



# **SCIENCE FICTION**

ENGL 481-001 --- ROBINSON R248 --- M/W 1:30PM-2:45PM



# ENGH 451-001— SCIENCE FICTION

MONDAYS & WEDNESDAYS, 1:30PM–2:45PM, ROBINSON A248

## CONTACT INFORMATION

INSTRUCTOR	Alexander Monea	EMAIL ADDRESS	amonea@gmu.edu
OFFICE ADDRESS	Robinson A 405B	OFFICE HOURS	Mondays 3:00PM–5:00PM

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

CREDITS: 3

Major works of science fiction in terms of mode, themes, and narrative techniques, especially role of hypothesis in science fiction. Focuses on novels, short stories from early 19th century to present.

## COURSE GOALS

- Gain a historical understanding of the emergence, development, and differentiation of science fiction literature.
- Analyze the social importance of science fiction literature as a popular imaginary for human identity and collective meaning, especially as projected into the future.
- Analyze the technological importance of science fiction literature as a popular imaginary for interpreting and hypothesizing about the meaning of technologies, techniques, and scientific/technological trends, as well as the recursive importance of this function for determining scientific research and development.
- Gain critical practice in prognosticating the future(s) implied by events and/or trends in sociotechnical systems of research and development.

## COURSE TEXTS

Below you will find the list of texts that must be purchased for this course. It is highly recommended that you purchase these exact editions (regardless of whether or not they are previously used). As this is a rather large course, we will not have time to halt discussions for people with alternate editions to locate pages and passages.



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- Atwood, Margaret (1998). *The Handmaid's Tale*. ISBN: 978-0385490818 Price: \$7.95
- Butler, Octavia (2005). *Bloodchild and Other Stories*. ISBN: 978-1583226988 Price: \$9.31
- James, Edward & Mendlesohn, Farah (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. ISBN: 978-0521016575 Price: \$28.51
- Le Guin, Ursula (1987). *The Left Hand of Darkness*. ISBN: 978-0441478125 Price: \$8.99
- Lem, Stanislaw (1999). *His Master's Voice*. ISBN: 978-0810117310 Price: \$13.08
- McCarthy, Cormac (2007). *The Road*. ISBN: 978-0307387899 Price: \$8.88
- Sagan, Carl (1997). *Contact*. ISBN: 978-0099469506 Price: \$5.08
- Stephenson, Neal (2000). *Snowcrash*. ISBN: 978-0553380958 Price: \$11.76
- Stross, Charles (2006). *Accelerando*. ISBN: 978-0441014156 Price: \$7.99

## DAILY SCHEDULE

The Daily Schedule for the course will be maintained as a Google Doc that anyone with the link will have read-only access to. This link will be emailed to you at the start of class. You will need a computer with an internet connection to access the Daily Schedule.

Over the course of the semester we will be reading seven key book-length science fiction texts. Each of these texts will be spread across two weeks. In addition to these key texts, you will read a combination of (1) key sections of the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, (2) science fiction short stories that share key themes with the larger texts, and/or (3) short non-fiction articles related to the themes of the course. Any materials not contained in the required texts for the course will be provided digitally via the Daily Schedule Google Doc.

I reserve the right to modify the ancillary readings up until one week before the class in which we will discuss them. The purpose behind these changes is to offer some flexibility to the syllabus, such that the readings can be modified on an ad hoc basis in accordance with the trajectory of our in-class discussions and your ongoing projects throughout the semester.





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## COURSE PROJECTS

Students will be asked to pursue one project over the course of the semester and to keep a journal chronicling their activities, thoughts, and responses to readings (both assigned and pursued independently) over the course of the semester. Students will also be required to officially propose their projects to me halfway through the semester and can only turn in final projects to me that I have received a proposal for and accepted.

Students are welcome to work in groups of three or fewer people on their final projects — though each member will be required to submit an independent project journal.

The following projects ought to take one of the following three forms:

### FUTURE PROGNOSTICATION (NON-FICTION)

The first option for final projects requires you to spend the semester tracking developments and trends in science and technology news in order to make predictions about the future of humanity — or lack thereof. You might follow publications and broadcasts such as *MIT Technology Review*, *Science Friday*, *Scientific American*, *Ars Technica*, *IEEE Spectrum*, and *Wired* or follow institutions such as *Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)*, *MIT Media Lab*, and *Google* — which maintains a company blog, but also individual blogs belonging to a large number of its key employees. You will keep track of these sources, the events and trends they highlight, as well as your thoughts and reactions to them in your project journal throughout the semester.

The final project will draw on this ongoing research to produce either (1) a deeply developed singular prognostication for the future based on the events and/or trends you have outlined, or (2) a series of less developed but interconnected prognostications about the future based on the events and/or trends you have outlined. While these will not be traditional academic assignments, they do need to leverage wide body of properly attributed research to reach well-reasoned and developed conclusions.



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The format these might take is negotiable, and I am happy to tailor the assignment guidelines to the project you would like to develop. I would suggest developing them as 2,000-word written pieces with accompanying images and/or illustrations to be published on the web via some service like *Medium.com*.

## FUTURE PROGNOSTICATION (FICTION)

This second option for final projects also requires you to spend the semester tracking developments and trends in science and technology news in order to make predictions about the future of humanity. You will similarly keep track of your sources, the events and trends they highlight, as well as your thoughts and reactions to them (though these may be phrased poetically, visually, or otherwise more creative) in your project journal throughout the semester.

