



**ENG 610.001—Studies in Film Genres
“The Fearful Other in Science Fiction Cinema”**

**Summer I 2014
TR—1:00-5:00 pm
Room: HL 203**

Instructor: (Christopher Gonzalez, PhD – Assistant Professor)
Office Location: Hall of Languages (HL) 225
Office Hours: TR 11:00 am-1:00 pm and by appointment
Office Phone: 903.886.5277
Office Fax: 903.886.5980
University Email Address: Chris.Gonzalez@tamuc.edu

NOTE: I reserve the right to revise the contents of this syllabus as I deem necessary.

| |
|---------------------------|
| COURSE INFORMATION |
|---------------------------|

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Required Reading List:

Film Genre Reader IV by Barry Keith Grant, ed. (U of Texas P, 2012) ISBN: 0292742061

Poetics of Cinema by David Bordwell (Routledge, 2007) ISBN: 0415977797

Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality by Christine Cornea (Edinburgh UP, 2007) ISBN:
0813541735

Science Fiction by Adam Roberts (Routledge, 2006) ISBN: 0415366682

Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction by David Seed (Oxford UP, 2011) ISBN: 0199557454

Suggested Reading List:

Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film by Adilifu Nama (U of Texas P, 2008) ISBN:
0292717458

Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?: A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation by Seo-Young
Chu (Harvard UP, 2011) ISBN: 0674055179

The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction by Mark Bould, (et al.) ed. (Routledge, 2009) ISBN:
0415453798

Films

Alien (1979)
Blade Runner (1982)
Akira (1988)
Ghost in the Shell (1995)
Twelve Monkeys (1995)
Gattaca (1997)
The Matrix (1999)
V for Vendetta (2005)
Solaris (2002)
Minority Report (2002)
The Chronicles of Riddick (2004)
Children of Men (2006)
Sleep Dealer (2008)
District 9 (2009)
Prometheus (2012)
Elysium (2013)

Note: Students must have access to the films beyond class meetings. These films may be available for rental at local video stores, Netflix, Amazon, and so on.

(ENG 610 catalogue description): Studies in Film Genres - Three semester hours

An examination of film genres, either by surveying the various genres or examining a particular genre (such as westerns, film noir, or French New Wave), through the eyes of a particular director or culture. May be repeated as topics vary to a maximum of 6 hours.

Course Description

Science fiction (SF) has been a long contested genre for much of its history. It dwells in the interstices of popular culture and high literature. It has been accused of promoting escapism; it has been hailed for its ability to prophesy. When at its best, SF can help expose the flawed tendencies of humanity—those aspects about us as a species that both define us and mark us as frail. At its worst, SF can revel in inanity and whimsical non-sequiturs. Like any creative tradition, SF has a broad range of what we might call “literariness.” What, we might ask, are the factors that contribute to an impactful, lasting SF tradition, and what endangers it? What makes a work of SF last, and what makes it forgettable? This course seeks to answer these intriguing questions and more by studying one specific aspect of the SF tradition: Speculative Science Fiction Cinema. In particular, the relatively recent films selected for study in this course all engage with the marginalized “Other” in some meaningful way. Thus, despite their often-otherworldly trappings, these films have at their core a very quotidian issue: they all take up “the fear of the unknown.” In the course title, “fearful” denotes something that *causes* fear, but it can also mean something that *experiences* fear. Such a seeming paradox exists quite naturally in SF. By considering very recent examples of Speculative SF Cinema, we ask how these films *in toto* (director, scriptwriting, historical contexts, production values, technology) compel audiences to (re)consider their own worlds by envisioning alternate realities that recontextualize our own human experience. Our films and readings range across a host of creative tendencies and theoretical perspectives, respectively. Students with specific thematic or scholarly interests are encouraged to integrate them into the coursework whenever possible.

Students enrolled in ENG 610 are encouraged to integrate their specific thematic or scholarly interests into the coursework whenever possible. Students should plan to engage in and at times lead productive discussions based on the theoretical and commonplace readings; develop ideas via questions posed in response to the readings; hone the skills presenting before an academic audience, continue to develop writing via a short, analytical essay suitable for presentation at an academic conference, and demonstrate proficiency of the course material via a final exam.

Course Objectives:

- Students will further develop their ability to present scholarly research before an academic audience.
- Students will demonstrate their engagement with the scholarly community.
- Students will hone their ability to write a conference paper for presentation.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students will further develop their ability to present scholarly research as measured by a presentation.
- Students will hone their ability to write a conference paper by submitting a paper for grading.

| |
|----------------------------|
| COURSE REQUIREMENTS |
|----------------------------|

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments

This course consists of a series of activities and assessments to assist you in achieving the outcomes and objectives of this course and instructional units/modules. By the end of this course the class will read and discuss several book-length texts and feature-length films.

