Topics in Literature: A Long History of Science Fiction

Dr. Everett Hamner
Western Illinois University, Fall 2017, Thursdays 12:30-3
ENG 400G: Q01 (Quad Cities Complex 2206), westernonline.wiu.edu
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General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

A study of a special theme or topic in literature. Prerequisite: ENG 299 with a grade of C or better, or consent of instructor.

Specific Description & Goals

Many Americans derive their notions of science fiction largely from Hollywood blockbusters filled with space battles, damsels in distress, and alien monsters. Those make up a key part of the genre, but they only scratch the surface of what science fiction can do. This course will drill down to SF’s origins, explore some of its most enduring masterplots, and seek glimpses of its future. There will be space settings, gender issues, and radical otherness, but their cumulative effect may be surprising.

While I have taught this course several times, this version is repurposed for upper-level and graduate students and to satisfy the undergrad major’s pre-1800 requirement. Its three parts are organized in roughly chronological order, but we will regularly leap ahead and backward in time so as to highlight various intertextual relationships. The first unit dives into science fiction’s early history, with brief looks at the utopian literature and imaginary journeys of Thomas More, Johannes Kepler, Francis Bacon, and Margaret Cavendish, as well as more extended study of major novels by Jonathan Swift and Charles Brockden Brown. The second unit of the course then turns to science fiction proper, a period beginning in the 19th century, then taking full flight in the 20th century. Here we will utilize one of the best SF short story anthologies available, The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction, as well as various supplementary texts. While growing familiar with the Pulps, the Golden Age, the New Wave, and late-century Cyberpunk, we will also draw on an excellent critical overview by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. and read two short but very influential novels by Arthur C. Clarke and Octavia Butler. Finally, as the course concludes, we will look at our immediate present and near future, asking how SF’s interests in racial justice, ecological crisis, hacking technologies, and crossing national borders are mutating in an era of new media and global capitalism.

Coursework includes a quite heavy but often very entertaining reading load, three quizzes, an invitation to creatively apply 17th-century satire to our current realities, an argumentative paper engaging multiple texts, and an outside-novel project aimed at further expanding everyone’s awareness of SF’s many permutations. Whether you come to this course with a longstanding love for literature of the fantastic or in a state of fear and trembling about an unfamiliar genre, my hope is that all of us will emerge from this semester with a few new texts and authors to enjoy, a heightened capacity for science fictional thinking, and a new readiness to actively reimagine our own worlds.
Meeting, Reading/Viewing, & Assignment Schedule

PLEASE NOTE:
~“READING,” “VIEWING,” or “WRITING” = watch, read, or complete in full BEFORE class
~“IN CLASS” = no preparation required
~“1 STUDENT” = required for only 1 student to read/report on each week (but recommended to all)
~“*” = Short stories and essays marked with an asterisk will be available for download via the course website; otherwise, they can be found in the Wesleyan Anthology.

Part One: The Emergence of Science Fiction

1st WEEK, AUG 24+: HOW DEFINITIONS SHAPE HISTORY

IN CLASS: ~“Margaret Atwood, “Homelanding” (1990)
~Common conceptions (and misconceptions) of science fiction
~Syllabus review, discussion of goals and assignments, and introductions
~How far back does SF reach? + reading groups for week 2 & annotation choices

2nd WEEK, AUG 31+: 16-17c UTOPIA & THE IMAGINARY JOURNEY

~In week 1, I will divide students into 4 groups, each of which will read ONE of:
  ~Thomas More, Utopia (1516, excerpt)
  ~Johannes Kepler, The Dream (1608)
  ~Sir Francis Bacon, The New Atlantis (1627)
  ~Margaret Cavendish, The Blazing World (1666, excerpt)


IN CLASS: ~An SF timeline: how much history can we fill in?
~An introduction to Swift and discussion of the Paper #1 assignment

3rd WEEK, SEPT 7+: 18c SATIRE

READING: ~Jonathan Swift, Gulliver’s Travels (parts 1-2) (1726-27)


IN CLASS: ~Isaac Asimov’s annotated edition of Gulliver’s Travels: cross-century connections
4th WEEK, SEPT 14th: 18c SATIRE, CONT. (NO IN-PERSON MEETING; EVERETT @ CONF)

READING: ~Jonathan Swift, Gulliver’s Travels (parts 3-4) (1726-27)

WRITING: ~Paper 1 (Contemporary Satire) due online by 11:59 pm on Mon, Sept 18

5th WEEK, SEPT 21st: 18c GOTHIC

READING: ~Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland; or The Transformation (1798)


IN CLASS: ~Mapping SF: intersections with the gothic, horror, magical realism, fantasy, etc.

