

Fall 2020
SOC 407 TOPICS IN POPULAR CULTURE:
SOCIOLOGY OF SCIENCE FICTION
Instructor: Dr. Maura Kelly maura@pdx.edu
Teaching assistant: Natalie Cholula ncholula@pdx.edu
Saturday October 10, 9:00am-1:00pm via Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This one credit course examines how science fiction texts (e.g. films, television, short stories) can be used by sociologists to understand the societies that produce them. We will focus on how identities and systems of oppression (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality) are portrayed in science fiction texts, examining what this means for our present and future.

SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS PARTICIPATION

Synchronous: For students who choose to meet synchronously (in real time) on Saturday October 10 9-1, use this [Zoom link](#) (password: scifi). Students will complete the “in class” work in small groups during this class meeting.

Asynchronous: Students who choose to participate asynchronously will watch the video of the class meeting and complete the “in class” work on their own by October 17 (video of class meeting with assignment instructions will be posted to D2L after the synchronous class meeting).

Office hours: The instructor will be answering student emails within the hour during “virtual office hours” on Wednesdays 12-2. Alternately, students can make an appointment to meet via Zoom on Wednesdays from 12-2. [Make your appointment here](#). At the time of the appointment, use this [Zoom link](#).

COURSE MATERIAL

Students will be required to rent one film, *Black Panther* (available for \$4). All other course materials are available through the PSU library or are free online.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Reading quiz (10 points)
- Why study science fiction assignment (20 points)
- World building in science fiction assignment (20 points)
- Arguments and evidence assignment (20 points)
- Final paper proposal (5 points)
- Final paper (25 points)

Note: Student will receive a numeric grade out of the 100 possible points (shown above). For students choosing the P/NP grading option, 70 points earns a grade of Pass.

Reading quiz (10 points)

All students must complete the quiz by Friday October 9 at midnight.

You will have 20 minutes to complete the 10 question multiple choice quiz (one attempt). This quiz is open-notes. You will have enough time to look up or double check SOME of the answers, but not enough time to look up EVERY answer. Make sure to read/watch all the course material before attempting the quiz! Access materials via links and/or instructions in the syllabus. Note: All required course materials are free, except for the *Black Panther* film.

Review all of the following materials to prepare for the quiz:

- Jackson, Terence. 2020. "The Sociology of Science Fiction" *Amazing Stories* [LINK](#)
- Kelly, James Patrick. 2018. "Grace's Family" *Tor.com* [LINK](#)
- Watch *Black Panther* (2018), available for rent on [Amazon](#) and [YouTube](#). Note: watch the film first then read Saunders.
- Saunders, Robert A. 2019. "(Profitable) imaginaries of Black Power: The popular and political geographies of *Black Panther*." *Political Geography* 69: 139-149. Note: See glossary for key concepts from the article (and beyond) below [LINK](#)

Saunders Glossary

- *Afrofuturism*: A genre of speculative fiction that examines Black past, present, and futures simultaneously (disrupting the Western conceptualization of time as linear)
- *Political geographies, geopolitics*: a social context that has important political and geographic components
- *Neoliberalism*: an ideology and normative framework that favors free-market capitalism; a "neoliberal agenda" involves protecting capitalism and/or corporate profits, often at the expense of people who are marginalized
- *Imperialism*: the practice of an empire acquiring political control over another country and exploiting it economically (e.g. the US annexation of Hawaii, 1898)
- *Colonialism*: the practice of acquiring political control over another country, exploiting it economically, and occupying it with settlers; colonialism has (1) a material (explicit) component and (2) an ideological (implicit) component (e.g. the British colonization of India, 1612–1947).
- *Settler colonialism*: a form of colonialism in which colonizers seek to replace the original population of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers (e.g. Dutch and British colonization of South Africa, 1652-1961)
- *Decolonization*: ending colonial control; can be (1) freeing a country from colonial rule (e.g. the US, 1776); (2) challenging ideologies and practices created by colonization and imperialism (e.g. Native people learning the Native languages that their communities were not allowed to use under settler colonialism, present day)
- *Coloniality*: Newer term used similarly to colonialism, but emphasizes the ongoing nature of colonialism in new forms (e.g. new forms of anti-Black racism, as described in Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, present day)
- *Decoloniality*: Newer term used similarly to decolonization, but emphasizes how colonialism is resisted in the present through delinking from the colonial matrix of power

(e.g. Zapatistas, Mexican revolutionaries opposing neoliberalism as described in *On Coloniality* by Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, present day).

