

ANTH 220/HDEV 201/ENG XXX: Human Futures

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Course Overview

The future hasn't always been of such intense interest to societies. What, over the last century, has intensified this interest, and how does this interest map onto specific social concerns? In this course, we take a long view of concern about the future – as threat, opportunity, and crisis – to consider the moments in which specific futures have become salient for large numbers of people. In so doing, we focus on philosophy, social science, and literature (especially science fiction) as they operate in speculative idioms – or attempt to capture other people's speculative moments. This takes us through particular historical moments in the U.S. and North Atlantic (especially Western Europe) to think about forces like industrialization and deindustrialization, colonialism and decolonial movements, and modernization, development, and indigenous rights movements. Taken together, they help to show how concerns about the future enable and limit particular kinds of social formations, alliance building, and political organization.

The future as a concept has extreme elasticity – with a society, across societies, and as a thing in its self. As a result, we might reasonably ask: how do cultural expectations of the future shape scientific, political, and philosophical pursuits? To this end, this course takes a largely historical approach, situating the study of the future as a problem in the late 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries as new futures are being elaborated – and, in many cases, debilitated.

This course takes an interdisciplinary social science approach to the contemporary interest in the future, and, in so doing, draws on material from literature, anthropology, sociology, and history. In addition, it integrates a variety of important thinkers from many disciplines, as they have significantly shaped understandings of the future. Across this diverse literature, students will be exposed to a variety of methods that scholars and writers have employed to understand the relationship between the future and the social contexts in which that particular future becomes salient.

Students will be expected to develop writing projects that integrate approaches across the arts, sciences, and humanities, and which draw upon the historical and cross-cultural record. Students should complete the course with a significant piece of writing that builds upon their expertise developed in the course.

Learning Outcomes

Students in C courses will

1. Demonstrate understanding of course content through formal academic writing;
2. Construct effective prose that demonstrates critical thinking and advances sound conclusions, appropriate to the course and discipline; and
3. Demonstrate the ability to revise and improve their writing in both form and content.

Students in O courses will demonstrate

1. Proficiency in oral presentations.
2. The ability to improve oral presentations in response to critiques.
3. Skill in listening to and critiquing oral presentations.

Reading List:

Books are available at the campus bookstore. All other readings are available through Blackboard.

Butler, Octavia

2000 [1993] Parable of the Sower. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

DeConnick, Kelly Sue and Valentine De Landro

2015 Bitch Planet, Vol.1: Extraordinary Machine. La Jolla, CA: Image.

Dillon, Grace

2012 Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.

Haraway, Donna

2016 Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Jones, Stephen Graham

2008 Ledfeather. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Kirkman, Robert, Charlie Adlard and Cliff Rathburn

2011 The Walking Dead, vol. 12: Life Among Them. La Jolla, CA: Image Comics.

Kolbert, Elizabeth

2014 The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History. New York: Henry Holt.

Le Guin, Ursula

1994 [1974] The Dispossessed. New York: Harper Voyager.

Lenin, Vladimir Ilich.

1992 The State and Revolution. Translated by Robert Service. New York: Penguin.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels

1998 [1888] The Communist Manifesto. New York: Verso.

Okorafor, Nnedi

2010 Who Fears Death. New York: Penguin.

Vonnegut, Kurt

1999[1952] Player Piano. New York, Dial Press.

Weisman, Alan

2007 The World Without Us. New York: St. Martin's Press.

X, Malcolm

1992 By Any Means Necessary. New York: Pathfinder Press.

Grading & Assignments:

Reading Guides (20%) – Students are required to complete at least 1 reading guide each week, and a total of 20 reading guides over the course of the semester (there are more readings [] than required Reading Guides, so students have some latitude in which readings they submit Reading Guides for). Reading Guides must be turned in to the instructor at the beginning of class in which the reading is discussed. Late Reading Guides will not be accepted for credit. Reading Guides cannot be submitted for readings during the first week of class.

Oral Presentations (2 @ 5% and 10%, respectively) – Students will initially present on their identified problem (see below) and the resources they intend to draw on to address that problem. These presentations will be short (2 written pages, ~5 minutes), and students will receive written feedback from the instructor and peers. During the last two weeks of class, students will give longer presentations (4-5 written pages, ~10 minutes) summarizing the argument of their final paper, the evidence that they have drawn upon, and the conclusions they have reached. Again, students will receive written feedback from the instructor and peers. In both cases, students will be graded on their effectiveness in communicating their ideas, the coherence of the presentation, and their ability to engage the audience. Presentations cannot be rescheduled; if you miss your presentation, you will receive a failing grade in the course.

15-Page Final Paper, broken into these components (60% total):

Identify a Problem (5%) – Based on the readings during the first month of class, identify a contemporary problem related to how people think about brains, consciousness, and personhood. This might be a problem you identify from your everyday life, one associated with a specific person you know, one you can identify in popular media, historical literature, or modern science. In 300 words, what is the problem, and why is it a problem? That is, whom does this problem affect? How does the problem relate to the course content?

