
ENG 4938 - 01

Minor Universes: Race, Space, and Speculative Futures

Advanced Seminar in English | Florida State University | Spring 2018

Instructor: Frances Tran
Course/Section: ENG 4938 - 01
Class: T/R 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM, WMS 114

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will explore how minoritized authors and artists have turned to science and speculative fiction as a means to reflect on, critique, and imagine alternatives to existing conditions of material inequity and social injustice. We will examine how their writing and cultural productions open up “minor universes,” that is, worlds that turn on and around the minor. The texts we will engage foreground subjects, histories, and spaces that have been marginalized, neglected, or otherwise rendered invisible. Together, we will inquire how authors such as Octavia Butler, Ken Liu, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Karen Tei Yamashita, G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, reinvent our understanding of time travel, unsettle what constitutes the “human,” and challenge the white masculinist tradition of the American superhero. We will discuss, moreover, how the genre of science and speculative fiction functions for people of color, not as a means of escape or merely a form of entertainment but as a radical effort to envision the possibility of better worlds.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of how minoritized authors have intervened in and reinvented the genres of science and speculative fiction
 - Articulate how cultural productions create meaning and inform our perceptions of difference, justice, and possibility by engaging in careful close reading and textual analysis
 - Effectively assess and contribute to existing critical and theoretical discourses on science fiction and questions of race, temporality, and embodiment
 - Propose, complete, and share research projects focused on or creative endeavors inspired by the speculative imaginaries of marginalized writers and activists
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COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts

- Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (2004)- ISBN: 978-0807083697

- Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Certain Dark Things: A Novel* (2016): ISBN: 978-1250099082
- Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (2017)- ISBN: 978-1566894869
- G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* (2014)- ISBN: 978-0785190219
- G. Willow Wilson, Jacob Wyatt, and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 2: Generation Why* (2015)- ISBN: 978-0785190226

PDFs and links to electronic course readings are available on Canvas under "modules" where they have been organized by date.

ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION FORUMS

For each class session (unless otherwise stated), students are responsible to contribute a post to the discussion forum on Canvas, marked by the appropriate date. **This post should be either (1) a question about one or more of the assigned readings OR (2) a brief response to another student's question.**

On posting questions:

Constructing effective and engaging questions is a difficult skill and one that we rarely have a chance to practice. Yet, learning how to ask thoughtful and inquisitive questions is also what will serve as the foundations for developing strong thesis statements for your critical essays, research projects, and creative endeavors, not to mention your career and lifelong pursuits. The discussion forums will be a chance for you to experiment with asking each other complex, difficult, and, above all, genuine questions about the readings and topics we will cover this semester. Here are some things to consider when developing your questions for the discussion forums:

- Craft your questions carefully and cite relevant page numbers when necessary.
- Avoid asking plot-driven or yes/no questions that are easily answered if you have read the material. Keep in mind that the goal is to challenge your peers to think deeply about the assigned texts and the issues and questions it raises.
- Before posting your question, read carefully through the questions your peers have posted. You will not get credit for repeating the same question someone else has already asked!

On posting replies:

Instead of asking a question, you can also choose to reply to a classmate's question for your discussion post, especially if you find one that is striking or thought-provoking. While your response does not have to be lengthy, it should demonstrate a substantive engagement with the question and/or any other posted comments. Here are some things to consider when developing your replies:

- Draw on specific ideas, examples, and/or passages from the assigned readings to support your response.

- Keep in mind that you are participating in an ongoing conversation. In other words, do not simply repeat what others before you have written but contemplate how you might build on, challenge, or take the discussion into a different direction.
- Feel free to speak to each other, i.e., use names when you are referring to someone's writing and ask questions if you are curious about a point another person has made.

Discussion posts are due before the start of class and will be evaluated on a check scale (✓+, ✓, ✓-) over the course of the semester for a cumulative grade. You are allowed 3 freebie posts, which you can miss without penalty. Discussion posts cannot be made up unless you contact me in advance for an extension.

SEMINAR FACILITATIONS

Once during the semester, students will be responsible for **leading and stimulating discussion about the assigned reading(s) for the first 15-20 minutes of a class session**. This assignment consists of an **in-class** and **written component**.

On the in-class facilitation:

As a facilitator, you will guide the class in a discussion and analysis of at least one of the assigned reading(s) for your facilitation date. You should come prepared with well-crafted discussion questions, presentation materials, and/or activities. Feel free to use the questions that your peers have crowd-sourced on the discussion forum as well.