Why study science fiction (20 points)

- Synchronous: Discuss in breakout rooms during class meeting
- Asynchronous: On your own write 400-500 words, submit via D2L by Saturday October 17 at midnight (see D2L for video of class meeting and assignment instructions)

World building in science fiction assignment (20 points)

- Synchronous: Discuss in breakout rooms during class meeting
- Asynchronous: On your own write 400-500 words, submit via D2L by Saturday October 17 at midnight (see D2L for video of class meeting and assignment instructions)

Arguments and evidence assignment (20 points)

- Synchronous: Discuss in breakout rooms during class meeting
- Asynchronous: On your own write 400-500 words, submit via D2L by Saturday October 17 at midnight (see D2L for video of class meeting and assignment instructions)

Paper proposal (5 points)

Due Saturday October 17 at midnight via D2L.

Choose a focal text (e.g. television episode, film, short story). You may choose one from the list below or suggest an alternative. Your focal text must be recent (published/released in 2010 or later), *science fiction* (no magic!), and have *main themes related to social inequality* (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nationality).

Suggested focal texts

- “Nosedive” *Dark Mirror* directed by Joe Wright
- “Striking Vipers” *Dark Mirror* directed by Owen Harris.
- *Snowpiercer* (2013) directed by Bong Joon Ho
- *Ex Machina* (2014) written and directed by Alex Garland
- “The Frequency of Compassion” by Merc Fenn Wolfmoor *Uncanny Magazine*
- “Ten Excerpts from an Annotated Bibliography on the Cannibal Women of Ratnabar Island” by Nibedita Sen *Nightmare Magazine* (note: if the experimental form of this text doesn’t make sense to you, choose a different text!)

For additional focal text ideas, see also *Dimension 404* (Hulu), *Philip K. Dick’s Electric Dreams* (Amazon), *Amazing Stories* (Apple tv), *The Twilight Zone* (CBS), *Clarkesworld* (text), *Clarkesworld* (podcast), *Tor.com* (text), *Escape Pod* (text and audio), *Lightspeed* (text),

Lightspeed (podcast), *Strange Horizons* (text and audio), *Uncanny Magazine* (text), anything by Octavia Butler (text),

After watching/reading/listening to your focal text, write a proposal that includes: 1) the focal text title, author/director, and year published/released; and 2) the main argument. This can be accomplished in 1-2 sentences (no minimum or maximum word count). You may elaborate to make sure you are on the right track. Note: if you want to change your film or topic/argument between submitting the proposal and writing the paper, that will probably be fine, but check with me first.

Final paper (25 points)

Due Saturday November 7 at midnight via D2L.

1. Watch/read your focal text at least one more time, taking notes on evidence from the film to support your main argument. Notes might focus on the world building questions for the course (e.g. what systems of inequality are examined?) and elements of text analysis (e.g. dialog, plot, characters, visual images).
2. Write the paper, 1200-1400 words total.
 - The paper should start with an introduction that describes the main argument of the paper and a brief description of the focal text, including introducing key characters
 - The bulk of the paper should be your original analysis of the text.
 - Draw on lots of quotes and examples from the focal text to support your points.
 - Make sure to compare and contrast throughout the paper. Note any counter-examples that show variation from the overall trend. Going one-by-one through characters or scenes will not be a successful strategy for this paper!
 - Keep the focus of the paper on the content of the focal text. You do not have the data to make arguments about how this may effect audiences. Your personal opinions are also not relevant here.
 - Write a concluding paragraph briefly restating the main argument of the paper. Then reflect on what you have observed and written means for society. Here you can feel free to go beyond the data.
 - Include a references section in which you include the citations for focal text (required) and any additional readings cited (not recommended)
3. Review what you have written against the final paper rubric (out of 25 points)

	A	B	C	D
Main argument	There is an interesting argument that is clearly stated and supported by examples and quotes	An interesting argument is present, but is underdeveloped, or not completely supported	Argument is present, but is not interesting or not successfully developed or supported	There is no argument