Part Two: 19-20th-Century Fusions of Science, Culture, and Science Fiction

6th WEEK, SEPT 28th: 19c GOTHIC

READING: ~E.T.A. Hoffman, “The Sandman” (1816); Edgar Allen Poe, “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833); Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844); Jules Verne, “Master Zacharius” (1854; trans. 1874)
~Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction (ch 1, The Neologism)

2 STUDENTS: ~Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919, trans. 1924). Annotation/discussion ______ ______

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #1 + more details/examples for paper #2

7th WEEK, OCT 5th: GADGETS FOR AN EXPANDING COSMOS

READING: ~Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court (excerpts, 1889); H.G. Wells, “The Star” (1897); E.M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (1909); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland (1915, excerpt)
~Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction (ch 2, The Novum)


IN CLASS: ~Clips, People’s Century episode 1: “Age of Hope” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYmbyOrM4gs
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<th>Week</th>
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<td>~Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Seven Beauties (ch 3, Future History)</td>
<td>John B. Michel, “Mutation or Death!” (1937)</td>
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<td>~Clips, People’s Century episode 12: “Brave New World”</td>
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<td>~Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Seven Beauties (ch 4, Imaginary Science)</td>
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<td>10th, Oct 26th: Alien Contact</td>
<td>~Arthur C. Clarke, Childhood’s End (1953)</td>
<td>Quiz #2 + more details on Outside Novel Project, time to start forming groups</td>
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<td>~Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Seven Beauties (ch 5, The Sublime)</td>
<td>Clips, People’s Century episode 17: “Living Longer”</td>
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<td>1-2 page plan for Paper #2 due online by Mon 10/30 (use any format desired to convey why given texts interest you, key questions you may investigate, possible outline, etc.)</td>
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12th WEEK, NOV 9th: ALIEN CONTACT REDUX (NO IN-PERSON MEETING; EVERETT @ CONF)

~Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Seven Beauties (ch 6, The Grotesque)

WRITING:  ~Paper 2 (Intertextual Argumentative Essay) due online by 11:59 pm on Mon, Nov 13
~Outside Novel Project: groups, selected novel due online by 11:59 pm on Mon, Nov 13

13th WEEK, NOV 16th: CYBERPUNK, DIGITIZATION, & TECHNOCULTURE

READING:  ~William Gibson, “Burning Chrome” (1982); Bruce Sterling, “We See Things Differently” (1989); Pat Cadigan, “Pretty Boy Crossover” (1986); James Patrick Kelly, “Think Like a Dinosaur” (1995)
~Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Seven Beauties (ch 7, Social Transformation)

IN CLASS:  ~Surveillance, imagined community, and personal biotechnology
~Bruce Sterling, preface of Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology

TH, NOV 23rd: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK

(A Short) Part Three: 21st-Century SF Trends

14th WEEK, NOV 30th: RACE, ECOLOGY, AND NEW MEDIA

READING:  ~*Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” (1992); *Nalo Hopkinson, “Report from Planet Midnight” (2008 speech to International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts);

2 STUDENTS:  ~Janet Fiskio, “Apocalypse and Ecotopia” (2012) Annotation/discussion _____ _____

IN CLASS:  ~How do these works of art resonate with earlier texts? How do they reframe our news?

15th WEEK, DEC 7th: HACKING ACROSS BORDERS


LISTENING:  ~“Limetown” (episode 1) https://www.twoupproductions.com/shows/limetown

IN CLASS:  ~Quiz #3
~A filmic recap & course evals
~Outside Novel Project: time to plan for presentations

FINALS WEEK, DEC 14th: OUTSIDE NOVEL PROJECTS

IN CLASS:  ~Outside Novel Project presentations
Texts for Purchase

PLEASE NOTE:
*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—that site has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).
*I am happy for students to use complete electronic versions of texts so long as they use appropriate citation methods when writing papers and can accept occasional challenges in finding a given passage.


