

## HSS404.027 ENG Seminar: Speculative Technologies in Science Fiction

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Siemann  
Office: Central King Building G17B  
Office Hours: M 3-4 & T 10-11 & by appointment  
(In Person or via Webex)

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Phone: 973-596-3271  
Classroom: CKB 220  
Meetings: MW 1-2:20

**Course Description:** Welcome to Speculative Technologies in Science Fiction. In course, we'll be reading and discussing science fiction that deals with speculative technologies: space travel, communication, artificial intelligence, human survival on Mars, and more.

**Prerequisites:** HUM102/ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

**Instructional Objectives:** As a senior capstone class, we will focus both on the substantive material we'll be reading and viewing, and on your communications skills as demonstrated in our various course activities:

- To examine speculative technologies, as presented in science fiction, in connection with the contemporary technologies you have studied, or are otherwise interested in, and to consider the connection between imagination and innovation.
- To discuss your ideas with your classmates and your professor.
- To create a class presentation on the future of a specific technology of your choosing.
- To write a final research paper centered on the speculative technologies as presented in a science fiction text, film/tv show, or videogame

### Assignments and Assessment:

20% - class participation and attendance (including in-class writing and homework Canvas forums)  
15% - class presentation  
35% - pre-writing assignments (topic proposal, research proposal, annotated bibliography, draft)  
30% - final essay

***Please note that while your individual grades will be recorded in the Canvas Gradebook, your grades will be calculated according to the percentages given above.*** (In other words, the Canvas Gradebook is a place where your grades are collected, but does not accurately represent totals.)

Grades will be calculated according to the University's grading scale:

A=100-90	B+ = 89-87	B = 86-80	C+ = 79-77	C = 76-70	D = 69-60	F = 59-0
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***You must turn in all formal writing assignments in order to earn a passing grade for the course.***

**Class Policies:**

*Participation:* You are required to participate in all class activities in a timely manner. There is a point allotment for each exercise.

*Courtesy:* You must be respectful of your classmates and of me. That does not mean you may not disagree with them or with me, but rude or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

*Lateness:* All assignments, including any Canvas discussions, the online class presentation, and the final paper, must be submitted on or before the specified deadline. **Points will be deducted for late assignments. I will be unable to grant extensions on your final research paper.**

**Attendance:**

1. Attendance is critical to your success in this class. Participation in in-class activities, discussions, and workshops will contribute to your knowledge, ability, and performance. At a minimum, this means showing up on time, being prepared, and contributing to class discussions. Your level of engagement with the material will subsequently impact how much you get from the class.
2. You may miss up to one week of class without penalty. Students who expect to miss class for religious observances must submit to me a written list of dates by the end of the second week of class (per university policy). More than six unexcused absences (three weeks of the course) will ordinarily result in the automatic failure of the course. HOWEVER, in recognition of the unusual times we are going through right now, further absences may be allowed as per University Covid-19 policies. Illness must be reported to the Dean of Students' Office at dos@njit.edu to be excused. You must keep in touch with me and make arrangements to make up the missing work.

**NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:

<https://www.njit.edu/dos/code-student-conduct-article-11-university-policy-academic-integrity>

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing, or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu)

**Artificial Intelligence Policy:** AI (artificial intelligence) usage will be permitted for certain assignments in this course. DO NOT ASSUME AI IS PERMITTED UNLESS THE ASSIGNMENT PROMPT SPECIFICALLY INDICATES THAT IT IS THE CASE. I designed this course to specifically appeal to the interests of NJIT students, and I want to hear your opinions of the things we will be reading and viewing, **not** what Chat-GPT thinks. However, since it is a class dealing with speculative technologies, there will be *certain assignments* where you'll have an opportunity to use AI. If you do choose to use it for those assignments, the AI must be cited as it shown in the [NJIT Library AI citation page](#) for AI. Use of AI outside of those parameters will be considered academic dishonesty.

**Assignment Submission:** All assignments must be submitted to the appropriate Canvas forums. *I will not accept emailed work.* (Exception: if Canvas is down and you are concerned about lateness, you can email but must then submit to Canvas as soon as possible.) Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. There will also be some in-class writing done with pen and paper, so make sure to have a notebook with you in class.

Specific formatting guidelines will vary according to each assignment, so please follow the explicit guidelines found on individual assignment sheets.

### **Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted (except in the case of an excused absence). Should you know in advance that you have having trouble completing an assignment, please contact me in advance.

