“Everything is becoming science fiction. From the margins of an almost invisible literature has sprung the intact reality of the 20th century.” J. G. Ballard

“The boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.” Donna Haraway

The lines from Ballard and Haraway quoted above state something that has become a conversational commonplace in the early twenty-first century: we are living in the science fiction future. This class will examine the variety of futures American science fiction has imagined in the twentieth century, exploring the way familiar tropes developed in often-overlooked works of literature and visual culture before emerging into the mainstream through Hollywood film, network TV, popular music, and digital media. We will trace key histories of American literature, culture, media, and politics through our readings, while also contemplating the range of social realities that science or speculative fiction (we will discuss the contested meanings of both those terms throughout the class) seek to represent and critique. Questions of race and gender will be central to our inquiry.

The goal of the course is both for you to familiarize yourself with the period and the genre, with a view to future teaching, and to develop your own research interests, as far as possible, in relation to the works we read. Class presentations and projects will offer ample opportunity to connect class issues to your own research interests; studies in technoculture, feminism, and postcolonialism as well as in many branches of twentieth-century literature will provide useful intersections. As part of your coursework, you will write blog entries, either on your own blog or on one that you create for the course; while you are welcome to do this pseudonymously, you should at least consider making the blog a part of your professional online profile.

Reading is heavy, and includes secondary and theoretical texts as well as fiction. While I expect you to be familiar with everything assigned, graduate study is also about developing the skills to manage large amounts of reading efficiently. One way to do this is to meet with fellow students outside the class in order to discuss any questions that might be slowing you down.

**Required Texts (additional texts available online or distributed in class)**
George Schuyler, *Black No More* (1931)
Available free online, though you will want a critical edition if you plan to write about them:
Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1880);
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915) and *With Her in Ourland* (1916)

**Recommended critical monographs (required sections will be scanned, but you may wish to acquire the whole books)**
John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan UP, 2008

**Course Requirements**
In addition to keeping up with the reading and participating in discussion, this class has the following requirements:

**Assignments**

**Presentations**
You will give two presentations in the course of the semester.
1. Pedagogical class presentation. Once in the semester, each student will take responsibility for running the class for approximately half of the session (we will do this in groups if there are more students than weeks available). You will give a short presentation focusing on areas of particular interest to you, then lead class discussion. I encourage you to bring additional material such as images or video clips and to explore pedagogical strategies you might use if you were teaching this material at the undergraduate level. I will meet with you in advance of your presentation week to help you plan.
2. Conference-style presentation of research. The last week of class and finals week will be given over to presenting and discussing your seminar paper research. You will give a short presentation, for which I encourage you to prepare visual aids, and the class will discuss your ideas and offer feedback for your final paper. Where relevant, we will also discuss possible venues where you might present and later publish this research.

**Blog Responses**
You are required to post biweekly blog responses, which you may make at your own blog or post on our class site at AmericanFuturesIUP.wordpress.com. On the first day of class, I will demonstrate some options for free blog hosting for any students interested in creating an academic online presence; whether you make your blog pseudonymous is up to you, but I do require the postings to be public. Your blogging may be informal and personal, but it should address questions raised by the texts we are reading and it should be written in a style that readers outside our class community will be able to understand.
Papers
You will write a seminar paper (15-20 pages) due on Monday May 13, which will be preceded by a proposal discussing your areas of interest, due in week 5; a 5-page short paper on the same theme (which may or may not be incorporated into your final paper) due in week 9; and an annotated bibliography due in week 12.

Attendance, Participation, and Grades
This is a graduate class; I expect you to want to be here, to be prepared to spend time working through texts that can be difficult, and to be continually thinking about what might be possible in your own intellectual projects. The grade is not the point at graduate level, and if you show that you are deeply engaged and working hard, you will do well. If you are missing class, failing to do the reading, and not participating online, you will not do well. Please let me know if you are having problems that are affecting your attendance and participation.