Recommended Reading

NOVELS BY FEATURED AUTHORS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE ON SYLLABUS)

Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid’s Tale, Oryx & Crake, Year of the Flood, MaddAddam
Edgar Allen Poe, The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym
Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”
Jules Verne, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
Mark Twain, Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven
H.G. Wells, The Time Machine, The Island of Dr. Moreau
W.E.B. Du Bois, Dark Princess
Isaac Asimov, Foundation series
Theodore Sturgeon, More than Human
Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles, Fahrenheit 451
Robert Heinlein, Starship Troopers, Stranger in a Strange Land

Philip K. Dick, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
Arthur C. Clarke, 2001: A Space Odyssey
Ursula K. Le Guin, The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed, The Telling, Parades Lost
Joanna Russ, The Female Man
Kim Stanley Robinson, Red Mars & sequels, The Years of Rice and Salt; 2312; Aurora; NY2140
Octavia Butler, Kindred, Parable of the Sower, Dawn sequels Adulthood Rites & Imago
William Gibson, Neuromancer
Bruce Sterling, Schismatrix Plus
Nalo Hopkinson, Brown Girl in the Ring

MORE RECOMMENDED SF (NOT EXHAUSTIVE & IN VERY ROUGH CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

Cyrano de Bergerac, The Other World
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus
Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward
Jack London, The Iron Heel
Yevgeny Zamyatin, We
Aldous Huxley, Brave New World
B.F. Skinner, Walden Two
H.P. Lovecraft, At the Mountains of Madness
George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four
Kurt Vonnegut, The Sirens of Titan
Russell Hoban, Riddley Walker
Samuel Delany, Triton
Walker Percy, The Thanatos Syndrome
Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time; He, She, It
Frank Herbert, Dune
Neal Stephenson, Snow Crash, Seveneves
Nancy Kress, Beggars in Spain and sequels
Greg Bear, Blood Music, Darwin’s Radio, Darwin’s Children
Paolo Bacigalupi, The Windup Girl; The Water Knife

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho
Bram Stoker, Dracula
Samuel Butler, Erewhon
William Morris, News from Nowhere
Karel Capek, R.U.R.
Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith
Adolfo Bioy Casares, The Invention of Morel
A.E. Van Vogt, The World of Null-A
C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet & sequels
Walter M. Miller, Jr., A Canticle for Liebowitz
Madeleine L’Engle, A Wrinkle in Time
Larry Niven, Ringworld
Carl Sagan, Contact
Orson Scott Card, Ender’s Game
Sheri Tepper, The Gate to Women’s Country
Gregory Benford, Timescape
Don DeLillo, White Noise, Zero K
Mary Doria Russell, The Sparrow, Children of God
John Updike, Toward the End of Time
James Morrow, Towing Jehovah
Robert Sawyer, Calculating God
Philip Roth, The Plot Against America
Jo Walton, My Real Children
Richard Powers, Plowing the Dark, Galatea 2.2, Generosity
Benjamin Hale, The Evolution of Benjamin Littlemore
China Miéville, Embassytown
N.K. Jemisin, The Fifth Season & sequels
Nicola Griffith, Ammonite
Colson Whitehead, The Intuitionist, The Underground Railroad
Molly Gloss, The Dazzle of Day
Cormac McCarthy, The Road
Jeff VanderMeer, Annihilation & sequels
Cixin Liu, The Three-Body Problem & sequels
Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven
Charlie Jane Anders, All the Birds in the Sky

Grading Criteria

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/ minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

30% 3 quizzes (10% each)
10% Annotation & Discussion Facilitation
10% Paper 1 (Contemporary Satire)
30% Paper 2 (Intertexual Argumentative Essay)
20% Paper 3 (Outside Novel Project)

Brief Looks at Main Assignments

Quizzes: These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned reading and viewing with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one and will focus more heavily on primary than secondary texts. Students sometimes worry about the quizzes initially, but generally agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. My best advice is to get the reading and viewing done well in advance, then go back over it, your journals and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

Annotation & Discussion Facilitation: This assignment has two parts. First, for each of the eight critical/theoretical pieces listed in the schedule, two students (signups online after week 1 class) will write separate 500-word annotations (1/2 summary, 1/4 analytical response, 1/4 questions—examples will be available). Please post these annotations to the course website by 11 a.m. on the day of class; I will print copies. Second, in collaboration, the pair will TALK THROUGH (NOT READ) their annotations, then facilitate a discussion about how they interpret the piece’s significance and its relationship to other fiction and essays we have read and discussed to that point. Aim for 20 minutes.

