

Semester Syllabus

English 4665

Fall 2026

Art 219 MW 2:20pm-3:40pm

Marshall Needleman Armintor, Principal Lecturer
(him, his)

Office Hours: Auditorium 116, MW 9.30-11, 12.30-2, T 10-2, F 9.30-11
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This course juxtaposes Anglophone science fiction with some of the most enduring questions in US & British political culture.. Science fiction has long been recognized as a form that, far from being escapist, is actually intensely concerned with the social, political, economic, and ethical landscapes of contemporary society. Indeed, its concern with society as it is and as it may evolve through technology is one feature which distinguishes it from fantasy or horror, two related and often overlapping forms. However, most scholarship has not extensively explored the relationship between science fiction works and their national or political contexts. This course sets out to ask questions about Anglophone culture and science fiction works. One of the key questions is to ask whether or not these works can be considered as emerging from a particular political context, or whether science fiction may have energies within it that defy those kinds of categorizations. If not recognizably “American”, then how should we consider science fiction literature from the United States?

Thus, it makes sense to ask how US-American science fiction has directly confronted contemporary social issues, and related American concepts such as freedom and equality. It also makes sense to ask how this form of writing has taken up matters of race, gender, identity, economic inequity, and justice. The matter is complicated in part by the way science fiction futures often imagine alternative forms of government, often world or global authorities.

Course Objectives

Write weekly responses demonstrating an ability to identify key elements in each text that deal with one or more of the semester's key issues.

Write both a Mid-Term and a Final Essay that presents a persuasive argument about one or more key issues stemming from the readings.

Prerequisites

There are no required prerequisites for this course. However, in order to be successful in this course you will need to:

Demonstrate strong writing composition skills.

An ability to read deeply and consistently across the semester. Most texts will require between 5 and 8 hours of reading per week.

Reliable access to a secure online portal.

Required Primary Texts

"The Comet:" W. E. B. DuBois (available in Canvas)

The Coming Race, Edward Bulwer-Lytton (available in Canvas)

Things to Come (1936 film; on Youtube)

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Philip K. Dick

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula K. Le Guin

Annihilation, Jeff VanderMeer

The Fifth Season, NK Jemisin

"Story of Your Life," Ted Chiang (available in Canvas)

Primer (2004) dir. Shane Carruth (on Youtube)

Assorted short fiction by Heinlein, Bradbury, Sturgeon, Knight, Butler, etc. (available in Canvas)

Reading Schedule

Aug. 19 "The Comet" WEB DuBois

Aug. 24-26 *The Coming Race*, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, available on Canvas

Aug. 31-Sep 2. *Things to Come*; 1936 British film, dir. William Cameron Menzies; available on Youtube

Sept. 7 Labor Day

Sept. 9 The Golden Age of SF, part 1, various authors, available on Canvas

Sept. 14-16 The Golden Age of SF, part 2, various authors, available on Canvas

Sept. 21-23 *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Philip K Dick

Sept. 28-30 *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Oct. 5-7 Bodies and their Ableness-es, various authors, available in Canvas module

Oct. 12 -14 *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ursula K. LeGuin

Oct. 19-21 *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Oct. 26-28 *Annihilation*, Jeff VanderMeer

Nov. 2-4 *The Fifth Season*, NK Jemisin

Nov. 9-11 *The Fifth Season*, NK Jemisin

Nov. 16-18 "Story of Your Life," Ted Chiang and *Primer*; American film (2004) directed and written by Shane Carruth, available on Youtube

Nov. 23 Thanksgiving Week

Nov. 30 Individual Meetings

Course Requirements

Weekly Writings:	26 percent/ 260 points max
Participation	10 percent/ 100 points max
Midterm Essay 1800-2400	30 percent/ 300 points max
Final Essay, 2100-2700 words	34 percent/ 340 points max

Weekly writing is always due at the end of day on Saturday.

No Weekly Writing when the Midterm is due, and the Midterm will be due October 9th.

Final Essay is due December 11th. There is no final exam.