

***POSC 31723: Science Fiction and Politics***

Summer 2017

MTWR 11:20 AM - 1:15 PM

Scharbauer Hall 1007

Grant Ferguson

Office Hours

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Immediately after class,

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or by appointment

• **Course Description**

Howdy! In this course, we will cover how science fiction enhances our ability to analyze politics. We will examine how science fiction highlights two methodological tools used in social science analysis, counterfactuals and forecasting. This course will be focused on American politics, but will take advantage of comparative political insights as well. We will devote extra attention to what science fiction can tell us about the nature of government and citizenship, the importance of government structures and institutions, the relationship between the individual and the state, and the role of civil society in government. After drawing conclusions about politics from a variety of science fiction short stories, movies, and TV series, we will apply our knowledge to contemporary issues.

• **Course Learning Outcomes**

To successfully complete this course, you will:

- Demonstrate an ability to use the methodological tools of counterfactuals & forecasting to answer political science questions
- Develop the knowledge & skills necessary to critically evaluate several public policy challenges for American government, including citizenship, immigration, the role of intelligence & expertise in policymaking, & the international challenge of failed states
- Display the capability to identify the political science hypotheses evident in science fiction, & analyze them using empirical evidence & important theories

• **Expectations**

I will do my best to help you achieve the above goals. I expect you to attend class and take notes on what we cover. I do not take attendance, and understand that you will occasionally have good reason to miss class. If you choose to do so, it is your responsibility to get notes from a friend and go over what we covered in your absence.

I also expect you to read the assigned readings. Additionally, I expect you to watch the assigned movies and series. Many of them are available via Hulu, YouTube, Netflix, or Amazon Prime video. If you do not have Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon Prime, you can get a one-month free trial of them (also a student version of Amazon Prime with your tcu.edu email address) that will give you access to many of the videos you need. Please let me know if you have any difficulties related to these services; sometimes all 3 services rotate movies and series in and out. The rest of the movies and series can be borrowed from me or rented cheaply via Amazon Video.

I will lecture under the assumption that you have done that day's reading & watching, and your understanding will be impaired if you choose not to read and watch. It will be difficult for you to do well in this class unless you attend class regularly and do all the course assignments.

Class will include discussion and participation, and I expect you to participate. While the amount you participate is not usually directly linked to your grade, the subjects involved are, because they form the material for exams. If you do not contribute to class interactions, you will not learn as much and your exam grades may suffer accordingly.

While attending class, please keep your phone on silent and be respectful of others. Feel free to strongly disagree with someone during class discussions, but be polite and treat them as you would like to be treated. If you have a question, feel free to raise your hand and ask!

The consequences of current events, public opinion, and elections shape American politics all the time, and therefore will be discussed in lectures and our class discussions. As a result, I expect you to keep abreast of current political events so you can understand the context in which our study of American politics takes place. I suggest finding a news website, political website, or blog that you can enjoy reading on a daily or semi-daily basis. One good (balanced) one is [www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com). If you would like more suggestions, feel free to ask me.

- **Prerequisites**

None but a desire to learn.

- **Grading and Assessment**

I use the standard scale, without +/-:

89.5 - 100 = A

79.5 - 89.4 = B

69.5 - 79.4 = C

59.5 - 69.4 = D

59.4 or below = F

Grade Composition:

3 Non-Cumulative Exams, 25% each

1 Cumulative Final Exam, 25%

We will have 3 tests that only cover material on the syllabus since the last test (or the beginning of the course for Exam 1). These exams will have questions drawn from both the lectures *and the readings/videos*. While the exams may contain questions about specific details, you should focus your studying on key concepts, ideas, and facts. The exams will be comprised of multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer questions.

The final exam will be cumulative, meaning that it will draw on material from lectures and readings/videos throughout the course. Otherwise, it will be similar in format to the previous 3 exams.

- **Exam Dates**

The exam dates for this class are:

- Exam 1: June 13
- Exam 2: June 21
- Exam 3: June 29
- Final Exam: Thursday, July 6, 11:20 AM - 1:15 PM (regular class time)

- **Extra Credit**

I reserve the right to offer bonus extra credit assignments in class. However, unless I offer them in class, there will not be any extra credit assignments for this course.

I will occasionally give unannounced, brief extra credit quizzes in class on topics from the lectures and/or readings and/or videos. If you earn a 100% on one of these quizzes, you will receive an amount of extra credit that I will announce in class before each quiz. If you miss class without an excused absence on one of these days, or earn less than a 100% on one of these quizzes, it will *not* affect your grade in any way. An extra credit quiz can only help you, and cannot hurt you.

