
**GWSS 1905: Freaks and Aliens: Race, Gender, and Sex in Science Fiction
Spring 2016 Course Syllabus**

Time: Wednesday 12:20 PM–3:20 PM

Venue: Bruininks Hall 420A

Instructor: Dr. Aren Aizura

Office: 456 Ford Hall

Office Phone: 612-626-7824

Office Hours: Wednesday 10:00 AM–12:00 PM

Course Description

Mainstream science fiction shows tell familiar stories about heroes saving the earth from alien or cyborg invasion. Or the hero ventures heroically into space, “where no man has gone before.” But other strands of science fiction imagine differently: speculating about wildly altered futures where monstrosity and otherness are powerful and transformative. This seminar explores science fiction to explore bodies, technology, difference, and social conflict. How do gender, race, and sexuality play out in dreams of the future? How do dreams of technological embodiment reflect contemporary struggles about self-determination and social power? How are science fiction tropes like planetary invasion and genocide shaped by global histories of racism and empire, resistance and liberation? To answer these questions we will read science fiction and fantasy novels and short stories, watch film and TV shows, and explore the world of fan-made ‘zines and videos.

Course requirements

GWSS 1905 satisfies one Liberal Education Theme requirement: Diversity and Social Justice in the U.S.

To satisfy the Diversity and Social Justice in the U.S. Theme requirement, a course must meet the following criteria:

- The course explores one or more forms of diversity through the multi-layered operation of social power, prestige, and privilege.
- The course advances students' understanding of how social difference in the U.S. has shaped social, political, economic, and cross-cultural relationships.
- Students examine the complex relationship between a particular form of diversity in the United States and its impact on historical and contemporary social dynamics, democratic practices, and institutional stratification.
- The course enhances students' understanding of diversity as a social construct that has promoted the differential treatment of particular social groups and served as the basis for response to subsequent social inequities by these groups.
- The course engages scholarship that has emerged in response to epistemological gaps in information and perspective in traditional disciplines.

Weekly required readings

This is a reading-intensive class. We will read a selection of novels, short stories, and commentary. Required novels are available at the University of Minnesota Bookstore. Other required readings are in a course packet available from Paradigm Copies, 720 Washington Ave SE.

Required novels (get from bookstore or used online)

Ursula LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
 Samuel Delany, *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*
 Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
 Nnedi Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*.

Check Moodle or the syllabus for a list of reading assignments. Films will be screened in class or available on Netflix.

ALWAYS read the assigned readings BEFORE class. This class is reading intensive. At times we will read an entire short novel in one week: start well in advance so you can finish it in time for in class discussion. Write notes while you read in a notepad, journal, or your laptop/phone/electronic device. Note down terms you aren't sure of; highlight the sentences you think are key or that illuminate your understanding particularly well; jot down any thoughts you have while you're reading.

Grading and Course Requirements

Credits and Workload Expectations: For undergraduate courses, one credit is defined as equivalent to an average of three hours of learning effort per week (over a full semester) necessary for an average student to achieve an average grade in the course. For example, a student taking a three credit course that meets for three hours a week should expect to spend an additional six hours a week on coursework outside the classroom to achieve an average grade in the course. Your grade will be based on your performance, meeting assignment deadlines, regular and prompt attendance and class participation.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

Attendance and Participation	25% (250 points)
Short paper	15% (150 points)
Creative Project	40% (400 points)
 Blogging	20% (200 points)

Attendance and Participation 25%/250 points

Attendance and participation is highly valued. Class is a time to exchange ideas, talk to and listen to one another. We should think of our class as an experiment and approach it with curiosity, preparedness, and openness. This means doing the readings before class, showing up to class *with* your books and course packet, ready to actively participate. You may also blog before or after class in lieu of talking if you are nervous about speaking publicly.

Short paper 15% Due February 22

Write one short paper (4-5 pages not including works cited, endnotes, or bibliography) on a topic related to race, gender, sexuality and science/speculative fiction or film. Essay

questions will be handed out in class. You must use *at least* one peer-reviewed journal article and one book chapter in your paper.

