ANTH119: Anthropology and Aliens

CRN: 17842
ONLINE COURSE
Fall 2021

Instructor Emily Masucci – she/her – emasucci@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Graduate Employees

Polet Campos-Melchor – she/her
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Office Hours:
Wednesdays 9-11am
or by appointment

Molly McBride – she/her
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Office Hours:
Tues/Thurs 10-11am
(sign up for 15 min slots via Canvas)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class explores how anthropology and science fiction, a genre of speculative fiction, have been linked historically as each explores ideas about culture and society. Thematic questions addressed in the class include: What is an “alien”? What is “the human”? How does anthropology permit us to interpret science fiction? The class investigates this convergence of interest through the analysis of science fiction in print and film. In addition, using science fiction, we will explore how fundamental concepts in anthropology—linguistic and cultural relativism; race, gender, class, and nationality; the ethics of first contact; gender, marriage, and kinship; law, morality, and religion; politics, violence, and war; medicine, healing, and consciousness; and the environment—influence the ways in which we think about the possibility of extraterrestrial life and about cultures on our own planet.

The course joins perspectives from anthropology, history, and speculative fiction to understand core insights of cultural anthropology, discuss themes of exploration, progress, cultural encounters, social organization and stratification, and human enhancement in science fiction and ethnographic narratives. It applies an anthropological analysis to science fiction texts and conceptualizes the relationship between social science theory and the processes by which we come to understand the world around us.

COURSE FORMAT

This online course is asynchronous, meaning that there are no coordinated course audio/video meetings. Instead, course materials, explanations of activities and expectations, and deadlines are
available on Canvas and in this syllabus. Success in the course requires internal motivation, personal organization, and individual responsibility to complete course activities on time and in a high-quality manner. In this course you are expected to take an active role in your learning. Look ahead in the course calendar to anticipate course activities and due dates. Credit will not be given for work completed after it is due, except for rare exceptions. An example would be a documented medical issue. Be in touch well before a due date with any situation regarding the timely completion of course activities—not in the hours just prior, much less after the fact. Instructor Masucci and your GEs Polet and Molly are available to answer questions and will be involved with your learning by evaluating your work as the course progresses. But to maximize your learning experience, and to earn a passing grade, you are expected to actively engage the course material and complete activities before deadlines.

COURSE TEXTS

Please purchase the following books:
- LeGuin, Ursula K. The Word for World is Forest. (Any edition)

Other readings will be available on Canvas as PDFs.

You will be expected to view selected feature films. You will be expected to access some content online through commercial streaming services (e.g. Amazon Prime Video, Google Play, Hulu, iTunes, Netflix, Vudu, YouTube, or others). If cost or other barriers inhibit your access to movie content, please contact me well in advance of the deadline.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify and apply basic anthropological concepts
  - Cultural and linguistic relativism
  - Identity construction, cultural similarity, and difference
- Deconstruct literary and cinematic techniques
  - Narrative structure, casting/characterization, point of view, setting
  - Written and filmic representations that draw from shared cultural understandings
- Interpret science fiction texts and embedded messages about social life
  - Social values and anxieties
  - Social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and social class
- Produce academic writing that explains and offers analysis of written and film texts
  - Clear, well-organized composition
  - Insightful writing informed by course materials
**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

Over the course of this term you will complete FIVE types of assignments. Each assignment is designed to assess your knowledge and understanding of the course content and to improve your writing and thinking. This course is asynchronous, so it will be your responsibility to complete each assignment on time. **NO INCOMPLETES.** Your grade is comprised of the following assignments:

1. **Personal Introduction (5 points)**

   Personal introductions will be due at the end of Week 1 on the discussion board titled “Introductions.” In this introduction, you will be asked to write a short paragraph or record a video of yourself sharing 1) a few details about yourself (Ex. What is your major? Why are you taking this course?) AND 2) your favorite sci-fi universe (could be from a movie, novel, comic, tv show, etc.) and why. A more detailed prompt to help you compose your introduction can be found on Canvas under Assignments. Please complete the Personal Introduction by Friday, October 1 at 11:59pm.