Examples and quotes	Examples and quotes are incorporated throughout the essay	Examples and quotes are occasionally incorporated into the essay	At least one example or quote is included	Examples and quotes are absent or inappropriately used
Comparisons	Compares and contrasts throughout the essay	Occasionally compares and contrasts	At least one example of comparing or contrasting	Does not compare and contrast
Writing style	Writing is clear, grammatically correct, and organized	Writing is reasonably clear and has an overall structure	Style or organization sometimes inhibits understanding of the essay	Style or organization inhibits a basic understanding of the essay

- Subtract 1 point for every 200 words under 1200 or over 1400 words (e.g. 1000-1199 words = minus 1 point)
- Subtract 1 point if any citations are missing from the references section (or if references section is missing).

POLICIES

Required course materials: All course materials are available for free online or are held by the PSU library (with the exception of *Black Panther*, which you will need to rent). If you cannot access the materials held by the library through the links provided, navigate to the materials from the library homepage or by using the title to search for the material online.

Note on course content: Course material and discussions for this course may cover topics related to race, class, gender, and sexuality that some students may be uncomfortable reading and discussing. If you have concerns about the course content generally or any specific topics we may cover, please see the instructor at the start of the term.

D2L: We will use D2L extensively in this course. It is your responsibility to be able to access D2L.

Zoom: We will use Zoom for our course meeting. Students are required to participate via audio and/or chat to receive credit for small group in-class assignments. Students are encouraged but not required to have video on. The Zoom session will be recorded. The link for the course meetings is: <https://pdx.zoom.us/j/95254728932> (password: scifi).

Email: The instructor and TA will regularly communicate with the class via PSU email so be sure that you are receiving our emails. It is your responsibility to check your email daily during the school week and respond in a timely manner. In emails to the instructor and TA, please put the title of the course in the subject line and sign your emails using your first and last name. Use the email addresses on the first page of the syllabus. The instructor and TAs will generally respond to email within 24 hours. Emails sent after 5:00pm on Friday will generally be answered by 5:00pm on Monday.

Academic honesty: You are expected to demonstrate complete academic honesty. All work for the course must be completed independently (with the exception of assigned group work). Please refer to the Student Conduct Code for more detailed information on PSU policies. Cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and will be reported.

Plagiarism: If you use a direct quote (i.e. someone else's words), you must include it in quotation marks and cite the source, including author(s) name(s), the date of publication, and the page number. If you summarize or paraphrase an idea from another person, you must cite the source, including author(s) name(s) and the date of publication. Failure to cite your sources, whether intentional or not, is plagiarism. Instances of plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and will be reported.

Respectful behavior: You must demonstrate the highest level of respect for your peers, TA, and the instructor. Many points of view will be welcomed and respected; however, statements or behaviors that are disrespectful towards individuals or groups are not acceptable. During our class meetings, please give the class your full attention.

Cancelled classes: The instructor will email students if class is cancelled.

Late assignments: No late work will be accepted for this course.

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities who may require accommodations are encouraged to contact the PSU Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) and the instructor at the beginning of the term to arrange accommodations. The DRC is located in 435 Smith and can be contacted at 725-4150 or by email at drc@pdx.edu. Visit their website at <http://www.pdx.edu/drc>.

Title IX reporting: As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. As a member of the university community, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals at <http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help> or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your D2L.

LAND AND LABOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Portland State is located on the traditional homelands of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tumwater, Watlala bands of the Chinook, the Tualatin Kalapuya, and many other indigenous nations of the Columbia River. We acknowledge the ancestors of this place and understand that we are here because of the sacrifices forced upon them. We recognize and honor the past, present, and future of these communities.

We also pause to recognize and acknowledge the labor upon which our country, state, and institution are built. We remember that our country is built on the labor of enslaved people who were abducted and brought to the U.S. and we recognize the continued contribution of their descendants. We also acknowledge labor of all immigrants, voluntary and involuntary, that contributed to the building of the country and continues within our labor force. We acknowledge that our institution relies on hourly, student, contingent, and unpaid labor and we recognize those contributions. Finally, we acknowledge the value of unpaid care-giving labor and the challenges that result from conflicts between care-giving, paid labor, school, and other commitments.