During the semester you will complete several major assignments designed to build on each other intellectually and conceptually. These assignments are:

Daily Discussion and Participation**10%**

Active class participation is vital in graduate classes, but it is at times difficult to measure. You should be prepared to discuss several aspects of the readings and films during each class meeting. During a four-hour class meeting, you will have plenty of opportunity to participate. Each class meeting ought to be viewed as a collaboration of an investigative team that is charged with examining a problem. Everyone's sustained attention, preparation, and participation is key to this approach. Expect to be called on to discuss some facet of the day's readings and viewings, and to elaborate on these points via discussion. Because there are only 10 class meetings, every class is worth 10 points.

Quizzes (x 3)**15%**

In order to ensure that you engage with the course materials at an acceptable level, you will take three quizzes that will test your knowledge of key concepts and theoretical points that arise in readings, viewings, and discussion. Each quiz is worth 5% of your total course grade.

Oral Presentation**20%**

For this assignment you will prepare a presentation based on a film from the course viewings. You are encouraged to use a multimedia format to present your ideas (PowerPoint, Prezi, handout, etc.). The goal here is to introduce the rest of the class with the contents of the supplemental reading and demonstrate how it operates with our theoretical texts.

Written Responses**15%**

You will write three, one-page responses to a theoretical point and apply it to one of our films. For example, you might take up a theoretical point raised by David Bordwell and “test” it out on one of our films. These responses are due at the end of Weeks 1, 2, and 3. Responses should be single-spaced and should take up no more than one sheet of paper—even if you have to adjust the margins and font size. Each response is worth 5% of your total course grade.

Paper Abstract

5%

You will write an abstract of your final paper for approval. Abstracts will be 300-400 words in length and will describe the theoretical issue to be examined, the film (or aspect of film) to be discussed, and a bibliography of pertinent works (between 6-8). Your paper must have a title, and it is best to have a conference in mind where you might submit this abstract for consideration.

Conference Paper

15%

You will submit a well-organized, persuasively-argued, well-argued conference paper approximately 8 pages in length. Your final paper must unite a theoretical position with one of our commonplace films. This paper may grow out of one of your weekly responses or even your presentation.

Final Exam

20%

The final exam will cover the major components of the course and will test your knowledge of theoretical points as they pertain to the course films.

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Daily Discussion and Participation | 10% |
| Quizzes | 15% |
| Oral Presentation | 20% |
| Written Responses | 15% |
| Paper Abstract | 5% |
| Conference Paper | 15% |
| Final Exam | 20% |

Total: 100%

Scale used to compute final letter grades:

Percentage

- A: 100-90
- B: 89-80
- C: 79-70
- D: 69-60
- F: 59-0

Technology

This course is conducted face to face (f2f). However, some aspects of the course will be accessed online (e.g., quizzes and exams). All technological aspects of the course can be accessed at: <http://chrsgnzlz.wix.com/phdgonzalez>

There will be no extra credit assignments. As a rule, I do not accept late work.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

Academic Honesty Policy

Texas A&M University-Commerce and the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate **plagiarism** and other forms of **academic dishonesty**. Conduct that violates generally-accepted standards of academic honesty is defined as academic dishonesty. "Academic dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another person and passing them off as one's own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension and expulsion (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1, 2, 3]). Cheating, including plagiarizing papers in whole or part, will result in a grade of zero (0) on the assignment for the first offense and failure of the course for any subsequent offenses.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in this graduate class equates to participation in the discussions and is important to the success of this class and to your development as a writer/scholar. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you notify me of potential conflicts with course expectations. The expectation is that you will do more than simply show up to class. Your active participation, in the form of discussion responses and questions, is vital for success in this course. Deadline extensions and other allowances can often be accommodated before they are required, but this requires advance notice. Related to this, SEE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignment Policy

Student work must be completed and submitted on time. All assignments should be turned in during the class period when they are due. Students who know they will miss class when an assignment is due must contact the instructor as soon as possible in advance of class to arrange for submission of the assignment.

All papers should conform to the MLA style guidelines, with the exception of your weekly responses.

Late Work

I will not accept any assignment after its due date. Assignments submitted after the due date may receive a score of zero (0).

Drop a Course

A student may drop a course by logging into his/her myLEO account and clicking on the hyperlink labeled "Drop a class" from among the choices found under the myLeo section of the Web page.

Incompletes

Incompletes (grade of "X") are granted only under rare and extraordinary circumstances.

