English 824: Quest for Utopia

Instructor: Jaclyn Partyka
Course Time: MWF 11:00am-11:50am
Location: Anderson 204
Office Hours: MW 10:00am-11:00am (Anderson 912) and by appointment
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Course Objectives:
This course, designed to meet the Human Behavior requirement of the General Education program, will examine literature and other texts that express human desires for a utopian ideal and our experiences in realizing, or failing to realize, that ideal. We will read and talk about the actions of individuals and groups as they relate to or separate from a society or community in an attempt to shape a utopia. As we read about utopias and dystopias, we will reflect on how behaviors and assumptions affect and influence utopian desires and visions, and also how such visions become flawed or poisoned. We will look at texts that range from a sixteenth century social commentary, a nineteenth-century feminist utopia, a contemporary speculative fiction novel, and a popular young adult film. We will finally consider plans for utopian communities alongside the experiences of actual modern utopian communities.

This course should develop your thinking, learning, and communication skills, help you identify, access, and evaluate sources of information, and promote curiosity and lifelong learning. It should also give you experience in ethical reflection and help make you aware of current issues.

Required Texts:

*As many of you may know by now, textbooks are expensive! Therefore, I have taken the liberty of scanning a number of our course readings and uploading them to Blackboard [Bb] for your convenience. This task took a fair amount of time and effort, so in return I will expect you to bring these readings to class – either printed or in their electronic forms via your tablet or laptop (NOT your cell phone). This may cost a fair bit of your printing allotment for the semester, but it will hopefully save you money in the long term.*

Attendance:
You are permitted a total of six absences (no distinction will be made between excused and unexcused). Your final grade will be reduced by a half for each absence you acquire over six. Therefore, an A grade with seven absences will be reduced to an A- and so on. The amount of absences you acquire will significantly affect your participation grade. Therefore, if you miss more than six classes, you will be in danger of failing the course. You are responsible for any work missed during class; contact your classmates for appropriate notes.
Assessment:

- Attendance 10%
- Participation & Quizzes 20%
- Daily Papers (4) 20%
- Group Project Presentation 30%
- Final Paper 20%

Assignments:

- **4 daily papers** – The daily papers are two-page responses to the day’s assigned reading or viewing; you can react to what you’ve read or seen, ask questions, or draw connections between the day’s work and previous discussions. Write these papers at your convenience, but they must come to me by e-mail by 5:00 PM the day before the class when your topic will be discussed (for example, if we’re reading the first part of *Oryx and Crake* on Monday, your paper would be mailed to me by 5:00 PM Sunday.) Two of these papers must be turned in before we begin Unit III. These are “daily papers” in the sense that they help us get started each class day; there is really no point to them after the day’s work has been finished and so no late daily papers are accepted. These papers are graded plus, check, or minus; they don’t need to be formal, but they should be finished, edited, and reasonably coherent. They will help us open up topics for discussion and let me know what issues I need to be raising.

- **Group Project Presentation** – Your group project will take one of two forms: a plan for your utopia, or a report on a contemporary utopian project. Whichever project you choose, you will work with an assigned group of about 5 students to present your ideas to the class during the last three weeks of the term. You will not have to agree on all elements of the utopia you present, but you do have to plan a coherent 15-20 minute presentation. The presentation should blend oral presentation, text, and images. You will also need to submit a short 1-page reflection paper along with your presentation which provides an account of the work you have done and identifies each individual’s contribution.

- **Final Paper** – The final paper will synthesize the research and ideas you explored in the group presentation with the readings of this course. This will be a formal academic essay of FIVE (5) pages that should represent the culmination of your thinking about utopian writing and experiments as it has developed throughout this term.

Participation:

This course is structured around close readings and class discussions and various unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. Significant participation in large in-class discussions and small group work activities is an integral part of the course, and will be factored into the final grade. By “significant participation” I mean more than simply coming to class and asking a few questions. I expect students to approach this class with a sense of ownership in it—to come prepared for lively discussion of the texts, to take the lead in completing group assignments and activities, and to let me know how I can make our classes more useful and engaging for students. If you have a question or were confused by a reading, please bring this up in class
discussion. I will also periodically have unscheduled reading quizzes throughout the semester which will be factored into your participation grade. If you come prepared to class having read the course material you should do well on these quizzes. Thoughtful contributions and criticisms are always welcome as long as they are respectful of both your instructor and your classmates. See the University’s Code of Conduct for more information. If you are severely uncomfortable about speaking publically in large groups, please let me know and I will try to make accommodations.

Group work:
Early in the semester you will be assigned to a group of about five students that will last the duration of the semester and culminate in your final project. I will assign this group based on your written preferences due by email to me by Monday 09/02. This group will be the standard configuration for in-class breakout sessions related to discussion of that day’s reading as well as preparations for the final project. You are encouraged to communicate with your group members via email outside of class regarding group projects. If there are any problems with group dynamics, please bring these to my attention as soon as possible.

Resources:
Kristina De Voe, the English department’s resident librarian, has offered a number of resources to assist you with this course. The library has a Quest for Utopia Research Guide available here: http://guides.temple.edu/english824. I have also provided a link on Blackboard. Kristina will also be holding office hours in the English Department Mondays and Tuesdays, 3:00-4:30pm on the 10th floor of Anderson, sitting in front of the elevators.

