

COM 692: Writing Speculative Fiction for Social Justice

Arizona State University

Spring 2023

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Office Hours: Th 10am-12pm and by appointment

Office Location: Stauffer A428

Course Time: T 6-8:45pm; F 9-4pm

Course Location: Stauffer A137

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The limits of our imagination constrain what futures we think are possible – and thus what we work to create. This course asks how we can use speculative fiction (the umbrella term for fantasy, science fiction, horror, magical realism, etc.) to broaden the types of justice we can envision in order to enable resistance to current oppressive structures and build better ways of relating to each other and the world. We'll look at short fiction examples from (post)colonial, BIPOC, queer, and trans speculative fiction writers to see how they connect individual characters to structural domination, provide political import without seeming didactic, and stretch the boundaries of our imaginations. We'll also take the work we're doing as researchers and experiment with using speculative fiction as a means of engaging in research and/or as a means of encapsulating political messages that reach a broad audience. This course will be an introduction to critique workshops and publishing as well. We'll design a critique model based on anti-racist practices in workshop and engage with it to strengthen each other's work. Finally, we'll learn about the speculative fiction publishing industry, how to submit to magazines, and which magazines might be a good fit for our work.

The Student Learning Objectives are as follows. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze speculative fiction stories in terms of craft and politics
- Understand how to find and submit to speculative fiction magazines, and the publishing process
- Reflect over their role and relations as critic, and offer critiques of each other's work that speak to each piece's particular goals and audience
- Create speculative fiction stories that are well-crafted and hold political import

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- Online readings on the syllabus or announced in class, which will be posted to Canvas.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

All written assignments must be typed in [Shunn Modern Manuscript](#) format, preferably in Times New Roman 12 pt. font.

If your story is not being critiqued in class, I am happy to provide extensions if you notify me before the assignment is due. If it is being critiqued in class, please try to ensure you can turn your story in on time in order to give your classmates enough time to read it and prepare critiques.

Short Stories (3 x 150 pts)

450 pts.

You will be asked to write three speculative fiction (science fiction, fantasy, horror, magical realism, etc.) stories for this course. There is no minimum wordcount for your stories, but they should not

be longer than 5000 words. Each story must have: (1) a beginning, middle, and end; (2) some speculative element; (3) an orientation toward social justice. Stories will also be evaluated in relation to plot, characterization, worldbuilding, and consistency in voice and style. As this course is an introduction to writing speculative fiction, I do not expect your stories to be perfect, but I do expect that you have expended effort to engage what we have learned and discussed in class in the way that you approach your writing.

Two of your three stories will be critiqued in a workshop format.

Critiques (3 x 150 pts)

450 pts.

You will offer three rounds of critique for your classmates. Each critique session will usually address 5 or fewer stories, so that we have adequate time to allocate to each one. We will create a means of engaging in critique in the first class based on anti-racist workshop models. Once we have decided as a class how to engage in critique, I expect each of you to follow the guidelines we set out, and offer prepared, thought-out, respectful, and encouraging critiques to each other. Critiques should be offered in the spirit of helping someone to make their work stronger and speak to their intended audience and experience in the world. Critiques will be offered verbally during class sessions (unless the class decides to provide written feedback to each other as well).

Participation

100 pts.

This class is heavily based in discussion, and as such attendance is required. After one unexcused absence, each following absence will result in a 20-point deduction from your participation grade. In order to earn participation points, you are expected not only to be present, but to contribute to class discussion through analysis of the readings, thoughtful questions, and respectful responses to other students.

Classroom discussions offer a unique opportunity and environment to “unpack” complex questions about speculative fiction and social justice. Participation will be based on: understanding and application of the readings; how attentive/engaged you are; how well you listen to other participants; how respectful you are of others’ views when disagreeing; and how well the points you make, questions you ask, and ideas you introduce contribute to the overall discussion. To earn participation points, you must read, attend, and contribute respectfully.

Readings must be completed on the day they are listed on the course schedule. I expect you to come to class having read thoroughly and formed incisive questions and/or applications about the topics being investigated in class that day. Note: Whether or not you “agreed” with the reading does not make for good discussion. I want to hear in-depth analyses of what particular stances can and cannot do; what is brought into focus and what is outside of the purview. That does not mean you have to understand everything you read; we will work through complex concepts and situations in class.