Identify Resources (5%) – What kinds of research are you going to conduct to explore the history and contemporary ramifications of the problem you have identified? We'll discuss a number of methods in course (ethnography, textual analysis, historiography), and you'll need to choose one or two to frame your research. In each case, you'll need to identify the resources that will lead to the successful completion of your research project: are there experts you can talk to? books and academic journals you can consult? archives that you can access? In 300 words, you'll need to discuss your proposed methods in completing your research project's data collection, what secondary and primary sources you can consult, and how these sources will inform your research.

Thesis & Argumentation (5%) – In a paragraph (~200 words), make an argument about your research findings. Are you making an historical argument? an ethnographic one? a cross-cultural one? How does the argument relate to the resources you will be drawing upon to make your argument? In another paragraph, discuss the contrary positions to your argument; that is, argue against yourself. What are the weaknesses in your argument? How might other people read the same evidence differently than you propose to? How have other people argued about similar evidence in the past?

First Five Pages (10%) – Write the first five pages of your research paper (~1500 words). In these pages, you should have a compelling introduction (provide an empirical example that helps pose your problem), as well as the statement of your thesis, and a discussion of your research methods. In addition, you should provide a map of your paper – what are the sections and how are they organized? how does each section relate to your argument? Discuss each section in a paragraph or more. What do you imagine your conclusion discussing?

Rough Draft (10%) – Building on your First Five Pages, you will complete a full rough draft of your paper. Each section needs to be fully written, including the presentation of evidence, your discussion and interpretation of the evidence, and an articulation of how the evidence relates to your overall argument and fits into the structure of the paper. You will also complete a draft of your conclusion, in which you will discuss the implications for the problem that you have identified, and, possibly, solutions for how the problem might be addressed. Each section should be at least five pages long, and the conclusion should be at least two pages long. The Rough Draft will be read and commented upon by the instructor.

Final Rough Draft (5%) – The Final Rough Draft must incorporate the comments of the instructor from your Rough Draft, and represent the final version of your paper. The paper should be complete for all intents and purposes, including completed introductions, sections, and conclusion, and full citations and bibliography.

Peer Reviews (2 @ 5% each) – First read this, on the ‘elements of productive peer review’: <http://bit.ly/2htngrT>. You will be randomly assigned two papers to read, and you are required to turn in a peer review for two of your peers. Each peer review should be 500-700 words long, and discuss the author’s argument, use of evidence, persuasiveness, and coherence. Additionally, you may choose to identify issues in your peers’ writing style. Late peer reviews will not be accepted for credit, but must be turned in.

Final Paper & Response to Peer Reviews (10%) – In no less than 300 words, you should prepare a document that outlines how you have chosen to address (or not address) each of the concerns raised by the peer reviewers. You may either complete this in one or two documents. Your Final Paper should incorporate these changes as well, and you should address how you have included the critiques into your paper.

Policies:

No exceptions to policies will be made for students who add the class late.

There is no extra credit available.

No late work will be accepted for credit.

Students taking the course Pass/Fail must earn a C to receive a Pass.

Workload: This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to the scheduled lectures, students are expected to do at least 9.5 hours of course-related work each week during the semester. This includes things like: completing assigned readings, participating in lab sessions, studying for tests and examinations, preparing written assignments, completing internship or clinical placement requirements, and other tasks that must be completed to earn credit in the course.¹ I assume that undergraduate students can read 1 page of academic writing in 3 minutes; 100 pages of reading should require about 300 minutes, or 5 hours. You may need to read some of the texts more than once to fully understand them. In most cases, you should expect to be reading about 75-100 pages per week (approximately 4 hours) in addition to other course requirements.

Disability-related Equal Access Accommodations: Students wishing to request academic accommodations to insure their equitable access and participation in this course should notify the instructor as soon as they are aware of their need for such arrangements. Authorizations from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are generally required. We encourage you to contact SSD at 607-777-2686 to schedule an appointment with the Director or Learning Disabilities Specialist. The SSD website (www.binghamton.edu/ssd) includes information regarding their Disability Documentation Guidelines. The office is located in UU-119.

Attendance: Students who miss class during the first week will be administratively dropped from the course and under no circumstances will be given a permission code to add the course.

Academic Integrity – Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated. Evidence of academic misconduct – which is not limited to plagiarism and cheating – will result in an immediate failing grade in the course and actions as dictated by university policy regarding academic integrity for undergraduate students.²

¹ <http://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/documents/syllabus-credit-hours-0314.pdf>

² http://www.binghamton.edu:8080/exist9/rest/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2_academic_policies_and_procedures_all_students.xq?_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xsl/MasterCompose.xsl

Contacting Me: I only check my email between 9-11 AM on weekday mornings and during my office hours. I will always respond to emails within 24 hours, except for emails received on Fridays, which will be responded to on the following Monday. If you plan to stop by my office hours, please contact me ahead of time, either by email (mwolfmey@binghamton.edu) or in person before or after class.

