

ENVS 411: Imagining Environmental Futures Syllabus Version 1.0

Course Information:

Meetings: 142 Columbia Hall, M/W 2-3:50

CRN: 38818

<http://blogs.uoregon.edu/envs411envfutures/>

password: dados

Instructor Information:

Name: Shane Hall , Graduate Teaching Fellow

Email: shaneh@uoregon.edu

Office: Columbia Hall 47a regular, 240 by apt.

Office Hours: M: 9:30-11:30, T: 12:30-1:30 or by appointment

“Books are the mirrors of the soul” – Virginia Woolf

Thinking is an action... the heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works.”-- bell hooks

Course Description:

Our “environmental imaginations” are determined by our vision of the future. Environmentalist movements have often been mobilized against *time*. Environmental apocalypticism, the belief that human action may imminently cause the wholesale collapse and irreversible despoliation of earth’s ecosystems, is a powerful component of American environmentalists’ collective visions of the future. Are timeless wildernesses falling prey to “progress,” never to return? Are we, as Bill McKibben argues, at “the end of nature?” Are we reaching “tipping points” in altering the biosphere from which there is no return? At what point in the future will the supposed chickens of population growth, swarming technologies, and an all-consuming, global market come home to roost? Do we face a bird-less silent spring or a planet teeming with urban poor, waiting to devour a ration of Soyent-Green? When do we get solar-powered jetpacks and hover-cars? Do we only have to keep Earth functional long enough to make a light-speed leap into the cosmos and boldly go to a galaxy far, far away, or are we on the verge of a great bottleneck disaster, leading to a grim post-apocalyptic pastoral occupied by the occasional mutant toiling on in the radioactive dust?

In this course students will examine the way tropes of apocalyptic crisis, calamity, utopia and dystopia inform environmental discourse in the United States from the late 19th century to the present. This course will explore the ‘specular’ nature of ‘speculative’ fiction; the connection between how the imagined futures of science fiction and fantasy literature reflect, challenge, or augment perceived environmental threats of a particular historic moment. We will critically read a variety of historical and contemporary cultural ‘texts’ including literary fiction, popular essays, advertisements, and cinema. By critically reading these texts as a cipher for environmentalist aspirations and anxieties in American culture at the time of publication, we will critically examine the opportunities and limits imposed by different rhetorics of crisis, apocalyptic calamity, utopia, and dystopia that construct environmental problems and our sense of a future world. These topics demand that we creatively interrogate how we ourselves “predict the future” in an increasingly unpredictable world of climate change, genetically modified organisms, new technologies, expanding markets, and growing population.

Course Objectives:

If you enthusiastically and critically engage in this class and successfully complete each assignment, by taking this course you will...

1. Explain how the ways we imagine the future inform what we apprehend the past and present.
2. Identify tropes of “environmental apocalypticism,” dystopia, and utopia in environmentalist rhetoric and literary fiction.
3. Connect *extrapolated depictions* of environmental issues in literature to the historically contingent *anxieties, concerns* and scientific data from which the literature derives.
4. See and examine how these public ideas about the future inform your day-to-day emotions and values, and vice versa.
5. Compare and contrast the various forms of argumentation (and argumentative strategy) that are used in literary and ostensibly non-literary texts.

Required Books:

- Dick, Phillip K: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
- Butler, Octavia. *The Parable of the Sower* (1994)
- Rich, Nathaniel. *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013)
- **Optional:** Parenti, Christian: *Tropic of Chaos: The New Geography of Violence* (2012)

How Your Grade is Evaluated: (full descriptions of assignments on Black Board)

1. Classroom Citizenship and Course Journal: 30%
2. In-class “Pop” Reading Quizzes: 10%
3. Blog Posts: 30%
4. Imagining Utopias Assignment: 30%

How your Grade is Evaluated: A: 94-100% A-: 90-93.49% B+: 86.5-89.49% B: 84-86.49% B-: 80-83.49% ...and so on!
--

Overall Expectations:

What to expect from your instructor: You can expect me to work hard to help you learn and succeed in this course. Specifically, I'll be available to help you in and outside of class. I will communicate clear expectations, criteria, and feedback for your efforts, and demonstrate the value of course activities and requirements (always feel free to ask about why we're doing each activity or assignment), and guide you in the completion of tasks in a timely manner so you can demonstrate your achievement. This course grapples with the challenges vast, slow environmental violence poses to our abilities to perceive and imagine crisis as well as solutions to crisis. I believe these are vital issues to investigate, and consequently I love talking about all the issues we'll be examining over the next few weeks and I am here to help you explore these ideas. If I don't know answers to your questions that you're asking, I'm positive that I can help you find those answers.

