First-Year Writing Seminar
Utopia

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TR 8:00 a.m.-9:15 a.m.
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Office Hours: R 9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Course Description

In the sixteenth century, Thomas More, inspired by Plato’s *Republic*, imagined his own ideal state. Instead of *Eutopia*, which means ‘happy place,’ More ironically named his imaginary island *Utopia*, which means simply ‘no place.’ More’s influential book eventually lent its name to a diverse set of texts and visions. The concept of utopia now carries both meanings and embodies the logical and ethical tensions that plague metaphorical (and sometimes geographical) borderlands between the ideal and the real. In the 20th century authors and theorists began to seriously weigh the benefits and dangers of utopian thought, as feminists, Marxists, environmentalists, and cosmopolitans continued to imagine new and complex utopias. In this course, we will examine the long tradition of utopian writing and thinking, analyzing its aesthetics and logic, uncovering and assessing its recurring themes and assumptions, and evaluating its utility and ethics. Students will write and revise four essays, each of which emphasizes a particular analytic strategy. Classes and assignments will also focus on crucial aspects of writing at the university.

Required Texts


Recommended:

N.B. If you do not have a writing handbook that outlines grammar, style, and documentation conventions, I recommend this one. If you would prefer not to purchase a handbook, please use *The Owl* website as necessary, especially for documentation information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

**Course Requirements**

- Essays (4): 75% (15%, 15%, 20%, 25%)
- Homework: 15%
- Class Participation: 10%

**Course Expectations**

**Blackboard:** Students are expected to check Blackboard at least twice a week to keep up with homework assignments.

**Attendance and Lateness:** If you miss more than two classes your final grade will be lowered; for each additional absence beyond the two that are allowed your grade will be lowered a half grade (e.g., C+ to C). Save absences for when you need them—religious holidays, inevitable illness. Additionally, you are expected to come to class prepared and on time. Chronic lateness and ill-preparedness will also result in a lowered final grade.

**Participation:** In order to participate in class, you’ll often need to have your text books, printed readings, and a copy of your latest homework assignment/draft. Please get into the habit of bringing these things to class. Computers are not allowed in class except on specific days identified on the course schedule because they interfere with discussion. You may use an e-reader for pdfs, if you choose, but please takes notes the old-fashioned way unless special circumstances prevent it (please let me know). Please keep cell-phones well hidden during class time.

**Email & Office Hours:** I do not accept work by email unless otherwise indicated on the syllabus. In general, be judicious in your email communications with me. Quick follow up questions from class are fine, but longer questions, especially about your writing, should be reserved for office hours, where they will be most welcome. Please do not email me to follow up on classes missed due to absence; check on Blackboard and then with a classmate if necessary. To clarify assignments, please try to figure things out yourself before emailing me, but of course do ask if you’re really confused or if there’s a problem with Blackboard. These are good habits to follow in general in the academic and professional worlds. Be as autonomous as you can, but ask for help when you need it.

**Homework:** Drafts and other homework must be completed thoroughly and on time to receive full credit. They will be assessed with a ✓+, ✓, ✓-, or NC (no credit). Homework submitted late will automatically receive NC. I will drop your two lowest homework grades at the end of the semester. I will not accept drafts or homework by
email, unless you have made special arrangements with me. See the “Grades” section below for more information about late work.

**Essays**: Four formal papers are required; specific assignments will be distributed in advance. Each essay will undergo revision and rewriting with the assistance of instructor feedback, your own further thinking, peer review, and/or the writing center if you choose. All essays will adhere to MLA format for research papers, including documentation. There will be penalties for late essays. See the “Grades” section below for more information about late work.

**Grades**

Your final drafts will be evaluated and graded using the following guidelines:

*A* papers raise insightful questions and generate focused arguments that are well supported with evidence, logic, and analysis. Arguments are sufficiently developed through appropriate use of sources with a strong sense of purpose. A papers are organized reasonably, and their prose is clear. There are few if any illogical or confusing moments. A papers also contain very few if any failures of grammar or citation.

*B* papers make clear and logical arguments, demonstrate competent engagement with sources, and are generally well-structured and readable. They may suffer from several illogical or confusing passages, some lack of evidence, or some disorganization, or a general lack of development, but not all of these. B- papers contain few failures of grammar or citation.

*C* papers either have a clear central claim, though it may be shallow or insufficiently supported, or visibly work toward a central claim through meaningful textual analysis. C papers may lack focus, contain several illogical or confusing moments, be disorganized, lack evidence, or some combination of these. C papers may contain some failures of grammar and citation.

*D* papers are either missing central claims or they are essentially unsupported. D papers are typically organized in a confusing manner; there is not a clear sense of rationale for paragraphing, order, or material presented. Supporting claims, paragraphs, and analysis do not serve to further the primary aims of the essay, though there may be a strong moment within the essay. Prose is often weak to the point where meaning is not clear.

*F* papers demonstrate failure to successfully engage with the assignment or writing task. In F papers the writer may not have addressed the assignment in terms of content, length, deadlines, or other requirements.
Other things that can affect your grade: Your course grade will be calculated using the percentages described above with the following exceptions: excessive absence, missing work, and submitting plagiarized work.

- **Missing Work**: You must submit all major assignments to pass the course.

