Gallatin School, New York University

Interdisciplinary Seminar- Exploring Frontiers and Fictions of Science (IDSEM-UG1659)

Fall 2011 - Monday & Wednesday 2:00 p.m. - 3:15 p.m. 7E12 - Room LL25
Professor - José Perillán
Email – jgp10@nyu.edu
Office Hours – By Appt. Monday 4 – 6 p.m. & Tuesday 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Gallatin Rm. 425

Course Description -

To many people the latest theories in science may seem distant and otherworldly. Math, logical reasoning, and subject specific technical jargon can form intimidating barriers to modern scientific understanding. Why then are big science fiction movies like Star Wars and Avatar so successful at the box office? Is the sci-fi genre simply a social lubricant for the acceptance of science? Do these fictional narratives prophetically predict innovations within the sciences or do they actually serve to inspire these innovations? At its core, the sci-fi genre emerges from the interlacing of scientific rationality and the escapism of story-telling, extrapolating current scientific knowledge into alternate realities. In this seminar we will explore the genre of science fiction and its underlying literary and scientific elements. Readings may include works by: Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, Arthur C. Clarke, Leon Lederman, Orson Scott Card, Alice Sheldon, Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Dawkins, H.G. Wells, Octavia Butler, Robert A. Heinlein, John Gribbin, Philip K. Dick, and Jules Verne.

General Expectations -

In this course we will focus on developing strong strategies for thinking, reading, and writing critically. Using a variety of readings, we will learn to deconstruct an author’s narrative and subsequently evaluate its effectiveness. With the help of supplementary readings and class discussions we will learn about concepts in modern physics that contribute to the genre of Science Fiction. I look forward to animated yet respectful discussions of the topics covered.

Attendance is Mandatory-

In addition, on time attendance is expected. In the event of an unavoidable absence, please notify me by e-mail as soon as possible, and I will make arrangements with you to catch up on the work you missed. Class participation is a significant portion of your grade, so please come to class on time, with your assignments completed, and prepared to engage the rest of the class in lively discussion.
**Readings –**

The following texts are required reading for this course. Books will be available for purchase through the NYU bookstore and all assigned readings that are essays, papers, or excerpts will be made available for copy or download.

**Books –**

**Required -**

- Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Sheep?* Del Rey, 1996.

**Recommended –**


**Reading & Writing Assignments –**

Students will be assigned both reading and writing assignments every week. The writing will include informal in-class writing, weekly responses to the assigned readings, and three formal assignments. Formal assignments will include a literary critical essay, exploratory essay, and an original short story. All written assignments should be double-spaced, paginated, stapled, in 12-point font, and with 1-inch margins on all sides.

**Formal Assignment 1:** Literary Critical Essay (8 pages)

**Formal Assignment 2:** Exploratory Essay: Building a Scientific Foundation (8 pages)

**Formal Assignment 3:** Short Story: Constructing a Narrative (10 pages)
Late Assignments -

Assignments will be downgraded for every day they are late. If there are extenuating circumstances, please notify me in advance of the due date so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Honesty -
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are very serious offenses and will not be tolerated in this course. Any act, deliberate or otherwise, will be reported immediately to the Gallatin administration for disciplinary action. More information about Gallatin’s expectations for academic integrity can be found at:
www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html

Grading -

Formal Assignment 1: Literary Critical Essay 25%
Formal Assignment 2: Exploratory Essay 25%
Formal Assignment 3: Short Story 25%
Response Papers 15%
Class Participation 10%
Tentative Syllabus -

Students are assigned weekly readings and reading response papers so they should come to class prepared to participate in class discussions. 1-2 page response papers with reflections and observations on the reading assignments will be assigned weekly.

Week 1 – September 7

- Introduction to course - Science Fiction as a literary genre
- ICCI communication – overview
- Reading assignment: Scalzi
- Reading response due (9/12)

Week 2 – September 12 & 14

- Reading critically – Close readings and evaluating narratives
- Reading assignment: Rabkin p. 3 -12, 50 -74, 112 – 161, 208 – 248, 264 – 286
- Reading response due (9/19)

Week 3 – September 19 & 21

- Reading assignment: Rabkin p. 315 – 525
- Reading response due (9/26)

Week 4 – September 26 & 28

- Reading assignment: Philip K. Dick (Complete)
- Reading response due (10/3)

Week 5 – October 3 & 5

- Reading assignment: See “Blade Runner”
- Reading Response Due (10/12)
Week 6 – October 12
- Reading assignment: Kaku p. ix – 153
- Reading Response Due (10/12)

Week 7 – October 17 & 19
- Reading assignment: Kaku p. 154 – 303
- Formal Assignment #1 due October 24th

Week 8 – October 24 & 26
- Reading assignment: Butler p. 1 - 110
- Reading Response Due (10/31)

Week 9 – October 31 & November 2
- Reading assignment: Butler p. 111 - 214
- Reading Response Due (11/7)

Week 10 - November 7 & 9
- Reading assignment: Le Guin p. 1 – 191

Week 11 – November 14 & 16
- Reading assignment: Le Guin p. 192 – 387
- Formal Assignment #2 due November 21st

Week 12 - November 21 & 23 (Thursday the 24th is Thanksgiving!)
- Reading assignment: Heinlein p. 1 – 185
- Reading Response Due (11/28)

Week 13 – November 28 & 30
• Reading assignment: Heinlein p. 186 – 335
• Reading Response Due (12/5)

Week 14 - December 5 & 7

• Reading assignment: See “Starship Troopers”
• Reading Response Due (12/12)

Week 15 – December 12 & 14

• Bringing it all together
• Formal Assignment #3 due December 16th by 5 pm