2. **Discussion Board Participation (40 points)**

   You get the most out of learning when you make connections between new ideas, past learning, and interactions with classmates to help prompt connections. Your Canvas discussion board participation will be broken into two parts: a) Discussion Posts and b) Response Posts. *Posts will be due on Friday of Weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8.*

   a) **Discussion Posts (8 points x 4 posts = 32 points)**: You will complete FOUR Discussion Posts over the course of the term. Discussion posts are an opportunity for you to think through the ideas in the readings and other course materials, demonstrate your understanding of concepts, make a meaningful contribution to class learning. Posts should be clear and well organized. Each post will be assessed according to 1) clarity, following instructions, and careful organization; 2) providing an insight or 3 interesting angle on an idea; and 3) applying arguments, concepts, or analysis from course readings (when applicable). For more detailed assignment guidelines see Canvas.

   b) **Response Posts (2 points x 4 posts = 8 points)**: In addition to your discussion post, you will respond to ONE of your classmates’ posts. Each response post will be evaluated for 1) clarity and careful organization and 2) adding to a classmate’s post in order to reveal an additional insight or complementary idea. Argument, debate, and confrontation are not the goal. The constraints of this written format make it less than ideal for an extensive back-and-forth. Instead, this is a space to reflect on how a classmate’s post made you think differently or discover a new way of looking at something. For more detailed assignment guidelines see Canvas.

3. **Midterm Exam (25 points)**

   The midterm exam will consist of 20 multiple choice and true/false questions and two short essays. You will have **90 minutes to complete the midterm.** The exam will be made available on Friday (10/29) and you will have 48 hours to complete it. This midterm is designed as a tool to evaluate
your knowledge of the content. The midterm exam may cover any and all concepts or information from readings, lectures, films, and other course content from Weeks 1-5. You are permitted to use course materials—including lectures, readings, and notes—while taking the midterm. You are expected to abide by University Academic Honesty and Integrity Standards and U.S. Copyright Law. Under no circumstances may you copy or distribute any part of the midterm. This exam is to be your own work. Please do not discuss midterm questions with classmates. Violation of these conditions will be considered academic misconduct.

4. **Film Reflection (10 points)**

This film reflection is another opportunity to demonstrate your grasp of the central arguments of the course. For this assignment, you must select ONE film and complete an analytical reflection that ties the film to at least TWO course readings. Your reflection essay should be between 600 and 750 words, clear, and well organized. You will be instructed on how to cite the authors within the text of the Short Essay prompts/questions that you will be given. Please structure your reflection with an introductory paragraph, a body of four or five paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Your citations should be in the body of your essay. Listing references cited at the end is not necessary. Reflections will be evaluated for: 1) following directions; 2) carefully and logically organizing your ideas; 3) writing incisively by crafting information-dense sentences and paragraphs and making precise word choices; 4) and providing engaged and insightful analysis wherein you thoughtfully consider and analyze course concepts and themes. More detailed prompts to help you compose your essays can be found on Canvas under Assignments.

5. **Final Exam (20 points)**

The final exam is designed to evaluate your understanding of the course content. The final exam may cover any and all concepts or information from readings, lectures, films, and other course content from Weeks 6-10. This exam is NOT cumulative. Your final will consist of 40 multiple choice and T/F questions and you will have 60 minutes to complete it. The exam will be made available on Wednesday, December 8 and you will have 48 hours to complete it. You are permitted to use course materials—including lectures, readings, and notes—while taking the final. You are expected to abide by University Academic Honesty and Integrity Standards and U.S. Copyright Law. Under no circumstances may you copy or distribute any part of the exam. This exam is to be your own work. Please do not discuss final exam questions with classmates. Violation of these conditions will be considered academic misconduct.

**GRADING**

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<th>Component</th>
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<td>Personal Introduction</td>
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<td>Discussion Board Participation</td>
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<td>Film Reflection</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Grades will be assigned based on the following criteria:

- (A) Outstanding performance relative to course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at the highest level;
- (B) Performance that is significantly above course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at a high level;
- (C) Performance that meets course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content;
- (D) Performance that is at a minimum level to pass, but does not fully meet requirements in all aspects; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content;
- (F) Performance that does not meet requirements, for whatever reason; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.