GRADING

Grades are determined based on the number of points earned out of a maximum of 1000 points. There is no extra credit given in this class, and there will be no rounding or curving of grades. Final grades are calculated as follows:

A	93%-100%	930-1000 pts
A-	90%-92.9%	900-929 pts
B+	87%-89.9%	870-899 pts
B	84%-86.9%	840-869 pts
B-	80%-83.9%	800-839 pts
C+	77%-79.9%	770-799 pts
C	74%-76.9%	740-769 pts
C-	70%-73.9%	700-739 pts
D+	67%-69.9%	670-699 pts
D	64%-66.9%	640-669 pts
D-	60%-63.9%	600-639 pts
F	0%-59.9%	0-599 pts

You will earn a grade based on the following guidelines:

- A = Exceeds course requirements. Exceptionally well-prepared and executed completion of assigned work, indicating significant effort, individualized creative style, and demonstrating a thorough grasp of the material.
- B = Meets and sometimes exceeds course requirements. Student demonstrates fundamental mastery of the material. Work is well-prepared and demonstrates considerable effort.
- C = Meets course requirements. Satisfactory completion of assigned work that demonstrates minimum mastery of the material.
- D = Basic course requirements are only partially met. Student does not demonstrate minimum mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates the unsatisfactory completion of assigned work, either through misperceived objectives or the failure to grasp key concepts.
- F = Basic course requirements are not met. Student demonstrates little or no mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates either a failure to complete the assigned work, or failure to grasp key concepts due to lack of reasonable effort.

COURSE POLICIES

Do your best to approach our texts with an open mind toward each author's disposition, message, context, and experience. This means trying to understand how and why they are arguing/writing what they are, which is typically more time-consuming than simply comprehending an author's argument/theme. Give each author a generous reading!

Communication for this course will be maintained exclusively through Canvas and email. Please make sure you are checking it often for updates from me, as well as readings, assignments, and grades.

Discussion of Graded Assignments

It is your right and responsibility to take an active interest in how you are evaluated in this or any class. If you believe you have been graded unfairly, please come visit me in office hours to talk about it. Be prepared to make a well-developed case regarding the evaluation. Your argument must be related to your assignment as presented, and based on how it compares with the criteria for the

assignment (not how hard you tried, how you think it compares with someone else's work, or how it will affect your final grade in the class or GPA). Any grade appeals must occur or be scheduled no sooner than 24 hours after but no later than one week after receiving the evaluation.

Attendance

You are expected to only miss one class a semester. **In order to be excused from a day of class, you must contact me before the class, unless it is a case of emergency.** Excused absences may include illness, emergency, institutionally approved activities (sports/clubs), and religious holy days. You must provide documentation for all absences within a week of their occurrence. You will not be excused for appointments, work, or transportation issues (unless they are emergency related). Coming in significantly late or leaving class early will be equated with an unexcused absence. As noted above, each unexcused absence after the first will result in 20 points being taken off your Participation grade.

Classroom Behavior

I expect us all to treat people and ideas with decency and respect. Give others, particularly those present with us in class, the benefit of the doubt. Privilege inquiry over defensiveness. At the same time as we should be generous with one another, this class seeks to undermine systems of oppression; when such systems are being reinforced through our language or actions, we also must be ready to be accountable to requests for transforming our thoughts and approaches.

In graduate classrooms, one of the most pernicious ways that disruptive behavior happens is through name-dropping. Contrary to what some might think, it is **not** impressive to talk extensively about a theorist or scholar you have read with whom the rest of the class is unfamiliar. Everyone has read things that other people have not. Unless there is a clear tie to someone's specific question or research project, please keep your personal readings to yourself. Useful contributions to discussion will be focused on what *everyone* has read and may competently comment on.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Student Comportment

Familiarize yourself with the [Student Code of Conduct](#) and comport yourself accordingly; this includes, specifically, refraining from threatening behavior per the [Student Services Manual](#). To be certain, ASU is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation. In particular, ASU prohibits discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation based on any protected status: race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and genetic information as outlined in the [Academic Affairs Manual](#). This is a critically-oriented class, and discussion/speech concerning issues of race, class, size, gender, nation, citizenship, religion, age, and so forth are encouraged and will certainly be addressed as communication is a key component to the construction and maintenance of our culture(s). Come to class with an open mind and due expect to be challenged on y/our communicative conventions; I expect to be held equally accountable for my communicative choices.