- **Late Work**: Late Drafts will not receive comments from the instructor and will count against your homework grade. They may also affect your participation grade if you are unable to participate in class because you do not have a draft with you. Late *Final* Drafts will be penalized 1/3 grade for every class day they are late. To clarify, any time after the deadline counts as the next class day, even if you submit your late essay before the next class actually meets.

- **Plagiarism**: The Instructor will uphold the University's code of academic and personal conduct for all instances of plagiarism. You may find this code in your NYU Gallatin Bulletin. You can download the bulletin at: [http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf).

**Writing Center**

If you need additional help with your writing, you can contact the Gallatin Writing Center at 1 Washington Place, room 423. See [www.nyu.edu/gallatin/writingschedule](http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/writingschedule) for instructions on how to make an appointment.

**Course Schedule**

*This schedule may change slightly throughout the semester. Be sure to check the course schedule on Blackboard for up-to-date information. If a class must be canceled due to an emergency, students will be contacted through a Blackboard announcement. Once again, it is important to frequently check email and Blackboard.*

**Tuesday, September 4**
- Introduction
- Reading Strategies
- Homework: Read Krishan Kumar “Utopias Ancient and Modern”; Plato *Republic* Book II.

**Thursday, September 6**
- Discuss *Republic*. Raising questions/generating topics for writing.
- Homework: Read Plato’s *Republic* Books III, IV, VII
Tuesday, September 11
Discuss Republic
Homework: Read Plato Republic Book VIII. Follow up on a point that we made in class by presenting and analyzing a passage from the Republic that you think we should have addressed, but didn’t in our discussion. Bring your analysis and the Kumar essay to class on Thursday.

Thursday, September 13
Writing Textual Analysis and Summary

Tuesday, September 18
Discuss Utopia. Theoretical Analysis: Reflects/Resists
Homework: Read Francis Bacon New Atlantis; Northrop Frye “Varieties of Literary Utopias”

Thursday, September 20
Discuss Utopia/New Atlantis. Compare/Contrast
Homework: Write draft of Essay 1.

Tuesday, September 25
Draft of Essay 1 Due
Watch Ken Burns’ The Shakers (note: if we need this day for writing work, I will schedule this for outside of class).

Homework: Read Krishan Kumar “Utopia in Nineteenth Century America.” Write a short response: How do the Shakers reflect/resist the notions of American utopianism outlined by Kumar? No need to be exhaustive; focus on one or two things that you found particularly interesting and develop your thoughts about them a bit.

Thursday, September 27
Structure: Introductions and Paragraphing
Homework: Analyze the structure of your current draft. Write a revision letter based on what you discover. Read Charles Nordoff “The Perfectionists at Oneida and Wallingford.”

Tuesday, October 2
Discuss the American Communitarians
Homework: Begin reading Edward Bellamy Looking Backward. Please bring Kumar reading and your latest draft to the next class.

Thursday, October 4
Key Moves and Transitions
Homework: Complete Essay 1

Tuesday, October 9
Final Draft of Essay 1 Due
Discuss Bellamy.

Thursday, October 11
Discuss Bellamy.
Homework: Write draft of Essay 2

Tuesday, October 16
No Class: Fall Break

Thursday, October 18
Draft of Essay 2 Due
Homework: Read Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herland.

Tuesday, October 23
Style and Clarity
Read: TBD (Literary Criticism Herland)

Thursday, October 25
Discuss Herland and Critical Texts
Responding to Arguments
Homework: Complete Final Draft of Essay 2. Please bring laptops to class on Tuesday.

Tuesday, October 30
Final Draft of Essay 2 Due (2 copies)
Basic Research Skills – Handout prospectus assignment.
Homework: Read classmate’s essay and write response letter. Find one book and one article that you might use in your research essay. Bring them to next class.

Thursday, November 1
Kinds of Sources and how to use them.
Read: Ernest Callenbach Ecotopia.

Tuesday, November 6
Discuss Callenbach
Homework: Find a source relevant to Callenbach or Gillman. Skim and summarize the source. Then explain how you would use it to develop an essay on one of these texts (comparative case study, critical argument, contextualizing source, theory) What question about that text would it help you to explore?

Thursday, November 8
Discuss Callenbach

Tuesday, November 13
Essay 3 Draft Due
Homework: Read Ayn Rand *Anthem*

**Thursday, November 15**  
Discuss Rand  
Homework: Read excerpts from Ayn Rand *The Virtue of Selfishness*; Karl Popper  
“Utopia and Violence”

**Tuesday, November 20**  
*Prospectus Due*  
Discuss Rand  
Homework: Complete final draft of Essay 3. Begin reading Phillip K. Dick *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

**Thursday, November 22**  
No Class: Thanksgiving

**Tuesday, November 27**  
*Essay 3 Final Due* (2 copies)  
Analyze Student Essay  
Homework: Read and respond to classmate’s essay. Finish reading Phillip K. Dick *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

**Thursday, November 29**  
Discuss Dick  
Homework: Write Draft of Essay 4

**Tuesday, December 4**  
*Essay 4 Draft Due* (2 copies)  
Discuss Dick  
Homework: Read and respond to classmate’s draft.

**Thursday, December 6**  
Course Review  
Homework: Work on revising Essay 4

**Tuesday, December 11**  
In-Class Writing Day. Bring your laptops and any remaining questions.

**Thursday, December 13**  
*Final Draft Essay 4 Due*