What your instructor expects from you: You are expected to be present for every class, complete class readings and assignments on time and in the manner required, check Blackboard/Blog announcements and your email regularly, and participate vigorously and often in class discussions and activities – meaning you will share your ideas openly, relate course concepts and skills to your interests and real world experiences, and work to synthesize information from a variety of sources. In addition, you are required to comply with the course policies (below) and ask me questions when things get confusing (and I guarantee they will, because confusion is the first step towards learning anything worth learning).

All of us are expected to respect everyone's voice; listen to, read, reflect upon, and comment appropriately on each other's contributions; challenge each other to clarify our ideas; and encourage each other to deepen our mutual learning.



“Cameraman and Flower” Banksy

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.*

--MacBeth, *MacBeth* 5.5.19-28

Course Policies:

Attendance

We only have 20 classes! Your ability to learn, and ability to earn a successful grade, in this course is compromised by missing class. You cannot pass the class if you miss more than two weeks of class. Repeatedly arriving to class late or departing class early will negatively impact your classroom citizenship grade.

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Consistent, correct citation of sources is required, and failing to adequately cite source materials will result in a final grade of “F” for the course. Refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website.

Access

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in the first day or two of class if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

A General Note on Communication

Due to the short, brutish nature of Spring Term, we are all expected and required to perform at a ‘high-octane’ level. That being said, we are human. If you are struggling with material, faced suddenly with a crisis, succumb to early-onset senioritis, are stalked by rogue nutria, etc. please communicate with me via email or in person so we can coordinate and ensure you are able to access fully a positive learning experience (and pass the class). Coming to me a week *after* an assignment is due to tell me that your house burnt down is an awfully long time to wait to talk about an extension. So promptly communicate, communicate, communicate.

Office Hours:

Everyone is required to briefly discuss their idea for a final project location during the first 3 weeks of the course in office hours. I hold three “office hours” downstairs in Columbia 47a each week. Continuing with the “communication” mantra of the last policy, please feel encouraged to come to office hours on a regular basis. It’s my feeling from my time at UO that too many students erroneously feel that office hours are a kind of “safety net” one only accesses when one is failing the course or needs an extension. Office hours are times for all students to get more out of the course and course readings by having smaller discussions with the instructor.

Late Work

Because of the extremely compressed nature of this course, late work will not be accepted unless you seek and receive permission from the instructor prior to the assignment’s deadline in the syllabus. All deadlines are included in the syllabus, so it helps to study –up on the schedule at the beginning of the course to see if you can predict any predicaments that you’ll need to talk to the instructor about.

Brief Descriptions of Graded Work:

Note: The full assignment descriptions are on the blog/Blackboard and go into greater detail on the logistics and requirements of each major assignment.

<p>1. Classroom Citizenship and Course Portfolio (30%)</p>	<p>Being a good “classroom citizen” means that you meet the expectations laid out on page 2 of this syllabus. This means that a portion of your grade will come from how well you prepare for and participate in classroom discussions and respond to your peers.</p> <p>You will prepare a course portfolio in a three-ring binder that reflects your engagement with the course readings, in-class lectures/discussions, and outside of class connections you perceive throughout the course. This portfolio will include, among other materials, homework assignments and in-class writing assignments.</p>
<p>2. In-Class Quizzes (10%)</p>	<p>These will be administered in the “pop” tradition. They are also a reward for keeping pace with the course reading and work load and coming to class ready for discussion. You must be in class, on-time, in order to take the quiz.</p>
<p>3. Blog Post (30%)</p>	<p>Everyone will post and respond to several blog entries throughout the term. In addition to the blog post/response dates listed on the Course Schedule, you will post a close-reading of a text that is not included on the syllabus sometime during weeks 3-10. We live in an era possessed by a myriad of apocalyptic, dystopic, and to a lesser extent, utopic visions. Each student will track down an additional text and write a blog-post-style entry performing a critical reading of the text to share with the class. Students will be graded on both the quality of their readings as well as their online responses to other students’ posts throughout the term.</p>
<p>5. Imagining Utopias (30%)</p>	<p>Throughout this course you will creatively and critically craft a utopic vision of the future. The final “product” of this assignment will take the form of a short, creative writing or artistic rendering of a utopia paired with a 5 page critical explication of your artistic choices and the socio-political ideas which undergird the work.</p>