

Syllabus for *Science Fiction Science* (NDL-138)

Gustavus Adolphus College, January 2012

Course description:

This course combines a survey of the science used in science fiction with an exercise in the creative writing of a science fiction short story.

Class times and locations:

Lecture/Discussion: MTuWThF 12:30 – 2:20 PM, 305 Nobel Hall
Media presentation: MTuWTh 3:00 – 4:50 PM, 305 Nobel Hall
Due to varying lengths of media presentations, start and/or finish times of this session may vary on a daily basis.

Professor: Dr. Thomas Gardner
Office: 303A Nobel Hall
Telephone: 507-933-6327
E-Mail: tgardner@gustavus.edu
Teaching Assistant: Kirsten Woodard
Office Hours: By appointment only.

Materials:

Readings: *Worlds of Wonder: How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* by David Gerrold
This book is your primary guidance for understanding how to write with quality your science fiction project story.

Science without the Boring Bits by Alok Jha
This provides brief supplemental readings on many of the topics we cover in this course.

Science Fiction stories for discussion:

Week 1: *The Andromeda Strain* by Michael Crichton
A team of scientists race to stop a deadly alien virus.

Week 2: *The Man Who Folded Himself* by David Gerrold
A man is given a gift by an uncle: A belt that serves as a time machine.

Week 3-4: *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman
Speculative non-fiction on what would happen on the Earth if humans suddenly disappeared or died off.

Wikibooks will be made available as PDF books on Moodle.

Additional short readings will be provided on Moodle on an ad hoc basis.

Grading:

Writing Project:	50 %
Short assignments:	20 %
Book and Film discussions:	30 %

I reserve the right to revise the grading scale as seems appropriate for the class.

The Writing Project:

The writing project for this course is to create a short story within the science fiction genre. The definition for a short story varies, but for purposes of standardization I am adopting the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America definition as being a literary work of 7,500 words. Stories longer than this are acceptable, as are those shorter given sufficient artistic justification. Works should be submitted as a Word document in double-spaced 12-point Times Roman with 1-inch margins. A 7,500-word story equates to roughly 30 pages in this format, and approximately 40 minutes if read orally (as in a radio play), which is the length of a “one-hour” television program in four acts.

The story should be a work of science fiction (and not one of fantasy). It can be hard or soft sci-fi, but must have a basis in believable scientific facts and do its best to observe scientific laws.

There are four hard deadlines for this project, as listed below; however, it is expected that you should have material ready well in advance of these deadlines in order to provide you with time to complete your story.

- On Friday of the first week, you should have a core concept for your story (with 1-2 back-up plans in reserve if needed).
- On Friday of the second week, you should be prepared to submit an outline for your story.
- On Friday of the third week, we will have an in-class peer review of your rough draft.
- On the last Thursday of the course, we will have readings/presentations of your final draft stories.

You are at liberty to create other story media, such as plays, radio plays, or cinematic presentations if these suit your interests and the nature of the story; however, these are entirely your option, and will not contribute favorably or unfavorably to your project grade. Whatever your medium, you are still required to submit a written story, and to make an oral presentation on the final Presentation Day.

Classroom Expectations:

Attendance: You are expected to attend class and the media presentations on a regular basis. You should consider the class your opportunity to interact with a professional scientist and writer in your endeavor to optimize your understanding of the subject.

Preparation: It is strongly suggested that you review relevant supplemental material to topics under discussion as needed. Materials required for deadlines are discussed as a class, they are not accepted late.

Participation: You are expected to participate fully in the classroom experience, and you will be evaluated on your participation. Distractions such as personal conversations or engaging in non-class activities are not advisable. The use of phones is prohibited, and phones should be set with ringers off or turned completely off during class. The use of laptops is prohibited unless required for the class session. Recording of the lecture in either audio or video format is prohibited; however, I may record certain sessions for private use in evaluating performance and improving future offerings of the course.

Homework: Short answer and essay homework shall be assigned periodically.

Resources: In addition to the above-listed resources available to you for your success in this course, you are also encouraged to seek assistance from:

- the professor during office hours,
- the teaching assistant for the course,
- the Office of Student Advising, and
- the campus Writing Center (a valuable resource to you as you develop and revise your story project).

