

English 393-US Science Fiction Film-
Western Illinois University
SPRING 2015

Class meetings: M/W 1:00-1:50 (220 SI)
Lab (Film Screening): T 5-7 (220 SI)

Dr. Roberta Di Carmine

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Minor

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Office hours: Monday 11:00-1:00; Tuesday 2:00-3:00;

Wednesday 2:00-3:00

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Course description and goals:

Through close analysis and discussions of films from the 1950s to contemporary cinema, students will investigate formal and narrative characteristics of science fiction and analyze key concepts of the genre (codes and conventions, representations).

Ultimately in this course students will reach a better understanding of the aesthetic and ideological complexity that can be found in this popular American genre.

COURSE POLICIES: SILENCE YOUR PHONE DURING CLASS AND SCREENINGS. I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO ASK STUDENTS WHO WILL BE FOUND CHECKING THEIR MOBILE/ OR TEXTING TO LEAVE THE CLASSROOM. THAT WILL COUNT AS AN ABSENCE. NO EXCEPTIONS. Also, food is NOT allowed at film screenings/discussions.

Texts: The primary texts are the films. In addition, readings will be assigned from the following books and are required.

1. *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture*, by M. Keith Booker Praeger; First Edition, 2006
2. *The Science Fiction Film Reader*, Ed. by Gregg Rickman, Limelight Editions, 2004.
3. *Writing about Movies*, 3rd ed. by Karen Gocsik, Richard Barsam, Dave Monahan, Norton 2013

Film Screenings: If students miss a screening, it is their responsibility to find other ways to watch the film before the discussion (i.e. Netflix). Attendance at screenings is MANDATORY

Films to be screened:

1. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise. 92 m. US)
2. *Forbidden Planet* (1956, dir. Frank Wilcox. 98 m. US)
3. *THX 1138* (1971, dir. George Lucas. 86 m. US)
4. *Star Wars* (1977, dir. George Lucas. 121 m. US)
5. *Logan's Run* (1976, dir. Michael Anderson. 119 m. US)
6. *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott. 117 m. US/UK)
7. *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, dir. Steven Spielberg, 120 m. US)
8. *Blade Runner* (1982, dir. Ridley Scott. 117 m. US)
9. *Back to the Future* (1985, dir. Robert Zemeckis. 116 m. US)
10. *12 Monkeys* (1995, dir. Terry Gilliam. 129 m. US)
11. *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996, dir. Jonathan Frakes. 111 m. US)
12. *Robocop* (1987, dir. Paul Verhoeven. 102 m)
13. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick. 141 m. UK/US)
14. *Wall-E* (2008, dir. Andrew Stanton, 98 m)
15. *Idiocracy* (2006, dir. Mike Judge. 89 m)

Class Meetings and Procedures:

- Each week students are expected to come to class prepared for a discussion on the film and readings. Each student is expected to bring a couple of selected passages from the readings in order to discuss the reading(s) and the film(s) assigned for that week.

- Discussions, lectures, and group presentations are scheduled on both class periods (T/TH). *Attendance at films screenings and discussions is required.* Students whose behavior during film screenings creates a distraction to others will be asked to leave. *Consistent late arrival or early departure at film screenings and class periods DOES affect your grade.*

Requirements and Evaluation:

Grades will be based on: attendance and participation (160 pts); 2 sets of

Film Diary (each with four diaries, 320 pts); group presentation (220 pts); a final paper (300 pts)

Grading Scale:

967-1000 pts= A+

966-934= A

933-900=A-

899-867=B+

866-834= B

833-800= B-

799-767=C+

766-734=C

733-700=C-

699-667=D+

666-634=D

633-600=D-

below 600 pts= F

Attendance and Late Work Policies:

Regular attendance and participation is **REQUIRED (60 pts)**.

Attendance will be taken regularly in class periods and screenings.

You are allowed 4 unexcused absences (0-4 absences= 60 pts; 5-8 absences= 30 pts; 9-11 absences= 10 pts; 12-+ absences= 0 pts).

Illness, emergencies, and religious obligations that fall on days of regularly scheduled classes may be excusable upon consultation with the instructor and require documentation from a university official or other authority. Letters from parents or relatives won't be accepted.

Remember, consistent late arrival or early departure **DOES** affect your attendance grade. Late works won't be accepted. Exceptions are considered only if provided with an appropriate letter of explanation from a physician, athletic director, or a faculty member justifying your request of a late submission. However, it is up to the instructor to decide whether or not accept the documentation after carefully reviewing the request.

It is the student's responsibility to make arrangement for the missed class, and check with a classmate for missed material (notes) in discussions/film screenings.

Late Work: Late assignments (if the instructor decides to accept it based on exceptional circumstances) will be penalized at the rate of 10 points per day late, including weekends.

