

# Introduction to Science Fiction

## COURSE DETAILS

**Course Designator and Number: LNDN 3254W**

**Number of Credits: 3**

**Language of Instruction: English**

**Contact Hours: 45**

**Instructor: Tyler Bickford**

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

What lies beyond “The Final Frontier”? Why does it matter if androids dream of electric sheep? What will our future look like and who will be there to enjoy it? What role do technology, ethics, and/or politics play in imagining our future? Why has science fiction become such a central metaphor for our daily, lived experiences? Introduction to Science Fiction discusses them all. This course is designed to expose students to a broad spectrum of science fiction. We will examine representative texts from each of the modern, roughly defined as the 20th and 21st Centuries, “periods” of the genre. The class will discuss the ongoing debate surrounding the “work” performed by the genre, as well as its themes, and stylistic movements.

## Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be knowledgeable about the history of science fiction as a literary and commercial genre. Students will develop and practice close reading skills and scholarly methods of textual analysis and critique. And they will cultivate habits of mind that take entertainment and commercial genres seriously in everyday life and in scholarly inquiry. Students will have substantial opportunities to practice written and oral communication.

- a. Acquire knowledge of the breadth and depth of the science fiction genre
- b. Become familiar with important concepts and debates in the history of science fiction
- c. Develop close reading skills and learn methods of textual analysis and critique

- d. Improve written and oral communication skills
- e. Gain experience working with others

Students should demonstrate: responsibility and accountability, independence and interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

## Methodology

Students will be expected to complete substantial reading, writing, and preparation outside of class. Class meetings will include lecture, discussion, small group work, and student presentations.

## Required Readings/Materials

- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*.
- Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*.
- Dick, Phillip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- Leinster, Murray, "Proxima Centauri."
- Hasse, Henry, "He Who Shrank."
- Asimov, Isaac, "Robbie."
- Bradbury, Ray. "There Will Come Soft Rains."
- Zelazny, Roger, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes."
- Delaney, Samuel R., "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones."
- Butler, Octavia, "Bloodchild."
- Jemisin, N. K. "The Effluent Engine."
- Walton, Jo, *Among Others*.
- Okorafor, Nnedi, "*Binti*."
- Lord, Karen, *Redemption in Indigo*.
- Lord, Karen, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*.
- Gaiman, Neil, *Miracleman: The Golden Age*.
- Moore, Alan, *Watchmen*.

## Grading

### Grading Rubric

Letter grade	Score or percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

A-	90-92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87-89	
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D+	67-69	
D	60-66	
F	0-59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

### Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of grade
Small group exploration (course objectives a-e)	10%
Short argument paper (course objectives a-d)	10%

Medium genre paper (course objectives a-d)	20%
Long analysis paper (course objectives a-d)	25%
In-class presentation (course objectives a-d)	5%
Class participation (course objectives a-e)	30%
Overall grade	100%

## Assessment Details

### Assessment/Grading Policy

1. A small group exploration of a type of narrative common to the science fiction genre.
2. A short (3-5 page) comparison of a text and narrative type.
3. A medium length (4-6 page) "argument" analysis of one class reading.
4. A long (6-8 page) paper that analyzes an ideological theme, or argument, across multiple texts read in the course. May include outside readings.

# COURSE CONTENT

## Unit 1

### Course Introduction

- **Read before class**
  - Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- **In class**
  - Writing: What is YOUR definition of the genre?
  - Discuss the problem of definition in science fiction. Which "official" definition is closest to your own? If you had to organize the list of definitions (including your own), how would you do it?
  - Discuss Shelley. Would you categorize this as science fiction? In what ways does it fit or not fit your definition?

- **Homework**
  - Students must finish in-class writing and post their definitions to LMS. They should read the collection of definitions of science fiction.

## Unit 2

### Early Science Fiction, Emergence through 1917

- **Read**
  - Wells, *The Time Machine*.
- **In class**
  - Discuss Wells. Is his science fiction doing similar work as that of Shelley? How does it match your definition of science fiction?
  - Review the small group assignment and create groups for assignment 1.
- **Homework**
  - Small group assignment for next week. Students must read assignment sheet for paper 1 and come to class with any questions.

## Unit 3

### Science Fiction Between the Wars, 1918–1939

- **DUE: Small Group Assignment**
- **Read**
  - Leinster, “Proxima Centauri” and Hasse, “He Who Shrank.”
- **In class**
  - Discuss Leinster and Hasse. How is science fiction evolving?
  - Small groups share their assignments with the class.
  - Introduce first writing assignment. Discuss ways to meet the terms of the assignment. Begin brainstorming proposals.
- **Homework**
  - Students must work on Paper 1 proposal for next week.