Title IX

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and

harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs>.

As a mandated reporter, I am obligated to report any information I become aware of regarding alleged acts of sexual discrimination, including sexual violence and dating violence. [ASU Counseling Services](#) is available if you wish to discuss any concerns confidentially and privately.

Academic Integrity

Honesty is expected of all students. The possible sanctions for academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

Accessibility

If you have any need for accommodation, please notify me as you are able so that we might make the appropriate arrangements. Formal accommodations can be made through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). For additional information, visit: www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc.

Intellectual Property

As outlined in the Academic Affairs Manual course content, including lectures, are copyrighted materials. Students may not share outside the class, upload, sell, or distribute course content or notes taken during the conduct of the course. For more information, see <https://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/acd/acd304-06.html>.

Canvas and Technology Support

Students can navigate directly to the course Canvas website via myASU or <http://canvas.asu.edu>. If you need technical assistance, it is available via the Canvas “Help” icon located on the left-hand navigation menu and phone and live chat support are available 24/7 at <http://contact.asu.edu>. ASU Tech Studios provide a variety of walk-in support services on all ASU campuses: <https://uto.asu.edu/services/campus-it-resources/techstudio>. To learn the basics, refer to the Student Guide: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> and the Canvas Glossary: <http://links.asu.edu/student-canvas-glossary>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to change with sufficient advance notice.)

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments & Speakers
INTRODUCING RHETORICAL CRITICISM			
T 1/10	What is speculative fiction and how do we write it?	<p>Stories: <i>Colonial Legacies (African perspectives)</i> “Here Sits His Ignominy” by Tobi Ogundiran (<i>FIYAH</i>) F “O2 Arena” by Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (<i>Galaxy’s Edge</i>) SF</p> <p>Readings: “What is Speculative Fiction?” by Stephanie Brown “On Fiction Genres and the Elements that Power Them Part I” by Suyi Davies Okungbowa “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism” - Kodwo Eshun (pdf) “Too Dystopian for Whom?” by Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki “A Compendium of Workshop Models – Clarion West Writer’s Workshop” (pdf)</p>	
T 1/17 OPTIONAL	Non-Western Story Forms	<p>Stories: <i>Class Nightmares (Latinx perspectives)</i> “A Diet of Worms” by Valerie Valdes (<i>Nightmare</i>) H “Help Me Follow My Sister Into the Land of the Dead” by Carmen Maria Machado (<i>Lightspeed</i>) H</p> <p>Readings: “Why Writing Second Person POV Appeals to Marginalized Writers” by Valerie Valdes “We are the Mountain” by Vida Cruz “Reclaiming a Traditional African Genre” by Yvette Lisa Ndlovu</p>	STORY #1 DUE BY 5PM
T 1/24	How do we critique and revise speculative fiction?	<p>Stories: <i>Reckoning (Indigenous perspectives)</i> “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience” by Rebecca Roanhorse (<i>Apex</i>) SF/H “Marked by Bears” by Jessi Loyer (<i>Apex</i>) F</p> <p>Readings: “The Ghost of Workshops Past” by S. L. Huang “How Iowa Flattened Literature” by Eric Bennett “25 Essential Notes on Craft” by Matthew Salesses</p>	PEER CRITIQUES OF GROUP #1 DUE IN CLASS