- **Taking Exams**

Do not arrive late to exams. If you are late to an exam, you will not receive extra time.

On exam days, please come to class with a pencil or a pen. You are required to write your name on your exam.

Please let me know as soon as you can if you miss an exam. If you miss an exam, you will be able to take a make-up test if your absence is covered by TCU's policy on Official University Absences (which can be found here: [http://www.studenthandbook.tcu.edu/student\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.studenthandbook.tcu.edu/student_handbook.pdf)) or is a properly documented extraordinary circumstance. Extraordinary circumstances include illnesses and personal or family emergencies. You are responsible for providing documentation from Campus Life in the event of an emergency. If an exam is missed due to illness, you must provide me with a note from a doctor or nurse saying that you were unable to take the exam at the scheduled time.

All paperwork related to missing an exam must be turned in promptly (within 1 week of the missed exam), so that I can schedule a make-up as soon as possible. In accordance with TCU policy, rescheduling arrangements for the final exam must be made by e-mail at least one week before the last day of classes.

If your absence is not covered by TCU's policy on Official University Absences or a properly documented extraordinary circumstance, I reserve the right to give you a 0 on your missed exam.

*Note: In accordance with TCU policy, make-up exams will be of the same difficulty as scheduled exams. However, make-up exams may be different, in form and content, than scheduled exams.*

- **Office Hours**

My office hours are listed at the top of the first page. Feel free to stop by with any questions about the course, or anything else you think I can help with. If these times don't work for you, please email me and we can set up an appointment in my office at another time.

- **Required Books, Movies, & Readings**

Books

Allen, Michael A. and Justin S. Vaughn. 2016. *Poli Sci Fi: An Introduction to Political Science through Science Fiction*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.

Van Belle, Douglas A. 2016. *A Novel Approach To Politics: Introducing Political Science Through Books, Movies, and Popular Culture, 4th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

These books are available at the TCU bookstore! Be sure to buy the **4th Edition** of the Van Belle book, as other versions may be different and lack the material you need. Please get it ASAP! Your first assigned reading from it is due Tuesday, June 6th.

### Movies

In order of appearance in the course, you will watch the following movies and program episodes, with directions on how to acquire them below:

- Episode 1 of Season 1 of *The Man In High Castle*
- Episode 4 of Season 1 of *Sliders*
- *The Book of Eli*
- Episode 1 of Season 1 of *The 100*
- *Starship Troopers*
- *District 9*
- *Equilibrium*
- *Jurassic Park*
- *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*
- *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*
- *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*
- *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*
- *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*
- *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*
- *They Live*
- *Interstellar*
- *The Giver*
- *V for Vendetta*
- *Idiocracy*

If you haven't seen them before, you are required to watch *Star Wars: Episodes I, II, III, IV, V, & VI* by June 19th. You can borrow them on DVD from me, or purchase them for yourself.

You need to watch them in numerical order, beginning with *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* & ending with *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. The total running time of all 6 films is approximately 16 hours, so I'd suggest watching them over a couple days.

### Readings

Any additional course readings will be distributed in class or made available online through library course reserves (e-reserves)<sup>1</sup> or other means (JSTOR, Google Scholar, etc.).

Readings (and movies) assigned for a particular day are expected to be done before class that day. Unless otherwise mentioned, I expect you only to read the main body of the text in the textbook reading assignments. This means you do not need to read or know anything in the sidebars, though you may enjoy them.

- **Copyrighted Materials**

The lectures, Beamer or PowerPoint slides, and readings for this course are copyrighted, so you do not have the right to copy and distribute them. Also, I do not give you permission to record class lectures.

- **Academic Misconduct Policy**

Academic Misconduct (Sec. 3.4 from the Student Handbook) Any act that violates the academic integrity of the institution is considered academic misconduct. The procedures used to resolve suspected acts of academic misconduct are available in the offices of Academic Deans and the Office of Campus Life and are listed in detail in the Undergraduate Catalog (Student Policies Academic Conduct Policy Details;

[http://www.catalog.tcu.edu/current\\_year/undergraduate/](http://www.catalog.tcu.edu/current_year/undergraduate/)). Specific examples include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating: Copying from another students test paper, laboratory report, other report, or computer files and listings; using, during any academic exercise, material and/or devices not authorized by the person in charge of the test; collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or laboratory without permission; knowingly using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release; substituting for another student or permitting another student to substitute for oneself.

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<sup>1</sup>You can access these through the library page (<http://library.tcu.edu/research/>).

- Plagiarism: The appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another's work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one's own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another's work without giving credit therefore. I may use Turnitin.com for plagiarism detection.
- Collusion: The unauthorized collaboration with another in preparing work offered for credit.

