

First-year Foundation Course: Utopia and Dystopia in Film and Fiction

Chapman University
Course Syllabus

Fall 2023

2:30-3:45 PM (PST) Monday/Wednesday 100A-08

4:00-5:15 PM (PST) Monday/Wednesday 100A-09

Wilkinson Hall 220

Prof. Michael Valdez Moses

(714) 516-4561

mimoses@chapman.edu

Prof. John Thrasher

(714) 516-4562

thrasheriv@chapman.edu

Office Hours: 1:00 pm-2:00 pm and by appointment

Wilkinson Hall 210

Course Description

The 19th and 20th centuries were an era of bold utopian experimentation. Numerous extraordinary attempts were made to realize in practice radical and competing conceptions of freedom and equality, progress and order, individual autonomy and human solidarity, social justice and racial harmony. Even as many of these utopias became nightmares for those who lived under them, thinkers and artists remained fascinated with the role that new technologies, behaviorial conditioning, and social engineering could play in making possible new and allegedly superior ways of organizing communal life that went beyond what was deemed possible at the time. Focusing on major works of literature, film, and historical prose, we will look at some of the most prominent and thought-provoking visions of utopia/dystopia in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries and reflect on what these (mostly) fictional (and sometimes historical) experiments in communal experimentation can teach about the limits of political thinking in reshaping our conceptions of morality, human nature, and social life. In this course, we will explore the tensions between individual freedom and communal solidarity, between economic prosperity and social equality, between natural limits and aspirations for an ideal social order, between technological progress and human flourishing, and between cultural liberation and racial harmony.

3 credits.

FFC Course Catalog Description

This course engages students in interdisciplinary, university-level critical inquiry and reflection. The FFC course focuses more on critical engagement, exploration, and communication related to complex issues than on mastering a body of material. The section topics vary, and students select a topic according to their academic and personal interests. Some sections of this course may allow students with more than 30 credits earned to enroll. Must be taken for a letter grade. Fee: some sections may require a class fee.

Program Learning Outcome

Students will be able to analyze and communicate complex issues and ideas in a variety of genres, modes of presentation, and contexts. They will work independently and collaboratively to explore issues and questions that have engaged thinkers from a variety of fields in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Identify and understand the nature of conflicts among differing and often opposing visions of society, morality, and human nature.
2. Comprehend the underlying social, moral, and political ideas conveyed by literary texts and films, as well as by philosophical and historical works, and engage with those ideas critically.
3. Formulate clear, incisive, thought-provoking questions about ideas presented in literary and academic texts as well as films.
4. Develop skill in constructing and presenting arguments.
5. The student critically analyzes and communicates complex issues and ideas.

Class Communications

Most classroom communications will take place through email (typically via the dedicated course Canvas site). **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING SURE THAT YOU RECEIVE THESE COMMUNICATIONS.** We are a team, so if you email one of us, email both of us.

Required Texts & Films

Texts (Bring the text each day to class)

1. Aldous Huxley (1932) *Brave New World /Brave New World Revisited*
2. George Orwell (1948) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
3. Rebecca Solnit (2009) *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*
4. Chris Jennings (2016) *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism*
5. Mikhail Bulgokov (1967) *Master and Margarita*
6. Herta Müller (1997) *The Appointment*

Films

1. Gattaca (1997)
2. The Children of Men (2006)
3. The Lives of Others (2006)
4. Stalker (1979)
5. Her (2013)
6. Blade Runner (1982)
7. Wall-E (2008)
8. Idiocracy (2006)
9. Waco: Rules of Engagement (2003)
10. 28 Days Later (2002)

Students are expected to bring the relevant text to each discussion. Some of the texts will be made available as PDFs on Canvas. We recommend getting the versions of the texts listed above to make it easier to follow the discussion in class.

Students are expected to watch the films **before** we talk about them in class and are encouraged to watch them twice. All of the films we will be discussing are available for rental or purchase on various streaming services and all can be streamed directly from either Amazon or Kanopy. Given that we will continue to discuss and compare the films during the entire fall semester, we recommend to all students that they *purchase* (rather than rent) digital/streaming versions of the films.

Instructional Methods

This course uses a combination of lectures, Socratic roundtable discussions of readings, small group discussion, engagement with films, creative projects, and writing exercises.

Assessment

There are five components to your grade. All assessments will use an 100 point scale. These are distributed as follows:

Class Participation	25%
Class Questions/Comments	30%
Project #1	15%
Project #2	15%
Final Exam	20%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade Percentage/Points

A	=	95-100	C	=	73-76
A-	=	90-94	C-	=	70-72
B+	=	87-89	D+	=	67-69
B	=	83-86	D	=	60-66
B-	=	80-83	F	=	0-59
C+	=	77-79			

Class Participation (25%)

Participation in this course offers the opportunity to experiment with and practice formulating questions and responding to other students. Students will develop skills in articulating their ideas, developing support for their positions, and submitting their views to rational scrutiny. The seminar-style conversation in the classroom will facilitate constant engagement and practice. *Students are expected to enter discussion in each and every meeting of the class.* Comments and questions are expected to be about or grounded in the texts we are reading together and the films we are discussing.