Correspondence with instructors: Only correspondence that follows professional conventions of correspondence will be replied to by me. For example, your email should begin 'Dear Professor Wolf-Meyer,...' and end with your signature. Beginning an email without a salutation, a 'Hey' or other informal forms of address will ensure your email will not be responded to. If the answer to your question is clearly stated in the syllabus or assignment guidelines, instructors may not respond to your email.

Style Matters: All written work should be double-spaced, 12 point font, in Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins on all sides, and page numbers. Citation should look like this: (Author Year: Page), e.g. (Wolf-Meyer 2009: 408). Failure to meet these standards will result in a reduced grade.

Letters of Recommendation: Before you ask me for a letter of recommendation, read this: <http://bit.ly/2nwbeNG>. My policy is to not provide students with a letter of recommendation before they complete a course with me. I also generally do not provide letters for students who have taken only one course from me (for reasons detailed in that link).

Week 1: What's the Future?

Introduction to the Course; Syllabus overview

Butler, Octavia

2000 [1993] Parable of the Sower. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

Heinlein, Robert

1940 [1970] The Roads Must Roll *IN* The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One, 1929-1964. Robert Silverberg, ed. New York: Tom Doherty Associates.

Part One: The Future as Crisis

Week 2: The Problem of Population

Butler, Tom

2015 Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot. New York: Goff Books.

Malthus, T.R.

2015 [1798] 'An Essay on the Principle of Population.' An Essay on the Principle of Population and Other Writings. Robert J. Mayhew, ed. New York: Penguin.

Week 3: The Problem of Industrialization

Rabinbach, Anson.

1990 The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity.
Berkeley: University of California. **Selections**

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang

2014 [1977] The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century. Berkeley: University of California. **Selections**

Thompson, Edward Palmer.

1993 Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture. New York: New Press. **Selections**

Week 4: The Problem of Deindustrialization

Identify a Problem Due

Brynjolfsson, Erik and Andrew McAfee.

2016 The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies. New York: WW Norton. **Selections**

Vonnegut, Kurt

1999[1952] Player Piano. New York, Dial Press.

Watch: Paul Schrader's Blue Collar (1978)

Week 5: The Solution of Communitarianism

Identify Resources Due

Le Guin, Ursula

1994 [1974] The Dispossessed. New York: Harper Voyager.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels

1998 [1888] The Communist Manifesto. New York: Verso.

Part Two: The Future as Opportunity

Week 6: The Problem of the Colony

Kolodny, Annette.

1984 The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. **Selections**

Smith, Henry Nash.

1978 Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. **Selections**

Turner, Frederick Jackson.

1998 Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays. New Haven: Yale University Press. **Selections**

Week 7: The Problem of Domination

Thesis & Outline Due

Arnold, David.

1993 Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India. Berkeley: University of California Press. **Selections**

Crapanzano, Vincent

1986 Waiting: The Whites of South Africa. New York: Vintage. **Selections**

DeConnick, Kelly Sue and Valentine De Landro

2015 Bitch Planet, Vol.1: Extraordinary Machine. La Jolla, CA: Image.

Week 8: The Problem of Revolution

Lenin, Vladimir Ilich.

1992 The State and Revolution. Translated by Robert Service. New York: Penguin. **Selections**

X, Malcolm

1992 By Any Means Necessary. New York: Pathfinder Press. **Selections**

Week 9: The Solution of Afrofuturism

First Five Pages Due

Okorafor, Nnedi

2010 Who Fears Death. New York: Penguin.

Womack, Ytasha. Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013. **Selections**

Watch: Robert Mugge's *Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise* (1980)

Week 10: The Solution of Indigenous Futures

Dillon, Grace

2012 Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.

Jones, Stephen Graham

2008 Ledfeather. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Watch: Skawennati's TimeTraveller series: <http://www.timetravellertm.com/episodes/>

Part 3: Inhuman Futures

Week 11: The Problem of Dehumanization

Bear, Greg

1985 Blood Music. New York: Arbor House.

Kirkman, Robert, Charlie Adlard and Cliff Rathburn

2011 The Walking Dead, vol. 12: Life Among Them. La Jolla, CA: Image Comics.

Rucka, Greg and Michael Lark

2014 Lazarus, Book 1. La Jolla, CA: Image Comics.

Week 12: The Problem of the Anthropocene

Rough Draft Due

Kolbert, Elizabeth

2014 The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History. New York: Henry Holt.

Week 13: The Solution of Extinction

Weisman, Alan

2007 The World Without Us. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Week 14: The Solution of Kinship

Final Rough Draft Due

Haraway, Donna

2016 Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. **Selections**

Week 15:

Peer Reviews Due in Class

Student Presentations

Week 16:

Student Presentations

Final Exam Week

Final paper due on final exam date, to be determined in October