

Politics and Imagination

Professor Megan Gallagher
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M-F, 10-11:45
Lloyd Hall 120
WS 310-051

Course Description

What resources does the imagination offer to the struggles for gender and racial justice? What is the relationship between imagination and political action? Why have artists and philosophers so often dreamt up detailed accounts of other ways to organize society? And how have gender and race been re-conceptualized in these imagined worlds? What is it about a galaxy far, far away or a distant future that makes it possible to interrogate political life - and reimagine gender and race?

The aim of this course is to think through these questions by attending to the relationship between politics and imagination. We will do so by reading and watching a variety of texts that are interested in world building, most of which fall under the heading of science fiction, and that center gender and race. Focusing on recurrent tropes in speculative fiction(s) will allow us to forfeit the demands of the everyday in favor of interrogating new modalities of being and alternative methods of organizing society.

Reading Schedule - daily assignments are due on the day that they are listed. Films/episodes should be watched independently ahead of time. **We will meet in person on the days listed in pink.**

WEEK ONE: IMAGINING OTHERNESS

Tuesday, June 29

READ: Ursula K. Le Guin, "World-Making" (1981)

READ: Le Guin, "It Doesn't Have to Be the Way It Is" (2011)

WRITE: Discussion post #1

*** Wednesday, June 30**

READ: The syllabus

READ: Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" (1948)

*** Thursday, July 1**

READ: James Tiptree, Jr., "The Women Men Don't See" (1973)

WATCH: Robert Wise, dir., *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)

*** Friday, July 2**

READ: Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (1984)

WRITE: Discussion post #2

WATCH: Ridley Scott, dir., *Alien* (1979)

WEEK TWO: FAMILY RECONFIGURATIONS

Monday, July 5

No class

Tuesday, July 6

WATCH: Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

WRITE: Discussion post #3

*** Wednesday, July 7**

READ: Nalo Hopkinson, "Money Tree" (1997)

*** Thursday, July 8**

READ: Nnedi Okorafor, "Mother of Invention" (2018)

Friday, July 9

WRITE: Discussion post #4

WEEK THREE: THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY

*** Monday, July 12**

WATCH: Robert Eggers, *The Witch* (2015)

Tuesday, July 13

READ: Nghi Vo, *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* (2020)

WRITE: Discussion post #5

*** Wednesday, July 14**

READ: Nghi Vo, *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* (2020)

*** Thursday, July 15**

READ: Nghi Vo, *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* (2020)

Friday, July 16

Midterm

WEEK 4: HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN?

*** Monday, July 19**

READ: Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* (1920), Act I

WATCH: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Q Who?," season 2, episode 16 (1989)

Tuesday, July 20

READ: Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, Act II

WRITE: Discussion post #6

*** Wednesday, July 21**

READ: Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, Act III and epilogue

WATCH: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "The Best of Both Worlds: Parts 1 and 2," season 3, episode 26, and season 4, episode 1 (1990)

*** Thursday, July 22**

WATCH: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "I, Borg," season 5, episode 23 (1992)

Friday, July 23

WATCH: Ridley Scott, dir., *Blade Runner* (1982)

WRITE: Discussion post #7

WEEK 5: COMMUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

*** Monday, July 26**

READ: Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973)

Tuesday, July 27

WATCH: Mati Diop, dir. *Atlantics* (2019)

WRITE: Discussion post #8

*** Wednesday, July 28**

READ: N.K. Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" (2018)

Thursday, July 29

No class

Friday, July 30

Final exam due

Required Texts

Nghi Vo, *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* (ISBN 978-1250750303)

Films

Robert Wise, dir., *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) - available to rent on Amazon Prime

Ridley Scott, dir., *Alien* (1979) - available to rent for free on Amazon Prime

Ridley Scott, dir., *Blade Runner* (1982) - available to rent on Amazon Prime

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994) - available on Netflix

Julie Dash, dir., *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) - <https://ua.kanopy.com/video/daughters-dust>