Creative Project: 40%/400 points Due May 3 in class

You will plan and execute a creative project of your choice. Projects must demonstrate their working knowledge of the course themes of race, gender, and science fiction. The project will involve submitting the following: a statement of intention; the project itself; a 2-page self-assessment; and presenting your project in class on December 16. Your project must be based on original academic research. Collaborative projects are encouraged.

Suggestions:

- Make a video about your favorite novel/short story/film
- Make an annotated map of one of the worlds in the films or texts we watch/read throughout the semester
- Write fan fiction based on one of the texts we read
- Make a fanvid
- Make a science fiction themed fanzine
- Write an original science fiction short story or novella

Breakdown of creative project:

Statement of intention:	5%
Final Project:	20%
2 page Rationale/self-assessment	10%
Presentation:	5%

Due dates for the components of this assignment will be distributed in the second week of class.

Blogging: 20%

Each student will write a blog entry on FOUR of the films and novels we watch and read over the course. Each blog entry should be approximately 250-300 words long.

- Blog Entry 1: due January 31 in class
- Blog Entry 2: due March 1 in class
- Blog entry 3: due March 22 by email
- Blog entry 4: due April 12 in class

Grading

Although the assignments accrue up to 1000 points, I will be using an A-F grading system for all assignments. The University mandated "+" and "-" grading symbols will be used with the A-F grading system.

- A: achievement *outstanding* relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B: achievement *significantly above* that level necessary to meet course requirements
- C: achievement meeting the *basic* course requirements in every respects

D: achievement *worthy of credit* even though it does not meet the basic requirements
 F : performance *failing* to meet the basic course requirements
 S: equivalent to a grade of C or better

Grading will be based on the following categories:

- Critical and thoughtful analysis
- Grasp of key term and concepts
- Initiative taken in researching and reading
- Written expression
- Structure (i.e., research assignment and exam have strong introduction, body and conclusion)
- Correctly formatted in-text citations and bibliography/reference list
- Presentation: assignments typed in 12 point font, double-spaced with wide margins; using correct spelling and grammar. ALWAYS SPELL CHECK YOUR WORK BEFORE PRINTING IT OR SENDING IT IN.

In Class Discussion and Note-Taking

Your enjoyment of and success in this course depends on all of us being present and paying attention. I encourage you to take notes in a notebook during class, rather than a laptop. If you need to use a laptop to take notes, please be smart about how you work. Opening readings or checking a word or facts in the dictionary/Wikipedia is fine. Checking Facebook, email or any site unrelated to the course during class is not permitted. Students who are clearly checking their personal email, chatting, or doing other extra-curricular activities during class time will be asked to leave, and will be marked absent for that day's class.

Class Discussion Guidelines

In order to facilitate class discussions in class and online, we will adhere to the following ground rules:

- 1) Acknowledge that discrimination exists in many forms (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, anti-semitism, ableism, etc.)
- 2) Acknowledge that any critical understanding of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ageism, etc. means that we need to recognize that we have been systematically taught misinformation about our own groups as well as members of other groups. This is true for dominant (e.g. white, male, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied, etc.) and subordinate (e.g. people of color, women, poor and working class, gay/lesbian/bisexual, disabled, Jew, etc.) group members. With the material involved in this class, I would like students to specifically remember this rule and be aware of it as they do their readings and participate in discussions.
- 3) We cannot be blamed for the misinformation that we have learned, but we will be held responsible for repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
- 4) We will assume people are doing the best that they can.
- 5) We will share information about our groups with other members of the class and we will *never* demean, devalue, or in any way put down people for their experiences.
- 6) We want to create a positive atmosphere for open discussion, even though learning might be uncomfortable at times. It is important to recognize that classes are not "safe" spaces, and that sometimes, the best learning experiences we have are

moments of great discomfort. Members of the class may wish to share writing or make comments that they do not want repeated outside of the classroom. If so, the student will preface his/her remark with a request and the class will agree not to repeat the remarks.

Finally, please be aware that this course includes topics that are sexually explicit. If you choose to take this class, you are responsible for completing all reading and written assignments. Remember that you do not have to agree with all of the material presented in this class. However, you are required to read, listen, think, engage, and write about the views presented.

