WRTG 3020: Special Topics
“Dystopias in Science Fiction”

Dystopia—*noun*, New Latin, from *dys-* + *-topia* (as in *utopia*), circa 1950;
1: an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives;
2: anti-*utopia* (*from* Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate On-Line Dictionary)

Spring 2007

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Instructor: Dr. Jim Walker
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Tel: 303.492.2903

Office: Temporary Bldg 1, Rm. 208
Office Hours: M,W,F 10–10:50
(& by appt.)

Course Description:
The aim of the course is to help you improve your skills of critical thinking and clear, controlled expression. Working on these skills successfully will require a commitment from you to engaging in concerted critical inquiry and honest self-reflection, as well as to creating a respectful and supportive group environment. Your engaged participation on a daily basis will be crucial to the success of the course as a whole. We will spend much class time discussing and writing in response to readings, films or other stimuli, examining and practicing rhetorical strategies, and providing reasoned support and evidence for our arguments. In all cases, I encourage you to boldly explore your own interpretations and views on the issues raised and to develop your own analytical and creative responses to the source material. How do dystopic fictions dramatize real-life fears, questions and social concerns? What is the nature of intelligence (artificial or otherwise)? How do current technological developments reflect on what it means to be human? How do we define or “know” reality – and how is technology challenging this? What are the limits of government – and what are our responsibilities? Why is it we so often fear what we create? What is the nature of the world we are creating?

Primary Texts:
Films (available on reserve in the Norlin Media Library):
* Blade Runner, Ridley Scott, 1982. 114 min. **Director’s cut**
* Brazil, Terry Gilliam, 1985. 131 min. **Director’s cut (request “DVD 1” of 3-DVD set)**
* Gattaca, Andrew Niccol, 1997. 112 min.

Selected Articles: (available on e-reserve or as handouts)
Books: George Orwell, *1984*

Suggested Texts:
A Writing Guide (such as Andrea Lunsford, *Easy Writer*)
A college-level dictionary (*The American Heritage Dictionary* is a good one)
Grading: (subject to alteration)
Creative Piece 5%
Response Papers 20% ea = 40%
Journal 10%
Participation 15%
Final Project 30%

Point Scale:
A = 100 – 93  C+ = 79 – 78
A- = 92 – 90  C = 77 – 73
B+ = 89 – 88  C- = 72 – 70
B = 87 – 83  D = 69 – 65
B- = 82 – 80  F = Below 65

NOTE: The university defines grading symbols as follows: A = Superior/Excellent;
B = Good/Better Than Average; C = Competent/Average; D- = Minimum Passing.

Course Requirements:

1) Creative Paper: The first paper of the course will be a 2-3 page creative piece in which you create a utopia. This will provide a chance for you to practice writing while exploring your own thoughts and feelings about the issues that will be raised in the class.

2) 2 Response Papers: These papers will be 4-5 pages in length and will deal with some aspect of the films or literature discussed in class. You may also write on a piece of science fiction not used in the class if you clear it with me first. The first paper will be a filmic analysis, and the second paper will be a persuasive essay in which you take an opinion on a particular issue and back up your opinion with specific points. Each paper will require at least two rewrites which will be incorporated into the final grade. If you do not have a draft ready for a paper workshop, your grade will be lowered.

3) Journals: You will be asked to keep a written journal to record responses to readings, films and class discussions. I will give you a specific topic or question to address in the journal, and entries will be collected on the day they are due. The journal allows you to practice getting your thoughts down onto paper and to come to class having thought through issues thoroughly and ready to discuss them. You will be graded for finishing journal assignments in a complete and timely manner, and on the thought put into each entry. You will not be graded on grammar and style as you will be for formal papers.

4) Participation: Clear thinking is imperative to clear writing. To this end, you are expected to come to class having read and completed all assignments and ready to share your thoughts in a class discussion. Such discussions allow you to clarify your own opinions and arguments when faced with opposition. Of course, you cannot participate if you are not in class. Thus, if you miss more than three classes during the semester, your grade will be lowered by one letter grade for each subsequent absence. Extenuating circumstances will require written documentation.

5) For your final project you will create a dystopia based on what you have learned in the class. You will write a 5-6 page analysis of your future world, utilizing outside sources as necessary. Finally, you will prepare a presentation in which you introduce and explain your dystopia to the class.
Policies:

Classroom Behavior: The classroom should be a free zone for exploration and questioning, discussion and debate, in which all of us can explore our thoughts, arguments, and argumentative strategies in a productive and supportive environment. Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Late work: Assignments are due at the beginning of the specified class period. I reserve the right not to accept late work, or to mark it down considerably. Having said that, I also reserve the right to make exceptions for students who encounter genuine, documented obstacles.

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU

Plagiarism: We will discuss plagiarism’s many forms and how to avoid them. All work submitted for this course must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly identified and documented using MLA citation guidelines, which we will also cover. If at any time you have questions concerning the definition of plagiarism or the proper citation of sources, please come see me. When in doubt, cite your sources!

I take issues of honesty, in all forms, quite seriously. There is no substitute for your own integrity. Students found to have plagiarized or in other ways cheated on any assignment will receive an “F” in the course and be reported to the CU Honor Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303.735.2273). Further sanctions, both academic and non-academic, may ensue. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the CU Honor Code policies at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode and to uphold your own honor in all of your interactions and activities.

Religious holidays: Campus policy requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled classes or assignments. In this class, please notify me at least two weeks in advance if you will need any accommodations due to religious observances. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html
**Disabilities:** If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit a letter to me from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

**Discrimination & Harassment:** The university policies on Discrimination and Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh

**Writing Help:** If you are having difficulty with a writing assignment, or just want some additional feedback or help on an assignment, you should always feel welcome to meet with me during my office hours. You may also wish to discuss your essay with a third party in the Writing Center. **The Writing Center (Norlin E-156)** offers one-on-one tutoring in all aspects of essay writing, from pre-writing to revising and editing. (Please note that the Writing Center will not simply proofread or edit your work.) Students can make appointments to meet with a tutor at an arranged time, or drop by for walk-in appointments. Consult the Writing Center handout or website for hours: [http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html](http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html).

**The Research Center** is also available Monday through Thursday from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in Norlin E156. The Research Center is staffed by a librarian to assist students with library assignments and research needs.

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**A Preparatory Note**

Remember: education is like any other activity; the more you get into it, the more you get out of it. It’s your education. Get into it!