

LIT 386-102/HM2 SCIENCE FICTION Spring, 2025

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Nancy Steffen-Fluhr

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Director, Murray Center for Women in Technology

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COURSE CANVAS: <https://njit.instructure.com/courses/49655>
CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesdays, 6:00-8:50 pm Cullimore Lecture Hall #1

OFFICIAL ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: “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: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>. 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”

COURSE AI USAGE POLICY: In this course, students are expected to work without the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) in order to better develop their analytical and writing skills. AI usage is not permitted except in specific AI-related assignments with the explicit permission of the instructor.

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course, we will analyze a set of science fiction novels, stories, and films in order to better understand the underlying cultural assumptions that drive the real-life US technological enterprise—with a special focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI).

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Mary Shelley FRANKENSTEIN
Sierra Greer ANNIE BOT
Kazuo Ishiguro KLARA AND THE SUN
Emily St. John Mandel STATION ELEVEN
+ Online Course Pack (CP) of short stories

NOTE: The complete (free) E-Text of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is available at: <https://ia902908.us.archive.org/9/items/Frankenstein1818Edition/frank-a5.pdf> and at <https://archive.org/details/mary-shelley-frankenstein/page/n17/mode/2up>

REQUIRED FILM VIEWING: You are expected to see the assigned films/video clips on your own, at home or in your dorm. Some of the films are available for free at the URLs indicated in the syllabus. The others are available for a small rental fee on YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, iTunes, and/or Vudu, etc. You can also access some films through the NJIT Library. If you have trouble finding a given film, contact me. I will also screen several short films/videos in class.

COURSE GRADING SCALE:

GRADE	POINTS
A	90-100
B+	88-90
B	80-87
C+	78-80
C	70-77
D	65-70
F	Below 65

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ GRADING (Here’s How You Earn Those 100 Points!)

Two analytical essays on assigned topics--

Essay #1: due March 4 20 points

Essay #2: due May 6 20

Midterm exam: March 11 20

Cumulative Final Exam: May 13 25

Weekly In-Class Quizzes 07.5 [10 quizzes 0.75 point each]

Weekly Class Participation Grade 07.5 [0.75 point/ week: See Rubric]

TOTAL 100 points

READING/ DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

NOTE ON READINGS & FILMS: You should have completed the assigned reading and/or seen the assigned film by the date on which it is scheduled for discussion. That is, **you should have finished the novel *Frankenstein* by next week, January 28.**

- J21 Unit 1 What is SF?**
In-Class Film: "Frankenstein" (1931)
- J28 Unit 2 The "Mad Scientist Plot": Creators & Creations Part I**
Book Reading: Shelley. *FRANKENSTEIN*
In-class film: Excerpts from "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" (1994)
- F4 Unit 3 Creators & Creations Part II**
Film to stream: "Blade Runner" (1982) [See the complete film prior to class]
In-class film: "Metropolis" (1927) [excerpts]
- F11 Unit 4 Creators & Creations Part III**
Reading: CP #1 DelRey. "Helen O'Loy"
Film to stream: "Android" (1982)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr2FCaK_gTU [See the complete film prior to class]
- F18 Unit 5 Creators & Creations Part IV**
Films to stream: "A.I.--Artificial Intelligence" (Spielberg, 2001) [See the complete film prior to class]
"Robot and Frank" (2012) [See the complete film prior to class]
Reading: CP #2 Turkle. "In Good Company"
- F25 Unit 6 Creators & Creations Part V**
Films to stream: "Her" (2013) [See the complete film prior to class]
"Ex Machina" (2014) [See the complete film prior to class]
Reading: CP #4 Minsky. "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?"
- M4 ESSAY #1 DUE**
Unit 7 Creators & Creations Part VI
In-Class Films: "The Original" (Westworld TV Pilot, 2016)
"Be Right Back" (Black Mirror TV Series 2)
- M11 MIDTERM EXAM [1.5 hours]**
In-Class film excerpts and discussion: WALL-E (2008)-PART I
- M18 SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**
- NOTE: READ ANNIE BOT [due March 25] and begin reading KLARA AND THE SUN [due April 8]**
- M25 Unit 8 Artificial Friends Part I**
Book Reading: Sierra Greer. *ANNIE BOT*
In-Class film excerpts and discussion: WALL-E (2008)-PART II
- A1 Unit 9 "White World" Dystopias**
Reading: CP #3 Forster. "The Machine Stops"
Film to stream: "Gattaca" (1997) [See the complete film prior to class]
In class film: "THX 1138" (1971) (excerpts) <https://vimeo.com/150086321>
- NOTE: Begin reading STATION ELEVEN [due April 22]**
- A8 Unit 10 Artificial Friends Part II**
Book Reading: Kazuo Ishiguro. *KLARA AND THE SUN*

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A15 Unit 11 Artificial Friends Part III

Film to stream: *Max Headroom* (1985): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZY-yQYVf38>

Film to stream: *Brian and Charles* (2022)

[See both films prior to class]

A22 Unit 12

Pandemic!

Book Reading: St. John Mandel. STATION ELEVEN

A29 LAST CLASS

Unit 13 Artificial Intelligence Then and Now

Film to stream: *2001* (1968) [See the complete film prior to class]

Reading: Scott Aaronson Blog on AI Safety: <https://scottaaronson.blog/?m=202211>

In-Class Chatbot Demos

May 6 ESSAY #2 DUE

NO CLASS [Tuesday is Friday]

May 13 FINAL EXAM