**SPECULATIVE FICTION, Fall 2025**

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00-11:00am & 1:00-2:00pm; Tuesday 11:00am-1:00pm; 2 hours Thursday, by appointment.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

* *The Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury
* *The Left Hard of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin
* *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood
* *The Story of Your Life and Others,* Ted Chiang
* Additional readings distributed digitally.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Encompassing genres ranging from science fiction to fantasy and horror, “speculative fiction” is a term meant to be inclusive of all forms of literature which play with and/or exceed our expectations of “realistic” narratives. This does not mean this kind of literature is a retreat or escape from our reality; indeed, speculative fiction is one of our most powerful tools for considering profound contemporary and historical questions, from the political to the philosophical to the deeply personal, and how all three intersect. This course focuses on some of the most challenging and provocative explorations undertaken by fiction - examinations of human civilization and technological development, memory and identity, history and its legacies of exploitation - which topics are especially suitable for treatment in speculative experiments. We’ll read these texts in loosely defined generic and topical units and spend each class in search of the energetic discussions which spring up around the very best speculative fiction.

A **major focus of this course is critical reading**: the ability not only to **understand what the text says**, but also to **interpret what the text does on a deeper level**. To do so we will examine **how each text was received in its historical moment** as well as determining **what we can take from it today**. Your insights and interpretations will be the building blocks of our class sessions; it will be a dialogue with the past and a meditation on the present. You will be expected to articulate your perspective on the texts and engage with other perspectives in a respectful and productive manner. In addition, we will develop the skills of interpretation, adaptation and analytical writing, preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings. Ideally it will also contribute to a deepening of your capacity for intellectual reflection, making strange the world so as to enrich our understanding of it.

COURSE GOALS

* Develop critical thinking and critical reading skills
* Engage with critical literary articles and apply their insights
* Recognize the ways in which literature can be used to explore our world and ourselves
* Analyze literary texts both orally and in writing
* Develop strategies for effective academic writing

**READINGS BY WEEK**

Weeks 8/11 - 8/25 – Genre Modality Unit: *The Martian Chronicles*

Week 9/3 - 9/22 – First Contact Unit: *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Week 9/29 – Selected Short Work

Weeks 10/8 - 10/27 – Social ‘Topia Unit: *The Handmaid’s Tale*

Week 11/4 – Cyberpunk Unit

Week 11/10 – Fantasy Unit

Week 11/17 – Horror Unit

Weeks 12/1 - 12/8 – Project Work

\*\*\*\***Project due 12/14 before 11:59 pm\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING**

Presence and Participation - 40%

Unit Reflections - 25%

Interpretive Project - 35%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D\* 69 and below

**Presence and Preparation (35%):** Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and your book, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. This category is mostly based on your presence in class, and your preparation for that class: whether you have your text, have read your text, and have completed the pre-class prep task. Behaviors that can damage your participation grade include lateness, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

**Unit Reflections (30%):** Each unit you’ll be called upon to write a longer-form reflection on the content and concepts at work in a given class unit. This is where you’ll synthesize your thoughts in relation to how a given genre modality within speculative fiction works both within the , and more broadly. These are not formal essays, but they will need to include reference to topics discussed in class as well as citation (including direct quotations) from the texts. They will be graded largely upon completeness; they are the seeds of a possible future project-concept, rather than rigorously graded essays. Use these as spaces for exploration and working through implications; just make sure you do them!

**Interpretive Project (35%):** A week at the end of the quarter will be set aside for you to work on your final projects. These can be anything from an analytical paper to a video essay to a creative work in whatever medium, as long as it engages with one or more of the texts we read during the quarter; the key is that they be *interpretive*, either enriching our understanding or transforming the text. They will be graded on a simple scale of A (100), B (85), C (70) with an adapted rubric, focusing on effort and sophistication evident in the product.

Where applicable, projects will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website.

**Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your project are your own.**

**COURSE POLICIES**

ATTENDANCE: Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

LATE WORK: Late assignments will not be accepted without an in-person discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. Reading assignments and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we do not discuss a plan for, you risk receiving no credit for it. Please make every effort to make sure assignments are timely, and that you meet the deadlines as outlined in the syllabus. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

TECHNOLOGY: Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class unless otherwise instructed. Laptops use is for designated in-class writing and research assignments only. Unauthorized use will earn a warning, followed by an improper use of computer designation in the attendance record.

# ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else’s paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else’s words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

**APPROPRIATE USE OF LLM/‘AI’ TECHNOLOGY**

**Official Humanities Division Statement:**

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.

**Instructor Statement:**

Large language models (more colloquially known as AI chatbots) are powerful tools which are rapidly altering the landscape of humanities scholarship. As with many such devices, there are benefits and drawbacks. Take for example motorized transport: automobiles made remarkable things possible for transit and logistics. It has also fostered a sedentary lifestyle, with all the concomitant health problems (i.e. driving instead of walking causes your legs to wither, your heart to weaken, your lifespan to contract).

Similarly, while large language models can accelerate a number of tasks, **it risks replacing invaluable skills and leading to the atrophy of the very capacities this class is meant to exercise and refine**. Letting an LLM write for you will not only produce mediocre, intellectually vacuous work, it will also cause your own abilities to shrivel precisely when they should be developing. It is also a priori plagiaristic: **all the words a LLM uses are drawn from uncredited, uncompensated sources**. It is not a voice from nowhere; it is stolen language. I want you to use your own words and ideas, and credit the words and ideas of others when you use them.

For the purposes of this class, **LLM/AI chatbots can be legitimately used for research purposes**: you can ask them questions (though always double check, since they frequently ‘hallucinate’) to increase your awareness of a topic, with the understanding that proper sourcing and citation must follow. **They may not be used to produce prose that represents itself as your own**. If you have doubts about the appropriate use of this technology, simply get in touch with me and we can clarify.

**BALL STATE UNIVERSITY BENEFICENCE PLEDGE**

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Ball State is committed to ensuring that all members of the campus community are welcome through our practice of valuing the varied experiences and worldviews of the people whom we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as evident in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State’s commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, inclusiveness at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive.

**IA WIRELESS DEVICE POLICY**

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication devices for non-instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all portable wireless devices that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic accommodations, individualized education programs, or with instructor approval permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health, safety, and/or well-being.

The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to; a verbal warning, temporary seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated consequences for repeated improper use.

**INDIANA ACADEMY ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Attendance is mandatory. Students may receive excused absences at the professional discretion of the school nurse, the associate director of mental health services, the associate director of college counseling and student engagement, the director of academic affairs, and the executive director of the Indiana Academy. Unexcused absences occur when students miss class without prior approval from the aforementioned designated school officials. Continued absences (both excused and unexcused) from Academy classes increase the likelihood of unsuccessful completion.

Alongside steady attendance, students are expected to maintain consistent healthy habits of decorum, respect, and kindness towards their classmates, instructors, and teaching assistants. When students fail to meet these classroom behavioral standards and academic habits, it is the expectation that faculty engage appropriately to bring quick and immediate resolution. When students consistently fail to meet these behavioral standards and academic habits in the classroom, an administrative consequence ladder will be adopted, and recorded, in an attempt to administratively address, engage, and rectify ongoing challenges.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The [Office of Disability Services](https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/disability-services) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at **765-285-5293** or **dsd@bsu.edu****.**

**LITERATURE NOTE**

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life’s mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of his/her times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences.

**If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor.** Alternative texts are available.