In general, I will refrain from participating during student facilitations—this is your time to introduce questions and topics that you want the class to explore. As a facilitator, you may not read from a prepared speech. Consulting bullet points or note cards is permissible but remember that your job is less to give a formal presentation than to engage class conversation about the assigned reading(s). I encourage you to be as creative as possible!

You are expected to come fully prepared on your facilitation date and seminar facilitations cannot be made up. If you discover that you are going to be absent when you are the assigned facilitator, please let me know at least 48 hours in advance so we can try to reschedule. Keep in mind, however, that this may not always be feasible depending on how many students are signed up for certain dates as well as where we are in the semester.

On the written component:

You are expected to write a **3-4 page thesis-driven essay** on at least one of the texts you organized your facilitation around. **This essay is due exactly two weeks after your facilitation date**. No extensions will be provided unless you contact me in advance.

When crafting your essay, here are some things to consider:

- The essay should present an argumentative claim and detailed analysis of your primary cultural text. Pay particular attention to the literary and aesthetic qualities of the text (e.g.,

language, form, style, narrative strategies) as well as its broader thematic concerns, meanings, and purpose.

- The essay should also draw on and engage with at least one of the non-literary secondary sources we have read and discussed this semester. Consider how your thesis builds on, piggybacks off, or challenges the arguments and ideas within the secondary source you have chosen.
- Strong essays will include brief quotations and analyses of specific passages from both primary and secondary sources to illustrate your main ideas and arguments.

MIDTERM EXAM

There will be an in-class midterm exam that will give you an opportunity to apply the concepts, topics, and texts we have discussed in relation to the course's overarching theme, "Minor Universes: Race Space, and Speculative Futures." Rather than an exercise in memorization, this exam will evaluate the depth of your engagement with the broader thematic concerns, scholarly discourses, and cultural productions we analyze in class.

Building on the skills you develop in the art of asking effective questions (through the discussion forum posts and for your seminar facilitations), students will collaboratively generate the questions for this midterm exam during an in-class review session. My hope is that these exam questions will not only allow you to reflect on the materials we have already discussed but also serve as a chance to identify the ideas, texts, and critical debates that will be most generative for thinking ahead to your final research projects.

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT

In lieu of a final exam, you will develop a **research project for a special issue of an academic journal, titled, "Worlds of Color": Speculative Fiction and Social Justice.**

For your contribution, you can decide between **writing a conventional research paper (8-10 pages) or producing a creative project** that takes up themes and questions related to our course. Students who choose the creative option will also be asked to compose a **brief artist's commentary (2-3 pages)** that reflects on the inspiration, motive, and larger stakes of their creative endeavor.

Conducting research will be a crucial component of your final project regardless of which option you choose for your journal contribution. As such, the final project will be scaffolded with a **proposal and annotated bibliography** as well as a **presentation** where you will share your research findings and works-in-progress with your classmates. More details on this assignment will be distributed in advance of the deadlines marked in the course schedule below.

ESSAY SUBMISSIONS

- Students are expected to submit their essays **in MS Word format (.doc or .docx file) through Canvas under “Assignments” by 11:59pm** on the specified due date. Keep in mind that facilitation essays are due two weeks after your scheduled facilitation date.
- **Technology policy:** Electronic submission is a privilege that I extend to allow you more time to work on your essays in a setting that is most convenient for you. As such, I expect you to make sure to **properly attach your essay**—missing/corrupted attachments will be penalized in accordance to the lateness policy below.
- **Lateness policy:** The final grade for a late paper will drop one whole letter grade for each day it is late, including weekends. For example, a paper that merits a “B” will result in a “C” grade if it is turned in one day late. Deadline extensions, though rare, may be granted for extenuating circumstances.
- Graded assignments are typically returned within 2 weeks after the due date.

GRADING POLICY

Breakdown

Participation	10%
Discussion Posts	15%
In-class Seminar Facilitation	10%
Facilitation Essay (3-4 pages)	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Project	
Proposal & Annotated Bibliography	10%
Presentation	5%
Research Paper or Creative Project	20%

The percentages above are to give you a sense of how the major assignments and components of the class are distributed. Your final grade will be based on your scores in these areas but I also highly value the amount of time and effort you put into this class. As such, your final grade will be shaped by your personal development as a reader and writer over the course of the semester.

GRADING SCHEME

Below, I have listed the numerical equivalents for letter grades, which you can use to track your progress in this class.

A	100% to 93%	B	< 87% to 83%	C	< 77% to 73%	D	< 67% to 63%
A-	< 93% to 90%	B-	< 83% to 80%	C-	< 73% to 70%	D-	< 63% to 60%
B+	< 90% to 87%	C+	< 80% to 77%	D+	< 70% to 67%	F	< 60% to 0%

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Course content is accessible through Canvas. You should log on to Canvas at least once every other day to check for course updates.