## Unit 4

### Science Fiction Between the Wars, 1918–1939

- **DUE: Draft of Paper 1 proposal**
- **Read**
  - Gilman, *Herland*.
- **In class**
  - Discuss Gilman. How does a focus on gender complicate the early history of science fiction?
- **Homework**
  - Students must finish their proposal assignment and bring one copy to class.

## Unit 5

### The Golden Age & the Atomic Age 1940–1963

- **DUE: Paper 1 proposals**
- **Read**
  - Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rains” and Asimov, “Robbie.”
- **In class**
  - Workshop paper 1 proposals
  - Discuss Bradbury and Asimov. How do their visions complicate our understanding of science fiction written during this period?
- **Homework**
  - Paper 1 due next week

## Unit 6

### New Wave & Reaction, 1963–1983

- **Due: Paper 1**
- **Read**
  - Delany, “Time Considered as a Helix of Semi Precious Stones” and Zelazny, “A Rose for Ecclesiastes.”
- **In class**
  - Introduce second writing assignment. Discuss ways to meet the terms of the assignment. Begin brainstorming proposals.
  - Discuss Delany and Zelazny. How are their stories different than the ones we have read in class thus far?
- **Homework**
  - Students must work on Paper 2 proposals for next week.

## Unit 7

**Mid-term break: No class**

## Unit 8

### New Wave & Reaction, 1963, 1983

- **DUE: Paper 2 proposals**
- **Read**
  - Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- **In class**
  - Discuss Dick. What similarities do you see between this novel and the short stories of Delany and Zelazny?

- Workshop proposals
- **Homework**
  - Students must begin drafting Paper 2. Outlines due in class next week.

## Unit 9

### Graphic Novels

- **DUE: Paper 2 Outlines**
- **Read**
  - Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (excerpts) and Gaiman, “Miracleman: The Golden Age”
- **In class**
  - Discuss Moore and Gaiman: How does the graphic novel/comic format change the genre of science fiction? Are superhero stories inherently science fiction?
- **Homework**
  - Students must read the assignment for paper 3 and come to class with any questions.

## Unit 10

### Science Fiction Reflects on Itself

- **DUE: Paper 2**
- **Read**
  - Walton, *Among Others*.
- **In class**
  - Introduce third writing assignment. Discuss ways to meet the terms of the assignment. Begin brainstorming your proposals.
  - Discuss Walton: This story is very much about science fiction and related genres; is it a work of science fiction itself?
- **Homework**
  - Paper 3 proposal due next week

## Unit 11

### Contemporary Trends

- **DUE: Paper 3 proposal**
- **Read**
  - Butler, “Bloodchild,” Okorafor, “Binti,” and Jemisin, “The Effluent Engine.”
- **In class**
  - Workshop paper 3 proposals
  - Discuss Butler, Okorafor, and Jemisin. How do these writers push the limits of science fiction? How do they build on the science fiction tradition?
- **Homework**
  - Students must start drafting Paper 3. Outlines due in class next week

## Unit 12

### Contemporary Trends (continued)

- **DUE: Paper 3 outlines**
- **Read**
  - Lord, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*.
- **In class**
  - Discuss Lord
  - Prepare for presentations next week
- **Homework**
  - Students must finish Paper 3 and prepare for in-class presentations

## Unit 13

### Field Study TBC

- SF in British Context: Visit to be determined according to group and instructor interests
- Possible field studies might include (for example):
  - The specialist sci-fi bookshop and merchandise/collectibles store, Forbidden Planet (179 Shaftesbury Avenue): [forbiddenplanet.com](http://forbiddenplanet.com)
  - The Centre for Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London: [ccl.bbk.ac.uk](http://ccl.bbk.ac.uk)
  - H. G. Wells/War of the Worlds walking tours in Bromley (SE London) and Woking (suburbs): [wellsinwoking.org.uk/walk-the-war-of-the-worlds-paths.html](http://wellsinwoking.org.uk/walk-the-war-of-the-worlds-paths.html)

## Unit 14

### Contemporary British Science Fiction TV

- **DUE: Paper 3**
- **Watch**
  - *Doctor Who*, series 3, episode 10, "Blink" and *Black Mirror*, season 1, episode 2, "Fifteen Million Merits."
- **In class**
  - Final paper presentation



# POLICIES

## Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

## University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

### Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.