Questions/Comments (30%)

Each student will submit one question *and* comment about the material under discussion that day to an assigned site on Canvas before each class. These questions and comments will be used in the class and evaluated according to how well they reflect the student's engagement with the material. The question/comment will be due at 11 am (PST) on the day of class.

Projects (15% each, total of 30%)

There will be three project assignments. The first will consist of an essay of approximately 1,200 words. This paper is an opportunity for students to demonstrate the skills they have acquired by writing efficiently and constructing well-supported, well-articulated arguments in relation to the topics covered in the class. The second will be creative and will involve the student developing a dystopia and a utopia of their own. For this assignment, students may submit a creative essay, a screenplay, a play, a story, a short film, or any number of other options.

Final Exam (20%)

Students will consider the course objectives and respond to questions posed by the professors in an oral examination during the exam period. More details will be given towards the end of the class.

Library Instruction

In addition to the work directly assigned for this class, students are required to complete the library instruction modules on Canvas before our mandatory library orientation session at

Leatherby on October 25th. Students must also complete the “What did you Learn” questionnaire by November 11. This assignment is worth 100 points and will be aggregated with your overall scores for Questions/Comments.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory, without a valid exemption. Four absences will result in the reduction of one letter grade in the final grade, six absences will result in a fail.

Students with Disabilities

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the [Disability Services Office](#). If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized.

Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516–4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure, or for information and to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for an accommodation has been granted, you are encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the University Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity at www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.aspx

Equity and Diversity

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in [Chapman’s Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#). Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the [Dean of Students](#) and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

Safety Protocol

Course format may be subject to change with little to no notice, depending upon state, local, and University guidelines

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Chapman University has developed the [CU Safely Back program \(CUSBP\)](#) and mandatory safety measures. The University’s mandatory safety measures may be stricter than local, state or federal guidelines and may be subject to change at any time. Students

are expected to adhere to the University's safety measures while attending classes, including when entering and exiting classrooms, laboratories, or other instructional areas. Refusal to abide by the University's mandatory safety measures or to the safety requirements specific to this course will result in your being asked to leave the area immediately, and may result in an administrative dismissal from this course.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires all of us to accept the possibility that changes in how this course is taught may be required and that some changes may occur with little or no notice. For example, some or all of the in-person aspects of a course may be shifted to remote instruction. If this occurs, you will be given clear instructions as to how to proceed. The uncertainty of the situation is not ideal for any of us. We must all try to approach this situation with good-will, flexibility, and mutual understanding.

Class Schedule and Readings

	Reading / Film	Assessment
Week 1		
M 8/28	Introduction	
W 8/30	<i>Children of Men</i> (2006) Film	Question/Comments
Week 2		
M 9/4	No Class—Labor Day	
W 9/6	<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> Part 1	Question/Comments
Week 3		
M 9/11	<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> Part 2	Question/Comments
W 9/13	<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> Part 3	Question/Comments
Week 4		
M 9/18	<i>Lives of Others</i> (2006) Film	Question/Comments
W 9/20	<i>Lives of Others</i> (2006) Film	Question/Comments
Week 5		
M 9/25	<i>Stalker</i> (1979) Film	Question/Comments
W 9/27	<i>Stalker</i> (1979) Film	Question/Comments
Week 6		
M 10/2	Master & Margarita (Part 1) Chapters 1-10	Question/Comments
W 10/4	Master & Margarita (Part 1) Chapters 11-18	Question/Comments
F 10/6		Critical Essay
Week 7		
M 10/9	Master & Margarita (Part 2) Chapters 19-25	Question/Comments
W 10/11	Master & Margarita (Part 2) Chapters 26-Epilogue	Question/Comments
F 10/13	First Project Due	
Week 8		
M 10/16	<i>Paradise Now</i> “Oneida” – Nick Gillespie (Reason Magazine)	Question/Comments
W 10/18	<i>Her</i> – Sarah Siskind (Hello SciCom)	Question/Comments
Week 9		
M 10/23	Gattaca	Question/Comments
W 10/25	Leatherby Library Orientation	Question/Comments

Week 10		
M 10/30	<i>Brave New World</i> Chapter 1-5	Question/Comments
W 11/1	<i>Brave New World</i> Chapters 6-12	Question/Comments
F 11/3	Second Project Due	Critical Essay
Week 11		
M 11/6	<i>Brave New World</i> Chapter 13-19	Question/Comments
W 11/8	Blade Runner—John Hoffamn (University of Marburg)	
Week 12		
M 11/13	<i>A Paradise Built in Hell</i> (Prelude & Chapter 1 - SF Earthquake)	Question/Comments
W 11/15	28 Days Later	Question/Comments
Thanksgiving Break		
Week 13		
M 11/27	<i>A Paradise Built in Hell</i> (“Fear at the Top” - pp.126-132 + Chapter 5 – Hurricane Katrina & Epilogue)	Question/Comments
W 11/29	Waco: Rules of Engagement	Question/Comments
Week 14		
M 12/4	Idiocracy	Questions/Comments
W 12/6	Wall-E	Questions/Comments
F 12/8	Final Project Due	Creative Project
	Final Exams	
M 12/11	100A-09 4:15 - 6:45 PM	
T 12/12	100A-08 10:45 - 1:15 AM-PM	