Administrative Withdrawal

I reserve the right to drop a student from the course administratively for excessive absences or violations of student conduct codes.

University Specific Procedures:

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Gee Library 132

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

StudentDisabilityServices@tamU-commerce.edu

[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. It is next to impossible to explore ideas in a classroom setting if students and instructors do not feel safe or otherwise supported. I will not tolerate discrimination in all its forms. Likewise, rudeness has no place in any classroom, and I will ensure that my classroom remains a rudeness-free environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

Responsibility

You are responsible for understanding all of the material contained in this syllabus, as well as any announced changes to this syllabus. You are also responsible for understanding instructions and directives related to assignments, exams, and grades. This means visiting your professor during office hours if instructions and/or directives remain unclear. Unless you state otherwise, I will assume that you have understood what is expected of you in this class.

| |
|----------------------------------|
| COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR |
|----------------------------------|

The following course schedule is subject to revisions and other modifications as the instructor deems necessary for the course. Any changes to the course schedule will be announced on the course website in advance of the week in which the change will occur.

n.b. *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* by David Seed (Oxford UP, 2011) ISBN: 0199557454, should be read before the first class meeting.

Please have the reading selections read by the date indicated below. In other words, be prepared to discuss the readings on the date indicated.

Summer I 2014

| Date | Agenda |
|----------------------------|---|
| Tuesday June 3 | Introduction, syllabus overview, discussion and overview of science fiction and film theory |
| Thursday June 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Genre,” Andrew Tudor (FGR) • “The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema,” Edward Buscombe (FGR) • “Ch. 2: Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision,” Bordwell • “1: Introduction,” Cornea • “3: SF and Gender,” Roberts Screening: <i>Alien</i> (Companion film: <i>Prometheus</i>) |
| Tuesday June 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Monsters of the Id,” Margaret Tarratt (FGR) • “Ch. 3: Three Dimensions of Film Narrative,” Bordwell • “4: The Masculine Subject of Science Fiction in the 1980s,” Cornea • “4: SF and Race,” Roberts Screening: <i>Akira</i> (Companion film: <i>Ghost in the Shell</i>) Quiz 1 |
| Thursday June 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Children of the Light,” Bruce F. Kawin (FGR) • “Ch. 14: Aesthetics in Action,” Bordwell • “5: Gender Blending and the Feminine Subject in Science Fiction Film,” Cornea • “Critical Race Theory,” Lavender Screening: <i>V for Vendetta</i> (Companion film: <i>The Matrix</i>) Abstract Due |
| Tuesday June 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” Rick Altman (FGR) • “Ch. 6: Film Futures,” Bordwell • “6: Alien Others: Race and the Science Fiction Film,” Cornea • “5: SF and Technology,” Roberts Screening: <i>Blade Runner</i> (Companion film: <i>Minority Report</i>) Quiz 2 |
| Thursday June 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Immigrants, Aliens, and Extraterrestrials: Science Fiction’s Alien ‘Other’ as (Among Other Things) New Latino Imagery,” Charles Ramírez Berg (FGR) • “Ch. 8: Cincerity,” Bordwell • “Design for Screen SF,” Britton • “Structured Absence, Token Presence,” Nama Screening: <i>District 9</i> (Companion film: <i>Elysium</i>) |
| Tuesday June 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Genre Films and the Status Quo,” Judith Hess Wright (FGR) • “7: Generic Performance and Science Fiction Cinema,” Cornea • Excerpt of <i>Mex-Ciné</i> by Aldama on <i>Children of Men</i> • “Latino Sci-Fi: Cognition and Design in Alex Rivera’s <i>Sleep Dealer</i>,” Gonzalez Screening: <i>Sleep Dealer</i> (Companion film: <i>Children of Men</i>) Quiz 3 |
| Thursday | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Experience and Meaning in Genre Films,” Barry Keith Grant (FGR) |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| June 26 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ch. 11: Who Blinked First?” Bordwell • “8: Conclusion: The Technology of Science Fiction Cinema,” Cornea • “Blockbuster SF Film,” Abbott <p>Screening: <i>The Chronicles of Riddick</i> (Companion film: <i>Solaris</i>)</p> <p>Conference Paper Due</p> |
| Tuesday July 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” Linda Williams (FGR) • “Ch. 4: Cognition and Comprehension,” Bordwell • “6: Conclusion,” Roberts <p>Screening: <i>Twelve Monkeys</i> (Companion film: <i>Gattaca</i>)</p> |
| Thursday July 3 | <p>Course wrap-up</p> <p>Final Exam</p> |