Participation (100 pts): Since the discussion revolves around the readings, the film(s), lectures, **active participation** is based on a careful reading of both films and literary texts as well as understanding of how the two relate. In-class activities (screening reports and other writing activities) will be graded as "participation points." Keep in mind that the contribution you offer to discussion counts toward your participation grade. Also, remember to be respectful in class, disagreements are inevitable in

discussions but they should always be conducted in a civil manner.

Two Sets of Film Diaries (320 pts): you are asked to write 8 descriptions/film diaries of any of the feature films watched in class. The two sets (of 4 film diaries each) are due, respectively, on 02/23 and 04/6. Each film diary (3 full pages long, double-spaced) should include a one-paragraph plot summary and a brief discussion of the film's crucial aesthetic and ideological issues. These questions should reflect your familiarity with the film and the readings and open up further research and critical inquiry.

A final paper of 8-10 pages (double-spaced) (300 pts). The final paper consists of a comparative analysis of TWO films chosen by the student among those studied in class. Students will also be responsible for choosing a topic or theme to explore in their final paper. A draft of the final paper of at least 4 pages is due May 4. On that day, students will give an in-class 5 minutes presentation of their topic/final paper. This presentation counts 50 pts of the final paper grade.

PLEASE NOTE: Students who submit a draft of less than 4 pages, or students who won't give the presentation of their final topic will be penalized of 50 pts from their final grade. Students who fail to submit the draft will be penalized of 70 pts from their final paper grade.

A group presentation (220 pts). A short paper (at least 2 pages) describing the presentation should be handed in the week after it is given. Each student enrolled in this class is required to participate in the group presentation. Students who don't actively and fully participate in the group presentation will receive a "zero" for this assignment. Also, students who will not submit the two pages paper will be penalized of 40 points. Precise guidelines

regarding this assignment will be given during the first week of the semester.

General Policies:

No incompletes will be given in this course.

PLAGIARISM: Successful participation in this course requires that students complete all the requirements/assignments. Students should be aware that plagiarism or cheating of any form will not be tolerated and that academic misconduct entails severe penalties. The most common form of academic misconduct is plagiarism. As stated on the website regarding Students' Rights and Responsibilities, "plagiarism is intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism occurs whenever:

one quotes another person's actual words or replicates all or part of another's product without acknowledgment. This includes all information gleaned from any source, including the Internet; one uses another person's ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one's own words without acknowledgment.

one uses facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials without acknowledgment; one fails to acknowledge with a citation any close and/or extended paraphrasing of another; one fails to use quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it is a few words, a sentence, or a paragraph.

Typical examples: Submitting, as one's own, the work of another writer or commercial writing service; knowingly buying or otherwise acquiring and submitting, as one's own work, any research paper or other writing assignment; submitting, as one's own, work in which portions were produced by someone acting as tutor or editor; collaborating with others on papers or projects without authorization of the instructor. In addition to oral or written work, plagiarism may also involve using, without

permission and/or acknowledgment, computer programs or files, research designs, ideas and images, charts and graphs, photographs, creative works, and other types of information that belong to another. Because expectations about academic assignments vary among disciplines and instructors, students should consult with their instructors about any special requirements related to citation.”

(<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>)

In the case a student is found plagiarizing, he/she will receive an F for that assignment and will be reported to the Chair.

Special Accommodation and Disabilities: “In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at (309) 298-2512 for additional services.”

PLEASE NOTE: The 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 at the Writing Center is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The University Writing Center is located in Simpkins Hall, call for an appointment (298-3512) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment. Writing centers on Macomb Campus: Malpass Library, Tanner Hall, Bayliss Hall, Simpkins Hall. Contact the University Writing Center for more information, e-mail mwcenter@wiu.edu

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******WIU Film Students' Club******

JOIN THE FILM STUDENTS CLUB!

Every semester, the Film Students' Club shows a selection of films (national and international) and offers thought-provoking discussions on a wide range of issues and topics! Students, especially those minoring in film, are highly encouraged to attend the screenings/meetings. Further information about the students' organization will be given the first week of class. The FILM STUDENTS' CLUB President, Dan Pourroy and Vice-President/Treasurer Thomas Franklin

Extra credits: throughout the semester, I will announce various events and films which students may earn extra credits for attending. In each case, the student must write a one-page report (single-spaced) to earn points, for a max. of 8 points for the semester.

Additional Information: to get important factual information about films (characters' name, cast, awards), check www.imdb.com. Be careful though with the "on-line interviews" and other material you find online. Remember, plagiarism is a very serious matter. It is also essential to take notes during the screenings. Therefore it is highly recommended to buy a penlight, a ballpoint pen with an illuminated tip, to facilitate writing in the dark.