### **Technology**

If you need to contact me, please use email. (Messages sent through Canvas will also be forwarded to my NJIT email address.) I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours. Please plan accordingly. Remember to include an appropriate SUBJECT line and your NAME in all emails and to indicate WHICH CLASS you are in. I will not respond to emails that do not include the sender's name. Please use your NJIT email address – if I need to find your email at a later point, it makes the search much easier.

*Laptops and cell phones should be used during class only for specific class-related activities.* Please set your phones to silent as a courtesy to your classmates and instructor.

### **Office Hours**

My scheduled office hours are M 3-4 and T 10-11. As the Director of the NJIT Writing Center, I may sometimes have conflicts with those specific times, but I can meet with you most weekdays in person or via Webex by appointment. Email me or catch me after class to schedule either – siemann@njit.edu

### **\*REQUIRED Books:**

Weir, Andy. *The Martian*. NY: Broadway Books, 2014. (any edition, print or ebook)

A notebook (that you can tear pages out of).

All other readings will be posted to Canvas; films assigned as homework are readily available on multiple streaming services.

### **Resources:**

- You should be familiar with and use the Purdue OWL, an excellent online source for issues of grammar, style, citations, etc. It can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- You will be required to use standard APA in-text citations and works cited list for your research paper.

**Accommodation Needs:** Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

**Writing Center:** The NJIT Writing Center will be available for both in-person and synchronous online appointments. We are open M-F. For more information, please go to our website at <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>. Appointments can be scheduled via Navigate, which can be reached through NJIT Pipeline or directly at <https://njit.campus.eab.com/>. While Writing Center consultations are valuable for all writers, if you have not written a research paper since (or before) your first year in college, working with the Center is particularly recommended. There is no charge for these services.

### ***Schedule of Assignments***

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

W 9/6: Course Introduction

*Star Trek*, "The Trouble with Tribbles" (1967)

#### **Week 2: The Past of the Future: Classic Science Fiction**

M 9/11: Read before class: Stephenson, "Innovation Starvation" (Canvas)

In-class viewing, scenes from *2001: A Space Odyssey*

W 9/13: Read before class: Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains"

<https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/belli-f2018-eng2420/files/2018/10/There-Will-Come-Soft-Rains-by-Bradbury.pdf>

Asimov, "Runaround",

[https://web.williams.edu/Mathematics/sjmiller/public\\_html/105Sp10/handouts/Runaround.html](https://web.williams.edu/Mathematics/sjmiller/public_html/105Sp10/handouts/Runaround.html)

#### **Week 3: The Past of the Future: Cyberpunk**

M 9/18: Watch before class: *Blade Runner*

W 9/20: Read for class: Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic" (Canvas)

"The Winter Market" (Canvas)

#### **Week 4: Exploring Speculative Technologies**

M 9/25: Read for class: Sawyer, "The Purpose of Science Fiction" (Canvas)

Introduction to and discussion of semester project

W 9/27: In-class workshop on project topics

#### **Week 5: The Martian 1**

M 10/2: Read: Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 1-9

W 10/4: Topic Proposal due in class; in-class workshop; introduction to Research Proposal assignment

#### **Week 6: The Martian 2**

M 10/9: Read: Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 10-18

W 10/11\*: Research Proposal due; in-class workshop, Introduction to Annotated Bibliography

#### **Week 7: The Martian 3**

M 10/16: Read: Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 19-26

W 10/18: Continued discussion of *The Martian*

Annotated Bibliography workshop

*Black Mirror* episode vote

**Week 8: Tony Stark's Technological Journey**

M 10/23: Watch before class: *Iron Man*

W 10/25: Annotated Bibliography due in class

**Week 9: The Cyber and the Human 1**

M 10/30: Watch before class: *Black Mirror* episode TBD

W 11/1: Read for class: Chiang, "The Truth of Fact, The Truth of Feeling" (Canvas)

Class Presentations sign-up and Q&A

**Week 10: The Cyber & The Human 2**

M 11/6: Watch before class: *Terminator 2*

W 11/8: Class Presentations

**Week 11: Class Presentations**

M 11/13: Class Presentations

W 11/15: Class Presentations

**Week 12: Class Presentations**

M 11/20: Class Presentations

W 11/22: NO CLASS – FRIDAY CLASSES MEET

**Week 13: Space Travel**

M 11/27: Watch before class, watch *Interstellar*

W 11/29: space travel, fact & fiction

**Week 14: Draft Conferences**

M 12/4: Individual draft conferences, during class time and all week

W 12/6: Individual draft conferences, during class time and all week

**Week 15: Final Paper**

M 12/11: *Star Trek Strange New Worlds*, episode TBD (2022-23)

W 12/13: Class summing-up

Final papers due via Canvas by class time