Disclaimers:

Science fiction is a genre that deals with speculative and often controversial and mature subject matter. As such, media presented in this course may contain violence, profanity, brief nudity, and controversial ideas. Furthermore, opinions stated by the professor in class are sometimes offered for the purpose of stimulating discussion, and should not necessarily be assumed to be his actual beliefs, nor do they necessarily represent the position of Gustavus Adolphus College. Comments made in class are to be held confidential, and are not to be published publicly and out of context (e.g., on the Facebook page “Overheard at Gustavus”).

Disabilities:

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 work together to ensure ‘reasonable accommodation’ and non-discrimination for students with disabilities in higher education. Any student who has a physical, psychiatric/emotional, medical, learning, or attention-related disability that may have an effect on the student’s ability to complete assigned course work should contact the Disability Services Coordinator in the Advising Center, who will review the concerns and decide with the student what accommodations are necessary.

ESL/ELL:

The Writing Center has on staff a part-time tutor with professional training in ESL/ELL instruction. Students can schedule work with this tutor by contacting the Writing Center. Students may bring their instructors documentation concerning their ELL status. Where it is appropriate, faculty may choose to allow such students more time to complete either in- or out-of-class writing assignments. For further information, contact the Academic Advising Office.

Tentative Course Schedule:

The first session of each day (M – F) is for discussion of the previous day’s media, and presentation of new lecture and discussion material according to the tentative schedule below. The second session (M – Th) is for media presentations, to be announced daily.

Tu	3 Jan	Intro to the course / Intro to Science Fiction & Futurism
W	4 Jan	Writing Science Fiction
Th	5 Jan	World building
F	6 Jan	Alien life and intelligence
M	9 Jan	Discussion of <i>The Andromeda Strain</i> / Linguistics
Tu	10 Jan	Spaceflight
W	11 Jan	Cultural interactions
Th	12 Jan	Materials, Energy & Weapons
F	13 Jan	Review of story outlines / Time Travel
M	16 Jan	Discussion of <i>The Man Who Folded Himself</i> / Computers, Robots and Androids
Tu	17 Jan	Improving Life
W	18 Jan	Sex, Reproduction, Mutations & Cloning
Th	19 Jan	Mind Powers & Mind Control
F	20 Jan	Peer review of rough drafts
M	23 Jan	Plagues, Extinctions & Overpopulations
Tu	24 Jan	Climate Change
W	25 Jan	Discussion of <i>The World Without Us</i> / Domsday Scenarios
Th	26 Jan	Presentation of Final Projects (all Projects due at the start of class)
F	27 Jan	Presentation of Final Projects

Student Responsibility:

I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.

– Albert Einstein

At Gustavus, we want students to be active in their own education. One of the differences between your college experience and your previous educational experiences is the responsibility born by each party. Your teachers here are less likely to simply disseminate facts that you must regurgitate on an exam later; rather, they are guides who will provide opportunities for you to expand your understanding of the world in which we live. Gustavus faculty members provide the opportunities for you to learn, but you must take advantage of those opportunities. I will do my best to help you understand the material, but you are ultimately responsible for that understanding.

Academic honesty:

As a community of scholars, the faculty and students of Gustavus Adolphus College have formulated an academic honesty policy and honor code system, which is printed in the Academic Bulletin and in the Gustavus Guide.

– Academic Information and Policies, General Catalog
https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/?pr=acainfo

The Honor Code at Gustavus is an expression of the importance with which we view academic integrity. Each faculty member is required to implement the Honor Code, and to define what is (or is not) authorized aid. It is the students' responsibility to ask clarifying questions when there is confusion regarding academic honesty. In this class, it is assumed that students are honest about their work. It is also understood that sometimes the boundaries can seem "fuzzy." If you find yourself in a situation where you are unclear about attributions or the use of sources, please ask. In the professional realm, issues of plagiarism and/or fabrication have ruined careers, and academic dishonesty can ruin a career before it begins.

The first instance of cheating on an assignment or exam will result in a score of zero for that assignment or exam, and the Dean's Office will be informed of the incident. The second instance will result in a failing grade for the course.

To impress upon you the importance of these two items (student responsibility and academic honesty), I require that you sign the following contractual pledge and return this signed page to me on the first day of class. A copy of this page for your records is available upon request.

On my honor, I pledge that I will not give, receive, or tolerate others' use of unauthorized aid in completing my work.

Signature

date

Printed name

student ID