You will need to be able to view videos, write and upload assignments, post to discussion boards, and take assessments. As such, you should have access to high-speed internet and updated software. To view the most current technology requirements, visit the FSU Canvas support site (<http://support.canvas.fsu.edu/>).

CANVAS SUPPORT

Need help with Canvas? Contact FSU Canvas Support:

- Email: canvas@fsu.edu
- Phone: (850) 644-8004
- Website: support.canvas.fsu.edu
- Hours: 8am to 5pm, Monday - Friday

COURSE POLICIES

COURSE CONTENT

The nature of this course will ask you to read and discuss issues that may be sensitive and controversial, such as sexuality, racism, colonialism, violence, political and religious beliefs, etc. In a college level course you are expected to think about these issues in a way that is critical, analytical, and mature, even if certain issues excite strong personal opinions from you. It is crucial that this class be a forum for the respectful exchange of ideas. Students engaging in conduct inappropriate for the classroom will be asked to leave; the same applies to online discussions. If you are unable to engage with the aforementioned topics in an open-minded and sophisticated manner, I encourage you to reconsider your enrollment in this class.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE/LATENESS POLICY

The success of this course depends on frequent, active, and sustained participation from all students. Participation entails coming to class having done the assigned readings and writing, prepared with the necessary texts and documents on hand (including materials made available electronically). Strong participation, however, involves being engaged in discussions, workshops, facilitations, and group activities. As such, I expect you to speak and contribute regularly, whether it is by asking questions, offering to read a passage aloud, or voicing your own insights. I understand that not everyone is comfortable speaking up in class so I have structured activities throughout the semester that will help you practice getting out of your comfort zone. You may also visit me during my office hours, which counts as a form of participation as well.

Attendance and Lateness: In order to participate in class, you must be present during class meetings. As a result, failure to attend class and persistent lateness will negatively impact your grade. Over the course of the semester, **you are allowed a maximum of 4 unexcused absences**. Being late to class three times equals one absence. If you arrive more than fifteen minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent. One third of a letter grade will be deducted for each additional unexcused absence (e.g., your final grade is a “B,” but you have missed five classes. You now have a “B-”).

This course follows FSU’s attendance policy for excused absences, which is outlined below in the “University Policies” section. If your absence is excused, I will give you the opportunity to make up exams or other graded assignments. When possible, please notify me of anticipated absences in writing as soon as you can. Appropriate documentation for excused absences is required.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is vital to the mission of this class. Consequently, plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity will be penalized severely and may even result in a failing course grade. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people, including well-intentioned friends and family
- Failing to document paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim phrases taken from outside sources
- Collaborating on an assignment without the explicit permission of the professor*
- Submitting an essay written for one course to another course without the explicit permission of both professors
- Submitting work as your own that has been purchased or copied from a paper preparation service or website

*In this class you will be collaborating with your peers on a number of group assignments. I hope that these activities will help facilitate intellectual exchange and social interaction. As such, it will not be a violation of academic integrity for you to share resources and collaborate in developing discussion questions and activities. However, these group projects often include individual writing

components as well, which should be completed in a way that preserves author integrity.

Please familiarize yourself with FSU's academic honor policy (detailed in the "University Policies" section of the syllabus).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (For more details see the FSU Academic Honor Policy and procedures for addressing alleged violations, found at:

<http://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>.)

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
Email: sdrc@admin.fsu.edu

Website: <http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

FREE TUTORING FROM FSU

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' website (<http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring>) or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

"Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice."

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Below you will find our working class schedule of readings and assignments. Depending on the course of our conversations and the perspectives and contributions you offer, we can discuss possible changes to organizing themes and texts. I hope that we can work together to make this class as engaging, generative, and rewarding as possible for your studies and future pursuits.

Building Minor Universes

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| T. 01/08 | Introduction to course |
| Th. 01/10 | Bao Phi, "Revolution Shuffle," in <i>Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements</i> (2015), pp. 7-14.
Mark Jerng, "Introduction: Racial Worldmaking," in <i>Racial Worldmaking: The Power of Popular Fiction</i> (2017), pp. 1-28. |
| T. 01/15 | Evie Shockley, "Separation Anxiety," in <i>Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora</i> (2000), pp. 51-68.
Mark Jerng, "Conclusion: On the Possibilities of an Antiracist Racial Worldmaking," in <i>Racial Worldmaking</i> (2017), pp. 207-217.
Sheree Renée Thomas, "Foreword: Birth of a Revolution" and Walidah Imarisha, "Introduction," in <i>Octavia's Brood</i> (2015), pp. 1-5. |
| Th. 01/17 | Ken Liu, "The Paper Menagerie," in <i>The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories</i> (2016), pp. 178-192.
Seo-Young Chu, "Introduction: Lyric Mimesis," in <i>Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation</i> (2010), pp. 1-10. |