Robert Eggers, dir., *The Witch* (2015) - <https://ua.kanopy.com/video/witch-1>

Mati Diop, dir., *Atlantics* (2019) - available on Netflix

Content Note

Given the nature of the course, some of the materials we read will deal with topics that may have personal resonance, such as misogyny, sexual violence, abuse, and racism. If there are specific materials or topics that you anticipate will be particularly challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have beforehand and, if necessary, find alternative materials.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion (literally or virtually), you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

You will also undoubtedly be exposed to views and beliefs that differ from your own, both in the readings and in discussion. You're neither obliged nor encouraged to agree with, or accept, them; your responsibility is only to engage with them thoughtfully and respectfully.

Assignments

Preparation and participation (30%): This class will be discussion-based and so regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required. Regular attendance will facilitate the development of our class community, which will in turn improve the quality of our discussions. Other forms of engagement, like asking questions, volunteering to read passages aloud, and meeting during my office hours, also count toward this!

Discussion posts (25%): Eight discussion posts of about 300 words are due throughout the semester. Prompts will be distributed in advance, though you are welcome to write about other topics that interest you.

Midterm (15%): A take-home midterm will be distributed on Wednesday, July 14, and will be due 48 hours later.

Final exam (30%): A take-home final exam will be distributed on Wednesday, July 28, and will be due 48 hours later.

Policy on Missed Coursework

Late assignments will lose one-third of a letter grade (i.e., an A- becomes a B+) for every day that they are late, including weekends, except in cases of illness or other documented emergencies.

It is always better to turn things in late than not turn them in at all!

Assignments not submitted will receive an F. All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course. I reserve the right to alter any reading or writing assignments during the semester.

Attendance Policy

This class will be discussion-based and so regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required. Regular attendance will facilitate the development of our class community, which will in turn improve the quality of our discussions. This holds for any Zoom meetings as well as in-person meetings.

You may miss two classes for any reason, no explanation necessary. It is your responsibility to keep track of the number of absences you have remaining.

Recording Policy

Without prior approval from the instructor of this course, students may not record course content and/or post course content publicly, including on social media sites. Students who record and/or post course content without instructor approval may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours by appointment. Please email me several days and times you available. If you are absent, it is a particularly good idea to make sure you're caught up. Please know

that you do not need to be struggling to come to office hours! I am happy to discuss particular readings, written assignments, how our work connects to other classes, or the class in general.

Academic Resources

Please feel free to consult with [the UA Writing Center](#). For questions about formatting, grammar, and other more technical aspects of writings, [the Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) is the best online resource.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

Accessibility

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the [Office of Disability Services](#) (204.348.4285; TTY 205.348.3081). If you have a diagnosis, ODS can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through ODS you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors. Thereafter, you are invited to contact me by e-mail or schedule an appointment to discuss accommodations based on any kind of disability, whether apparent or non-apparent, learning, emotional, physical, or cognitive (if you wish to do so). If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, again, you are welcome (and not required) to contact me to discuss your specific needs.

If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please see the [University's FAQs](#) on the UAct website.

Personal Resources

If you face challenges securing food or housing and believes this may affect your performance in the course, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students - specifically [the Office of Student Care and Wellbeing](#) - for support. Furthermore, if you are comfortable in doing so, feel free to notify me. This will help me to connect you with available resources.

For students dealing with anxiety, depression, distress, or other concerns, the [Counseling Center](#) can offer resources. They can be reached 24 hours a day at 205.348.3863.

[The Women and Gender Resource Center](#) (205.348.5040) provides free, confidential, and voluntary counseling and advocacy services to members of the UA community who are victims/survivors of interpersonal violence. Services are also provided to family and friends

who have been impacted by the abuse, to Shelton State students, and to anyone who is victimized on the UA campus.

Resources outside of UA include the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (1.800.799.7233) and [RAINN's National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline](#) (1.800.656.HOPE); both of these organizations also offer a chat option.

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help sustain a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility and am required to share with the University information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that is related to me. I can, though, help connect you to resources like those above.

Religious Observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).