Paper 1 (Contemporary Satire): Write a 1000+ (undergrads) or 1500+ (grads) word contemporary satire inspired by Gulliver’s Travels, then a ~250-word reflection comparing your fiction’s relationship to our time with the way Swift’s satire comments on his society. 1/3 of the grade will be based on the power and specificity with which you critique one or more contemporary issues, 1/3 will reflect the success of the humor and precision with which you imitate Swift, and 1/3 will concern your writing clarity and mechanical polish.

Paper 2 (Intertexual Argumentative Essay): Write a 1500+ (undergrads) or 2000+ (grads) word argumentative essay that develops a risk-taking, non-obvious claim about the relationship(s) between 2-3 SF texts. At least one must be a short story from our syllabus; at least one must be pre-approved from outside the syllabus (either by inclusion in the Wesleyan Anthology, by appearing above under “Recommended Reading,” or by communication with me at least a week before the due date). In grading this assignment, 1/3 will represent the significance of your thesis and its expansion on our in-class discussions; 1/3 will reflect the specificity of textual evidence and level of detail involved in your
comparison; and 1/3 will concern your writing clarity and mechanical polish. Further details and examples will be available well in advance.

**Paper 3 (Outside Novel Project):** Partnering with 1-2 classmates to read the same outside SF novel (see “recommended” lists on pp. 6-7), create a presentation for our finals week meeting that creatively illuminates its storyline. This should be 2-3 minutes long per member of your group. You may use Powerpoint slides, video, a skit, or any other format that can sell the book. ½ of the grade will evaluate your accurate, insightful, in-depth representation of the novel, especially in comparison to other SF we have read during the course; the other ½ will concern your entertainment value and polish—in other words, the more people who want to read your book over winter break, the better.

**PLEASE NOTE:**
The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keep its generality in mind.

**My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students**

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other **authentically and maturely.** I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~**Just as critically,** I expect students to be **professionally responsible.** You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other responsibilities, but my roles include challenging you beyond your comfort zone and honestly assessing your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even one semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and your entire college/grad school GPA will never convey those as fully as the recommendation letters you enable professors to write about you. Those usually matter far more.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. You show you are ready for that with your simultaneous investment. In short, what you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond classtime.

**Attendance & Participation**

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. **Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.**

**Classroom Courtesies**

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and electronics should not be used during in-class quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.
Communication

While there are occasional errors, I do my best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments. Please read it thoroughly; it answers most routine questions. Also, keep in mind that unless you expect to be gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other ordinary challenges. When you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, please ask after class or in office hours. If that isn’t possible, email is the next best option (far faster than voicemail). My goal is to respond within 2 business days, but if my answer is detailed, I may ask to shift the chat to office hours. Finally, be aware that I sometimes use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.).

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually post these on the website (under “Content”) soon thereafter, if not beforehand.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and others who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (= .80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. At the course’s conclusion, when consistent effort and other contributions to the class’s success warrant it, I sometimes bump up a borderline grade.

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be inaccessible as a deadline approaches, emailing the paper and then posting it the next day is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers usually take longer; please alert me of such submissions with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a docx, doc, or rtf file.
The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”

Late Work

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course. In many of my courses, I briefly review proper citation, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic dishonesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

Sex Discrimination/Title IX

“University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php.”

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php.
Dr. Hamner’s Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Does your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or abrupt?

2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?

   **Strengthening your thesis:**
   - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
   - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
   - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g., too-short/disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?

   **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):**
   - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
   - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?

   **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:**
   - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
   - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
   - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
   - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?