The final project ought to draw on this ongoing research to provide the background for a work of fiction set in a future world where these scientific and technological trends have come to fruition and reshaped human society.

The format these might take is negotiable, and I am happy to tailor the assignment guidelines to the project you would like to develop. You are welcome to create a non-linear web text/game (by using *Twinery.org*, for example), a short story, a set of poems, a graphic novel, a set of sketches or drawings with accompanying didactics, a short film, a radio broadcast, ad inf.

## LITERARY ANALYSIS & CRITICISM

The third option for final projects is a more traditional literary project. For this project you will select at least one, but no more than two, of the course texts to make an original argument about. You will also be required to incorporate external research, which must include either (1) a book-length non-fiction text directly related to your project, or (2) two additional (fictional) novels or novellas directly related to your project, and preferably by the same author(s) of the course texts you are focusing on.



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You will additionally be required to independently read and incorporate information from at least four directly related peer-reviewed academic articles, and it is recommended that you incorporate information from either two additional academic articles or four additional non-academic sources.

The format for this final project is a 2,000 word researched argument of literary analysis and criticism. These papers ought to emulate traditional academic writing and demonstrate a deep knowledge of their key text(s), original arguments, clear reasoning and researched support for those arguments, and precise writing.

## COURSE EXAMS

In order to focus this course on the readings, the only other graded items for the course beyond your course project will be two examinations, a midterm and a final. These exams will be completed via Blackboard from home with open notes and books and a three-hour time limit.

The exams will be largely composed of multiple choice, true or false, and/or matching questions that should be relatively simple for any student that has completed the readings carefully, ensured that they understand the key components of the text, and Googled any words, concepts, technologies, etc. that appear in the texts.

The exams will also contain a small number of short answer questions and a set of essay questions. The essay questions will be provided at least a week in advance of each exam and students will be asked to select one of them to respond to.

## PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Participation is crucial in this class because we will rely on in-class discussion to facilitate our analyses of the course texts. It is my hope that you will learn as much (or more) from each other as you will from me. It is for this reason that participation will account for twenty percent of your final grade.



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Class participation means more than how much you say in class; it's your effort to be present—both in mind and in body—in our discussions. Your grade will reflect your attendance, preparation, and the quality of your contributions to our class work. Accordingly, participation grades will be awarded as follows:

In order to earn an average participation grade (in the C range), you must fulfill four basic requirements: arrive on time; be ready to discuss readings when called on; be prepared with the book or reading in class; listen respectfully.

To earn a B, you must consistently fulfill the above requirements and: volunteer questions or points of interest from readings to generate discussion; willingly offer ideas in class; make sure your contributions are topical and thoughtful.

To earn an A, you must consistently fulfill the above criteria and: show leadership in class discussion (i.e. respond to open-ended questions, challenge received opinion, ask difficult questions); respond to other students' ideas (not just mine) by asking questions or building on their points.

You will receive a failing participation grade if you are excessively and/or frequently: tardy; unprepared for class; disruptive during class; and/or occupied with activities other than those related our class.

## GRADING SCALE

A-	90–93	A	94–96	A+	97–100
B-	80–83	B	84–86	B+	87–89
C-	70–73	C	74–76	C+	77–79
F	>64	D	64–66	D+	67–69



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## GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Participation — 20%

Midterm Exam — 15%

Final Exam — 20%

Project Proposals — 5%

Project Journals — 10%

Final Projects — 30%

## COURSE POLICES

### ATTENDANCE

As per GMU Academic Policies: “Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole.” Attendance is particularly crucial in a discussion-based course.

Unexcused absences will be negatively factored into participation grades. Any student with more than three unexcused absences will receive a failing participation grade.

Students may arrange for excused absences which will not be factored into participation grades as per GMU Academic Policies on Registration, Attendance and Grading. In these instances, it will be the responsibility of the student to provide as early advance notice as possible and to arrange to make up any missed work.

### TARDINESS

If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be counted absent. If you are tardy, it is your responsible to catch up with the rest of the class. I will not repeat the instructions delivered at the beginning of classes for the benefit of tardy students. Furthermore, students leaving class early will also be counted as tardy.





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## LATE WORK

All assignments must be submitted to me by the provided deadlines. I reserve the right to refuse to accept, grade, and comment on any assignments submitted late. That being said, if you contact me in advance about any problems you are having getting a particular assignment in on time *before the deadline*, I can usually work out an extension for you. I do, however, reserve the right to refuse any given request for an extension, and also reserve the right to determine the length of any given extension on a case by case basis.

## EMAIL POLICY

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

## NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

Discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status, pregnancy status or genetic information is a violation of state and federal law, as well as George Mason University's Non-Discrimination Policy, and *will not be tolerated*. Harassment of any person (either in the form of quid pro quo or creation of a hostile environment) similarly *will not be tolerated*. Retaliation against any person who complains about discrimination is prohibited.

We will be dealing with complicated and often disconcerting aspects of race, color, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, pregnancy status and genetic information in this course. Students will not be punished for engaging in these themes openly and honestly, so long as they demonstrate a good faith effort towards inclusivity and sensitivity to otherness.



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## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

## DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (<http://ods.gmu.edu>, SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The University Catalog (<http://catalog.gmu.edu>) is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

## OTHER RESOURCES

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;

<http://caps.gmu.edu>