<p>T 1/31 OPTIONAL</p>	<p>Understanding the Tone of Magazines</p>	<p>Stories: <i>Lightening the Mood (South Asian perspectives)</i> “Bride, Knife, Flaming Horse” by M. L. Krishnan (<i>Apparition Lit</i>) F “Bhatia, P.I.” by Shiv Ramdas (<i>Lightspeed</i>) F</p> <p>Readings: Pick one issue of a magazine from the list below to read in full. It can be the most recent, or just one that you find appealing. What do you learn from the issue about: The tone of the magazine? What types of authors they publish? The types of stories they gravitate towards? The type of writing style? (Consider voice, character, tone, plot, pacing, etc.)</p> <p>Apex Fantasy Lightspeed Nightmare Strange Horizons Uncanny</p>	<p>STORY #2 DUE BY 5PM</p>
<p>T 2/6</p>	<p>NO CLASS – Dr. Hanchey is a Provost’s Visiting Professor at Georgia College this week</p>		
<p>F 2/17</p>	<p>WSCA Workshop: Imagining Coalitional Possibilities: Using Speculative Fiction to Create Post-Roe Futures</p>	<p>Stories: <i>Reproductive Rights & Bodily Autonomy</i> “0.1” by Gabby Rivera (<i>A People’s Future of the United States</i>) F (pdf) “That Story Isn’t the Story” by John Wiswell (<i>Uncanny</i>) F “Don’t Press Charges and I Won’t Sue” by Charlie Jane Anders (<i>Boston Review</i>) SF “Rabbit Test” by Samantha Mills (<i>Uncanny</i>) SF “Root Rot” by Fargo Tbakhi (<i>Apex</i>) SF “0.1” by Gabby Rivera (pdf) F</p> <p>Optional Readings: Excerpts from <i>Emergent Strategy</i> by adrienne maree brown (pdf) Excerpts from <i>Craft in the Real World</i> by Matthew Salesses (pdf)</p>	<p>PEER CRITIQUES OF DUE AT THE WORKSHOP</p>
<p>T 2/21</p>	<p>Difficulties of Social Commentary and Solarpunk Futures</p>	<p>Stories: <i>The Difficulties of Social Commentary (Trans perspectives)</i> “Helicopter Story” (previously “I Sexually Identity as an Attack Helicopter”) by Isabel Fall (<i>Clarkseworld</i>) SF “I Sexually Identify as the ‘I Sexually Identify as an Attack Helicopter’ Controversy” by June Martin (<i>Blood Knife</i>) F</p> <p>AND <i>Solarpunk Futures</i> “University, Speaking” by Phoebe Wagner</p> <p>Readings: “How Twitter Can Ruin a Life” by Emily St. James “Introduction: The Situation So Far” by Phoebe Wagner and Brontë Christopher Wieland (pdf)</p>	<p>STORY #3 DUE BY 5PM</p>

<p>T 2/28</p>	<p>How do we publish speculative fiction?</p>	<p>Stories: <i>Diaspora (Asian diaspora perspectives)</i> Give Me English by Ai Jiang (<i>F&SF</i>) F (pdf) Homecoming is Just Another Word for the Sublimation of the Self by Isabel J. Kim (<i>Clarkesworld</i>) SF</p> <p>Readings: Pick five magazines from the following list and review their submission guidelines. What are they looking for? What are they not looking for? How much do they pay? What types of terms appear on the guidelines that you don't immediately understand? What sense do the guidelines give of the magazine? How does the rest of the website help you understand the magazine?</p> <p><i>Apparition Lit</i> <i>Apex</i> <i>Analog</i> <i>Asimov's Science Fiction</i> <i>Augur</i> <i>Baffling Magazine</i> <i>Beneath Ceaseless Skies</i> <i>Cast of Wonders</i> <i>Clarkesworld</i> <i>Cosmass Infinities</i> <i>The Dark</i> <i>The Deadlands</i> <i>Escape Pod</i> <i>Fantasy</i> <i>FIYAH</i> <i>Fusion Fragment</i> <i>Haven Spec</i> <i>Heartlines Spec</i> <i>If There's Anyone Left</i> <i>Interzone</i> <i>Interzone Digital</i> <i>Kaleidotrope</i> <i>Lightspeed</i> <i>Little Blue Marble</i> <i>The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction</i> <i>Medusa Tales</i> <i>Nightmare</i> <i>Orion's Belt</i> <i>Podcastle</i> <i>Reckoning</i> <i>Strange Horizons</i> <i>Tales & Feathers</i> <i>Translunar Traveler's Lounge</i> <i>Tree & Stone</i> <i>Uncanny</i> <i>Wyngraf</i> <i>Zooscape</i></p>	<p>PEER CRITIQUES OF GROUP #2 DUE IN CLASS</p>
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