Class Attendance and Late Assignments

In order to succeed in this course, you need to attend classes, complete assignments on time and keep up with the weekly readings. Part of your final grade will be based on your attendance (see below). As an instructor, it's my responsibility to offer interesting, fun and challenging teaching material. In return, I expect students to attend classes on time, to participate in group activities, to ask questions, pay attention and think critically.

Attendance Requirements: I will be taking an attendance roll for every class. If you need to miss a lecture for medical reasons, please email me and provide me with a medical certificate. You can miss two classes without providing a medical certificate or other form of excuse. After two unexcused absences, your course grade will be reduced by half a grade (ie, A to B+, B+ to B, etc). Three unexcused absences will lower your grade one whole grade. While I will take attendance at every class meeting, I will not be keeping track of individual student's attendance grade during semester; it is your responsibility to keep track of your attendance and to turn up to class.

Late Assignments: I do not accept late assignments or give extensions except in the most dire emergencies, such as documented illness or a personal emergency. If you are having serious health problems or a personal emergency and wish to ask for an extension, see me personally in office hours or before/after class at least four days before the assignment is due. All extensions will require a signed letter from a health professional or the Counseling Service. Assignments submitted late without an extension will drop a grade for each day late.

Academic Integrity

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

Disability Policy Statement

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities who will require disability accommodations in this class are encouraged to make their requests at the beginning of the semester either during office hours or by appointment. Note: Prior to receiving disability accommodations, verification of eligibility from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is required. Disability information is confidential.

Establishing Accommodations: Students who feel they will need disability accommodations in this class but have not registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) should contact DRC immediately on 612-626-1333. The DRC office is located on the first floor of the Macnamara Alumni Center. For additional information, visit <http://diversity.umn.edu/disability/home>.

Assistance With Writing

1. Make an appointment with a writing tutor at Student Writing Support, <http://writing.umn.edu> 612.625.1893, a service offering face-to-face tutoring for all U of M students by appointment in Nicholson Hall and walk-in satellites around campus.
2. Make an appointment with SWS.online, a service offering online writing consultations (you submit and receive comments on your paper electronically, and meet with your consultant online for a follow-up chat).

Week 8	March 1 Bodies, Race, and Biotech	Blog entry 2 due
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Octavia Butler, *Dawn*.

“‘We Keep Playing the Same Record’: A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler,” *Science Fiction Studies*, 23: 3 (1996), 331-338. (in course packet)

Week 9	March 8 Race and science fiction
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Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders,” in *Dark Matter* (in course packet)

Samuel Delany, “Racism and science fiction,” in *Dark Matter* (in course packet)

Week 10	March 22 Queering sci-fi/fantasy	Blog entry 3 due
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Samuel Delany, *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*.

Jeffrey Allen Tucker, “The Necessity of Models, of Alternatives: Samuel R. Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*.” (in course packet)

Alexis Lothian, “Speculating queerer worlds,” *Social Text: Periscope*,

http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/speculating_queerer_worlds/

(in course packet)

Week 11	March 29 Afrofuturism
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Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1993, 735-778. (in course packet)

Alondra Nelson, “Future Texts,” *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20: 2 (2002), 1-15.

Janelle Monae, *The Archandroid* (listen/watch)

Week 12	April 5 Sci-fi and the postcolony
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Nnedi Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*.

Week 13	April 12 Ecological apocalypse	Blog entry 4 due
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Pumzi (watch in class), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIR7I_B86Fc

Gerry Canavan, “Introduction: If This Goes On,” in *Green Planets: ecology and science fiction*. 1-24. (in course packet)

Week 14	April 19 Globalized dystopias
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Film: *Sleep Dealer* (2009).

Lysa Rivera, “Future Histories and Cyborg Labor: Reading Borderlands Science Fiction after NAFTA.” *Science Fiction Studies* 118 (2012) (in course packet)

Alex Rivera, Carlos Decena and Margaret Gray, "Putting Transnationalism to Work: An Interview With Film-maker Alex Rivera," *Social Text* 88 (24: 3), 2006, 131-138. (in course packet)

Week 15 April 26
Scifi and social justice

Excerpts from Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. AK Press, 2015. (PDF)

Dean Spade and Craig Willse, "Introduction: We are *Born in Flames*," *Women and Performance* 23:1 (2013), 1-5.

Born in Flames (film), watch in class.

Week 16 May 3
Final Project Presentations