**If you take this course pass/fail, you must have at least 70 points to pass.**

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week One**

Watch:
- Lecture 1
- Video – The Evolution of Science Fiction (6 min)

Read:
- Course syllabus
- Welcome announcement
- Oman-Reagan – How to Host an Extraterrestrial

**DUE: Personal Introduction**
**Week Two:** *Introducing Anthropology and Science Fiction*

Watch:
- Lecture 2

Read:
- Slusser and Rabkin – *Aliens*, Introduction
- Stover – *Anthropology and Science Fiction*
- Roberts – *Defining Science Fiction*

**DUE:** Discussion Board #1

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**Week Three:** *Linguistic Anthropology and Science Fiction*

Watch:
- Lecture 3
- Film – *Soylent Green (1975)*

Read:
- Boas – *The Aims of Anthropological Research*
- Sapir – *The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society*
- Hoijer – *The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis*
- Vance – *The Moon Moth*

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**Week Four:** *Race in Science Fiction, Pt I*

Watch:
- Lecture 4
- Film – *Outland (1981)*

Read:
- Roberts – *Science Fiction and Race*
- Nama – *Humans Unite!*
- Thompson – *New Myths for Modern Times*

**DUE:** Discussion Board #2

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**Week Five:** *Race in Science Fiction, Pt II*

Watch:
- Lecture 5
- Film – *Enemy Mine (1985)*

Read:
– Nama – Structured Absence and Token Presence
– Delany – Racism and Science Fiction

**DUE:** Midterm Exam

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**Week Six:** The Indigenous Alien and Colonialism, Pt I

**Watch:**
– Lecture 6
– Video – “Framed: The Politics of Stereotypes in News” (2 min)
– Film – District 9 (2009)

**Read:**
– Attebery – Aboriginality in Science Fiction
– Rieder – Introduction: The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction
– LeGuin – The Word for World is Forest, Ch 1-3

**DUE:** Discussion Board #3

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**Week Seven:** The Indigenous Alien and Colonialism, Pt II

**Watch:**
– Lecture 7
– Video – Protect Oak Flat: Saving Apache Sacred Grounds (5 min)
– Film – Avatar (2009)

**Read:**
– Adamson – Indigenous Literatures, Multinaturalism, and Avatar
– Rieder – Race and Revenge Fantasies in Avatar, District 9, and Inglorious Basterds
– LeGuin – The Word for World is Forest, Ch 4-8

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**Week Eight:** Gender, Sexuality, and Science Fiction

**Watch:**
– Lecture 8
– Video – “Why should you read sci-fi superstar Octavia Butler?” (4 min)
– Film – Alien (1979)

**Read:**
– Roberts – Science Fiction and Gender
– Kavanagh – Feminism, Humanism, and Science in Alien
– Newton – Feminism and Anxiety in Alien
– Butler – Dawn (Parts 1 & 2)
DUE: Discussion Board #4

**Week Nine:** Technology, Human, and Other

Watch:
- Lecture 9
- Film – *Blade Runner (1982)*

Read:
- Bruno – Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*
- Ryan & Kellner – Technophobia
- Butler – *Dawn* (Parts 3 & 4)

**Week Ten:** Anthropology, Immigration, and Alienation

Watch:
- Lecture 10
- Film – *Sleep Dealer (2008)*

Read:
- Beehler – Border Patrols
- Cravey et al.– Imagining the Future from the Margins: cyborg labor in Alex Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer*

DUE: Film Reflection

**COURSE DUE DATES**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Personal Introduction</td>
<td>10/1</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Discussion Board #1</td>
<td>10/8</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Discussion Board #2</td>
<td>10/22</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>10/29-31</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Discussion Board #3</td>
<td>11/5</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Discussion Board #4</td>
<td>11/19</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Film Reflection</td>
<td>12/3</td>
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Final Exam – 12/8-10