final Due |
| FINAL | No Final Exam in this course |