In-class media
You are more than welcome to bring your laptop to class, but please use it to participate: to access readings and the class blog, tweet or blog your notes, or find information online that will add to the discussion. Maintain the same respect in online participation as you would in the classroom, and check in with your fellow participants before you post their name in public. Be responsible about your own attention, and if you find that using your computer in class makes you tune out, close it or take steps such as deactivating your wireless connection.

Electronic communication
If you have a question, look at the course website and syllabus before you email me. I will not read unsolicited drafts in email, though I will be happy to discuss your ideas and your writing in my office hours. You can expect a response to your queries within 24 hours; 48 if you email at the weekend. I will expect the same response times from you if I email you with a question. You may also DM or @ me on Twitter, @alothian, which may garner a speedier (if shorter) response.

Discussion, reading, and generosity
Some of the texts we will read in this class will challenge you, for various reasons; that is the nature of scholarly inquiry. Some texts may offend you. Some should offend you. But our aim as scholars should be to work in a spirit of openness, seeking to understand how each project is shaped by its origins, location, and investments and to discover what we can learn from it. For the duration of the class, your goal in encountering texts and screenings should be to read both critically and generously. You should try to approach your classmates’ written and spoken comments in the same spirit, while paying attention to the flows of power in the classroom. This does not mean accepting offensive or hurtful language, or hesitating to call out problems when you see them; it does mean working from an assumption of collaboration rather than confrontation and appreciating that we are all in a state of constant change and that what we say does not define who we are. If you feel that conversation has become uncomfortable for you or you are concerned that a problematic dynamic is developing in the classroom or online, please speak to me privately as soon as possible and I will do my best to make a change.

Accessibility
I will do my best to work with any student who requires accommodations and to minimize barriers posed by course structures and materials. Any student requesting academic accommodations for a
disability is required to register with Disability Services (216 Pratt Hall). See http://www.iup.edu/disabilitysupport/default.aspx for more information.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: Key Terms and Introductions. January 31.**
Samuel R. Delany, “About 5,750 Words”; “The Necessity of Tomorrow(s)”
Ursula K. Le Guin, “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?”

**Unit 1: Foundations. Speculative Politics in the 20th Century**

**Week 2: Political Utopias and Techno-topias. February 7.**

**Week 3: Feminism, Reproduction, and Eugenics. February 14.**

**Week 4: Speculative Racial Critique. February 21.**
Optional: Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” (*Dark Matter*)

**Unit 2. Genre Interventions: Thinking with science fiction**

**Week 5: Genre Foundations: Pulp Science Fiction. February 28.**
Research proposal due
John W Campbell, “Who Goes There?” (1938); Lester del Rey, “Helen O’Loy” (1938); Tom Godwin, “The Cold Equations” (1954); CL Moore, “No Woman Born” (1944); Selections from Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*; John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction.*

**Week 6: Feminism Meets Science Fiction: Battle of the Sexes. March 7.**

**Week 7: Speculative Gender and Sexual Politics. March 14.**
Week 8: spring break. Use this time to read ahead; the Delany needs to be taken slowly.

5-page paper due
Samuel R. Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984); Jeff Tucker, “The Necessity of Models, of Alternatives”; Alexis Lothian, “It is not that I have no future: Samuel R. Delany’s Speculative Sex”
Optional: Robert Reid-Pharr, “Dinge”

Unit 3. Technocultures: science fiction realities

Week 10: Speculative Media and Technocultures. April 4.
Screening: selected episodes of *Star Trek*

Week 11. NO CLASS. Alexis will be at the Eaton/Science Fiction Research Association Conference in Riverside, CA. Follow the Twitter hashtags for the conference and see how scholars are exploring the course themes!

Week 12: Cyborg Bodies. April 18.

Week 13: Cyberspace: Digital Media as Science Fiction. April 25.
Annotated bibliography due
Screening: *Ghost in the Shell*

Optional: *Social Text Periscope: Speculative Life*

Week 15 and Finals Week: Research Presentations