*Tentative Schedule**

* The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course but some changes may be necessary. Students will be informed in class of any changes to the assigned schedule

Week 1:

January 20 (T): Introduction and screening. The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951, dir. Robert Wise. 92 m. US)

January 21 (W): discussion on the film

Reading for next week: introduction (Gregg Rickman); Part 3, Interview with Robert Wise (p. 50, Rickman); Introduction (Keith Booker)

Week 2:

Jan 26 (M): lecture and discussion on the readings.

Reading for W: chapter 2 (Booker), "Forbidden Planet"

Jan 27 (T): Screening: Forbidden Planet (1956, dir. Frank Wilcox. 98 m. US)

Jan 28 (W): lecture and discussion on the film/readings.

Reading assignment for next M: re-read introductions both books

Week 3:

Feb 2 (T): lecture and discussion on the readings.

Feb 3 (T): Screening: THX 1138 (1971, dir. George Lucas. 86 m. US)

Feb 4 (W): lecture and discussion on the film

Reading assignment for next W: Part 7, both readings 226 and 229 (Rickman); chapter 6 (Star Wars), in Booker

Week 4:

Feb 9 (M): lecture and discussion on the readings

Reading for W: re-read part 7 (Rickman) and chapter 6 (Booker)

Feb 10 (T): Screening: *Star Wars* (1977, dir. George Lucas. 121 m. US)

Feb 11 (W): discussion on the film/readings

Reading for next week: to be assigned

Week 5:

Feb 16 (M): lecture and discussion on the film/readings

Feb 17 (T): Screening: *Logan's Run* (1976, dir. Michael Anderson. 119 m. US)

Feb 18 (W): discussion on film/readings

Reading: read chapter "Reproducing Ripley," in Rickman, p. 335; chapter 8 (*Alien*) in Booker

Week 6:

Feb 23 (M): **FILM DIARY SET N. 1 DUE.** Discussion on the readings

Feb 24 (T): Screening: *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott. 117 m. US/UK)

Feb 25 (W): discussion on the film/readings

Reading for W: chapter Reading part 8 (all three readings, Rickman), pp. 254-266; chapter 9 (on *ET*) in Booker

Week 7:

March 2 (M): discussion on the readings/film.

March 3 (T): screening: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, dir. Steven Spielberg, 120 m. US)

March 4 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 1**

Reading for next W: read part 9 (all three readings, Rickman), pp. 270-287

Week 8:

March 9 (M): discussion on the film/reading

March 10 (T): screening: *Blade Runner* (1982, dir. Ridley Scott. 117 m. US)

Reading for W: read part 9 (all three readings, Rickman); chapter 19 (*On Blade Runner*) in Booker

March 11 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 2**

Reading for M/W: read part 11, p. 369 only (*The philosophy of time travel*)

Week 9:

SPRING BREAK

Week 10:

March 23 (M): lecture and discussion. Screening report (in-class activity)

March 24 (T): screening: *Back to the Future* (1985, dir. Robert Zemeckis. 116 m. US)

Reading for W: re-read part 11

March 25 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 3**

Reading for W: read part 11, "Time Travel.." p. 355 (Rickman)

Week 11:

March 30 (M): lecture and discussion.

March 31 (T): screening: *12 Monkeys* (1995, dir. Terry Gilliam. 129 m. US)

Reading for W; re-read part 11 (Rickman)

April 1 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 4**

Reading for next week: read to be assigned

Week 12:

April 6 (M): Lecture and discussion on the readings.

April 7 (T): screening: *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996, dir. Jonathan Frakes. 111 m. US)

April 8 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 5**

Reading for next week: chapter 12 (Booker)

Week 13:

April 13 (M): Discussion and in class-activity. **FILM DIARY SET N. 2 DUE**

April 14 (T): Screening: *Robocop* (1987, dir. Paul Verhoeven. 102 m)

Reading for W:

April 15 (W): **GROUP PRESENTATION N. 6**

WEEK 14:

April 20 (M): lecture and discussion.

Reading for W: "Kubrick and others, "Alien Encounters," p. 181 (Rickman); chapter 4 (on 2001) in Booker

April 21 (T): screening: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick. 141 m)

April 22 (W): Cont. Screening. And film discussion.

Week 15:

April 27 (M): lecture and discussion.

April 28 (T): screening: *Wall-E* (2008, dir Andrew Stanton. 98 m)

April 29 (W): discussion on the film

Week 16:

May 4 (M): DRAFT FINAL PAPER DUE. STUDENTS' BRIEF

PRESENTATIONS FINAL PAPERS. Students' evaluations

May 5 (T): *Idiocracy* (2006, dir. Mike Judge. 94 m). Followed by discussion

May 6 (W): CONFERENCES IN MY OFFICE

Week 17: FINAL WEEK. FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY May 13 @ 10 IN MY OFFICE