Policies:
• **E-mail:** Be aware that I will only check e-mail from 9am-9pm from Monday through Friday. I will not check or respond to e-mail outside of these hours, so manage your time thoughtfully. Please include ENG824 in the subject line and sign your messages with your full name. Politeness and professionalism are both expected and appreciated.
• **Phones:** Cell phones must be turned off – not just silenced – and put away. You may NOT read course materials on your smart phone. If you are using your phone in class, you are not “attending” the class discussion; therefore, I WILL mark you absent for the day.
• **Laptops/Tablets:** You are permitted to bring laptops or tablets to class to take notes or read course materials. However, I will warn you (Publically! And probably embarrassingly!) about using Facebook, Instagram, or Candy Crush etc. in class only once. After one warning, you will be blacklisted from the privilege of using a laptop or tablet in class. If you continue to use devices after being blacklisted, I will mark you absent for that day’s class.
• **Food and Beverages:** You may eat and drink in class as long as it does not disturb those around you. Small snacks are permitted – not huge meals. Please clean up after yourself – it is disrespectful to both me and the facilities service if you leave a mess behind.

Disability Accommodations: This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the situation as soon as possible. Students with documented disabilities should work with me and Disability Resources and
Services, who can be contacted at (215) 204-1280, or in their office at 100 Ritter Annex, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

**Course Schedule:**
This schedule may be revised as necessary throughout the semester. Changes to the schedule will be announced in class, via the course Blackboard website, or by e-mail. Please read all readings for the day they are assigned. When readings are due, I expect you to come to class prepared - text in hand – and ready to participate in our discussions.

**Unit I: Utopian Thinking in History**

**Week 1: What is a Utopia?**
M 08/26: Course Introduction and Syllabus
W 08/28: Rothstein “Utopia and its Discontents” (1-28) [Bb]
F 08/30: Continue Rothstein (1-28) [Bb]

**Week 2: Ancient Utopian Thinking**
M 09/02: No class; Labor Day
W 09/04: Plato, *The Republic* (Book II) [Bb]
F 09/06: Continue *The Republic* (Book V, VI, VII) [Bb]

**Week 3: Defining No-place**
M 09/09: Thomas More, *Utopia* (77-92) [Bb]
NOTE: Monday 09/09 is the last day to drop a class
W 09/11: Continue *Utopia* (77-92) [Bb]

**Week 4: Utopian Social Economics**
M 09/16: William Morris, *The News from Nowhere* (273-91) [Bb]
W 09/18: Marx and Engles, *The Communist Manifesto* (54-75) [Bb]
F 09/20: Continue *The Communist Manifesto* (75-86) [Bb]

**Unit II: Utopia and Gender**

**Week 5: A History of Female Utopias**
M 09/23: Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World* (excerpt) [Bb]
W 09/25: Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent* (53-77) [Bb]

**Week 6: Herland**
M 09/30 Continue *Herland* (53-76)
W 10/02 Continue *Herland* (76-108)
F 10/04 Continue *Herland* (108-130)

**Week 7: Herland**
M 10/07 Continue *Herland* (130-152)
W 10/09 Continue *Herland* (152-163)
F 10/11 From *A Woman’s Utopia* (202-5); From “Effects of Literature” (205-8); “As to Parthenogenesis and Humanity” (208-9); From *His Religion and Hers* (209-11)

*Daily papers: You must have turned in two of the four required daily papers by 5:00 PM on Thursday, October 10. If you have not turned in these papers, you will be marked failing on those you have missed.*

**Unit III: Contemporary Utopian Thinking**

**Week 8: Modern Utopias?**
M 10/14 Workshop: Bring in contemporary examples of how you see Utopian thinking in popular media and culture
W 10/16 Kristen A. Williams, “Old Time Mem’ry”: Contemporary Urban Craftivism and the Politics of Doing-It-Yourself in Postindustrial America” [Bb]

**Week 9: Moving towards Dystopia**
M 10/21 Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron” [Bb]

NOTE: Tuesday, 10/22 is the last day to withdraw from a class
W 10/23 Workshop: Final Group Projects
F 10/25 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (3-46)

**Week 10: Oryx and Crake**
M 10/28 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (50-110)
W 10/30 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (113-169)
F 11/01 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (173-218)
**Week 11: Oryx and Crake**
M 11/04 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (222-280)
W 11/06 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (283-329)
F 11/08 Continue *Oryx and Crake* (333-374)

**Week 12: Dystopia in Film**
M 11/11 *The Hunger Games* (film)
W 11/13 *The Hunger Games* (film)
F 11/15 *The Hunger Games* (film)

**Week 13: What would you do? What has been done?**
M 11/18 No class, Work on Group Presentations
W 11/20 Presentations: Groups 1&2
F 11/22 Presentations: Groups 3&4

**Week 14: Your Utopia**
M 11/25 Presentations: Groups 5&6
W 11/27 No class, Thanksgiving Break
F 11/29 No class, Thanksgiving Break

**Week 15: Your Utopia**
M 12/02 Presentations: Groups 7&8; Course wrap-up