- T. 01/22 Carl Marcum, "A Science Fiction" and "SciFi-Ku," in *Latin@ Rising: An Anthology of Latin@ Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2017), pp. 234-237.
Carmen Maria Machado, "Inventory," *Strange Horizons* 14 (2013).
Seo-Young Chu, "A Lyric Theory of Science Fiction; A Science-Fictional Theory of the Lyric," in *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* (2010), pp. 10-19.
- Th. 01/24 Charles Yu, "Standard Loneliness Package," in *Sorry Please Thank You* (2012), pp. 3-33.
George Saunders, "The Semplica-Girl Diaries," *The New Yorker* (2012)
- T. 01/29 Mia Mingus, "Hollow," in *Octavia's Brood* (2015), pp. 109-121.
Octavia E. Butler, "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" and "Speech Sounds," in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (2005), pp. 33-70, 87-110.
- Th. 01/31 Octavia E. Butler, "The Monophobic Response," in *Dark Matter*, pp. 415-416.
devorah major, "Trade Winds," in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2011), pp. 183-200.
Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life," in *Stories of Your Life and Others* (2016), pp. 1-39.

Bending Time and Space

- T. 02/05 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet," in *Dark Matter* (2000), pp. 5-18.
Tananarive Due, "Like Daughter," in *Dark Matter* (2000), pp. 91-102.
Sheree R. Thomas, "Introduction: Looking for the Invisible," in *Dark Matter* (2000), pp. ix-xiv.
Samuel R. Delany, "The Necessity of Tomorrows," in *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (1984), pp. 23-35.
- Th. 02/07 Daniel José Older, "Protected Entity" and "Red Feather and Bone," in *Salsa Nocturna: A Bone Street Rumba Collection* (2016), pp. 89-108, 131-148.
Avery F. Gordon, "Introduction to the New Edition," in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), pp. xv-xx.
- T. 02/12 Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (2004), pp. 9-107.
- Th. 02/14 Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (2004), pp. 108-180.
- T. 02/19 Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (2004), pp. 189-264.
- Th. 02/21 **Midterm Exam**
- T. 02/26 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (2017), pp. 3-134 (Chapters 1-21).
- Th. 02/28 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (2017), pp. 137-207 (Chapters 22-35).
- T. 03/05 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (2017), pp. 211-268 (Chapters 36-49).

Refiguring the Human, Rebooting Heroism

- Th. 03/07 Indrapramit Das, "The Runner of n-Vamana," in *Mothership* (2013), pp. 144-151.
 Donna J. Haraway, "An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit," in *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (2016), pp. 5-68.
- T. 03/12 Edmundo Paz Soldán, "Artificial," in *Latin@ Rising* (2017), pp. 114-120.
 Alex Hernandez, "Caridad," in *Latin@ Rising* (2017), pp. 125-142.
 Steve Castro, "Through the Right Ventricle," in *Latin@ Rising* (2017), pp. 121-122.
- Th. 03/14 Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Certain Dark Things: A Novel* (2016), pp. 1-79 (chapters 1-9).
Proposal & Annotated Bibliography Due
- T. 03/19 **Spring break- no classes**
- Th. 03/21 **Spring break- no classes**
- T. 03/26 Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Certain Dark Things* (2016), pp. 80-230 (chapters 10-27).
- Th. 03/28 Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Certain Dark Things* (2016), pp.231-311 (chapters 28-epilogue).
- T. 04/02 G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* (2014)
- Th. 04/04 G. Willow Wilson, Jacob Wyatt, and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 2: Generation Why* (2015)
- T. 04/09 **Peer Review of Final Paper**
- Th. 04/11 *Black Panther* (2018)
 Ytasha L. Womack, "Evolution of a Space Cadet," in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), pp. 5-24.
- T. 04/16 *Black Panther* (2018)
 Carvell Wallace, "Why 'Black Panther' is a Defining Moment for Black America," *The New York Times* (2018)
 adrienne marie brown, "Outro," in *Octavia's Brood* (2015), pp. 279-281.
- Th. 04/18 **Student presentations**
- T. 04/23 **Student presentations**
- Th. 04/25 **Student presentations**
 Reflections
- T. 04/30 **Final Projects Due**