ENG 335 Science Fiction
Spring 2012
MWF 9:20 – 10:20
Mueller Theater

Dr. Deborah C. Mitchell
TC 408, Ext. 7030
Office Hours: T 1-2 PM, W 10:30-11:30 AM
and by appointment

Science Fiction is the future ahead of schedule.
--Syd Mead, visual futurist

Warp speed. Wormholes. Time travel. Transporters. Androids. Aliens. Space cowboys and Saurian brandy. This is the stuff of science fiction, of future worlds and alternate universes. Syd Mead's definition focuses our study since science fiction stories should lie within the realm of scientific possibility. (Think Captain Kirk's communicator and then look down at your cell phone.) In this course, we'll boldly explore what critics call the "literature of ideas," the genre that bridges the arts and sciences, and we'll discuss how writers have used science fiction as a vehicle for social criticism and a commentary on the human condition.

We'll be reading some of the finest science fiction ever written and watching some great film adaptations. You will also be reading a variety of critical articles written by the leading scholars of their time. By the end of the course, you should be able to do the following:

- Trace the evolution of the science fiction tradition
- Identify the leading writers and scholars in the canon
- Grasp the conventions and characteristics of the science fiction genre
- Conduct research in science fiction appropriate for a 300-level English course
- Read a text through several critical methodologies
- Construct and support a sound, reasonable argument
- Demonstrate control of your reading and thinking about texts
- Engage in your own creative work in the genre
- Formulate some of your own conclusions about the importance of the science fiction genre and its significance to contemporary culture

Learning Outcomes for English majors
In addition to the outcomes for the course, English majors will demonstrate the following:

1. the ability to discuss literature, including engaging in an exchange of ideas, and offering and supporting insights.
2. the capacity to sustain controlled, critical arguments that analyze and synthesize texts.
3. an understanding of the craft of writing, including concision, diction, grammar, and syntax.
4. the ability to produce creative writing that shows an awareness of language, freedom from cliché, and an understanding of genre, style, and topic.
5. the ability to identify and use a range of sources suitable to the scholarly conversation on a particular topic, to evaluate and integrate source material, and to document accurately.
6. an understanding of the literary tradition, the historical and cultural contexts of literature, and critical methods of reading.
7. the ability to give well-planned, engaging presentations.

Written Texts
The War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells ((1898)
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (1932)
The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury (1946)

I, Robot by Isaac Asimov (1950)
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Childhood's End by Arthur C. Clarke (1953)
Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert Heinlein (1961)
The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula LeGuin (1969)
Neuromancer by William Gibson (1984)
The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (2008)
The Windup Girl by Paolo Bacigalupi (2009)

Film Texts
A couple of *Star Trek* (the original) episodes (1960s)
Blade Runner (1982), directed by Ridley Scott
I, Robot (2004), directed by Alex Proyas
The War of the Worlds (2005), directed by Stephen Spielberg
Serenity (2005), directed by Joss Whedon
Star Trek (2009), directed by J. J. Abrams
Cowboys and Aliens (2011), directed by Jon Favreau

Assignments
You will write three short (2-3 page) reaction papers to the written/film texts and one longer (8-10 page), critical paper using primary and secondary source material. Each of you will write a science fiction story of your own. The class will then select one of these stories to adapt to a short film, which will be your final group project. You will present this project during the final period. I will give quizzes on material and lectures periodically throughout the semester.

Grading
10% Reaction Paper #1
10% Reaction Paper #2
10% Reaction Paper #3
20% Longer research paper
20% Creative project
20% Final group project
10% Quizzes

Guiding Questions
How do we define science fiction? What makes it different from the fantasy genre?
Do these works fit Mead's definition of science fiction?
What are the characteristics and conventions of the sci-fi genre?
What are the subgenres of science fiction?
What do the sci-fi stories tell us about the future?
What do they tell us about the human condition?
Can the events really happen?
What inventions/technology in the stories seem familiar? Which ones seem possible?
How do the authors use the sci-fi genre to comment on issues of our own time?

We can add to this list as we go.

Reading schedule

Jan 18/20	Introduction to the Course *The Hunger Games* (novel)
Jan 23/25/27	*The Hunger Games* (novel) *Blade Runner* (film)
Jan 30/Feb 1/3	H. G. Wells and *The War of the Worlds* (novel) *The War of the Worlds* (2005 film) **Response paper #1 due Feb 3**
Feb 6/8/10	Aldous Huxley and *Brave New World* (novel)
Feb 13/15/17	Ray Bradbury and *The Martian Chronicles* (novel)
Feb 20/22/24	Isaac Asimov and *I, Robot* (novel) *I, Robot* (2004 film) **Response paper #2 due Feb 24**
Feb 27/29/Mar 1	Arthur C. Clarke and *Childhood's End* (novel) Assignment: Read Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* over break
Mar 3-11	**Spring Break**
Mar 12/14/16	Robert Heinlein and *Stranger in a Strange Land* (novel) Episode of *Star Trek* (original series)
Mar 19/21/23	Ursula LeGuin and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (novel) **Response paper #3 due Mar 23**
Mar 26/28/30	*Serenity* (film) Begin William Gibson and *Neuromancer*
Apr 2/4	*Neuromancer* (novel) Assignment: Read Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* over break
Apr 5-9	**Easter Break**
Apr 10	**Monday classes meet** Begin Paolo Bacigalupi and *The Windup Girl*
Apr 11/13	*The Windup Girl* (novel) **Short story due Apr 11**

Apr 16/18/20 *Star Trek* (film)
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Apr 23/25/27 *Cowboys and Aliens* (film)

Apr 30/May 2/4 **Critical paper due Apr 30**
Final project week

May 4 **Last day of classes**

May 7/8/10/11 **Final Period (Final Presentation)**

May 9 **Reading Day**

General Guidelines and Policies

Come to class prepared and ready to participate. Stay on top of your assignments, especially your reading. There is a lot of reading, but then this is a 300-level English course. I expect you to show up, participate in discussions, exercises, and presentations. We can't have a meaningful discussion if you haven't read the material. Your contributions are vital to the success of this class; therefore, I will lower your grade one letter for each absence after your third. If you have an emergency situation, you should notify me. I don't accept "sick in room" excuses.

Grammatical errors will significantly lower your grade on any assignment. Any work filled with grammatical and technical errors cannot receive above a C.

Late work, if I accept it, will receive a lower grade.

Quizzes cannot be made up unless you have a serious, emergency situation (i. e. you've had an accident or you're in the hospital) at the time it is given.

Turning in someone else's work—whether it is from a published text or a roommate's homework—as your own constitutes plagiarism and will be punished according to the rules laid out in the Student Handbook. I report all instances of plagiarism to the Dean of the College.

Please be aware that I do not accept Internet sources like Wikipedia or SparkNotes, or any sites that are questionable or non-credible.

Turn off all cell phones and put them away before you come into class. I count you absent if you are texting or sleeping in class because you're not really engaged in the class, are you? You might as well be somewhere else.

Purge the word "like" from your vocabulary, unless, of course, you use it correctly. Saying "like" every other word is distracting and not appropriate for college-level discussion. I will take off points if you use this word incorrectly. Practice <u>not</u> saying it. You will be surprised at how intelligent you sound.

Warp speed ahead.