I take cheating, plagiarism, and collusion very seriously. Don't.

- **Students with Disabilities**

Disabilities Statement: Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 1010. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-6567.

## Course Outline

### June 5: How Science Fiction Analyzes Politics

Read (before our first class): Kreider's "Our Greatest Political Novelist," available at <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/our-greatest-political-novelist>. How does the author view the relationship between science fiction and politics?

- Ershadi's "E3's Dystopian Releases Suggest Technology Isn't Everything," available at <http://thefederalist.com/2016/06/20/e3s-dystopian-releases-suggest-technology-isnt-everything/>

- "Project Hieroglyph: Fighting Society's Dystopian Future," available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28974943>

Watch (before our first class): "Star Trek Gave Us The Cell Phone," available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRXBSr1l084>

### June 6: How Science Fiction Analyzes Politics

Read: Preface, & Chapter 1, pgs. 13-17 (up to "Utopias as Social Statement") in Van Belle

- "Introduction: Science Fiction as a Tool of Political Science" and "Part I: Theory and Epistemology" in Allen and Vaughn

- Ashby's "SF vs. SF," available at (<http://boingboing.net/2012/01/02/sf-vs-sf.html>)

Watch: Season 1, Episode 1 of *The Man In High Castle*, available free via Amazon Prime.

Pay close attention to the political assumptions inherent in what would happen in this alternate history. Do they seem reasonable? Why or why not?

### June 7: Government Formation, Collapse, & Purpose

Read: Chapter 2, pgs. 44-63 in Van Belle

- Stanley Robinson's "Sci-Fi Gives 'Fuzzy' Prediction of the Future, Says Kim Stanley Robinson," available at (<http://www.livescience.com/39909-does-sci-fi-predict-the-future.html>)

- Acemoglu and Robinson's "10 Reasons Countries Fall Apart," available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/18/10-reasons-countries-fall-apart/>

Watch: Season 1, Episode 4 of *Sliders*, available via Hulu.

Pay close attention to the political assumptions inherent in what would happen in this alternate history. Do they seem reasonable? Why or why not? What threatens the downfall of the British government of San Francisco? What does that tell us about government collapse?

#### June 8: Government Formation, Collapse, & Purpose

Read: Chapter 3 in Van Belle

- “Part V: States” in Allen and Vaughn

Watch: *The Book of Eli*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What happens to people in the absence of society and authority? What does this reveal about human nature in anarchy?

- Season 1, Episode 1 of *The 100*, available free via Netflix. What happens in the absence of society and authority? How is life completely different for the people who have returned to Earth? How is it similar to their lives before? How do the answers to these questions fit with the Van Belle reading?

#### June 12: Aliens, Zombies, & Citizenship

Read: Chapter 2, pgs. 63-72 in Van Belle

- Klingler and Chatagnier’s “Are You Doing Your Part? Veterans’ Political Attitudes and Heinlein’s Conception of Citizenship,” available at

[http://www.jtchatagnier.com/Uploads/Are\\_You\\_Doing\\_Your\\_Part\\_Offprint.pdf](http://www.jtchatagnier.com/Uploads/Are_You_Doing_Your_Part_Offprint.pdf)

- “Part VI: Inter-state Relations” in Allen and Vaughn

- Drezner’s “Theory of International Politics and Zombies,” available at

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/08/18/theory-of-international-politics-and-zombies/>

Watch: *Starship Troopers*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What is the nature of citizenship in this new world? What is the nature of the alien? What unites the people of Earth?

- *District 9*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What is the nature of immigration in the movie? What does it have to tell us about immigration issues today? What is the nature of South African society in District 9? How do the prawns affect South African society?

June 13 (T)

Exam 1

June 14: Decision-making, Logic, & Intelligence

Read: Chapter 8 in Van Belle

- Desjardins' "How Algorithms Have Changed The Face Of Wall Street," available at <http://www.visualcapitalist.com/algorithms-changing-wall-street/>

Watch: *Equilibrium*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What are the assumptions about human decision-making made by the post-apocalyptic government of Libria? Are those assumptions realistic? Why or why not? How are the assumptions about political decision-making made by the Librian government and underground reflected in contemporary political issues and debates?

June 15: Decision-making, Logic, & Intelligence

Read: Dettmer's "Minds Like Machines," available at <http://www.economist.com/node/21538698>

- Flores' "Never Mind The Generals, Here Come The Technocrats," available at <http://www.symposium-magazine.com/never-mind-the-generals-here-come-the-technocrats/>

Watch: *Jurassic Park*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What does Hammond's creation of the park symbolize? What does the movie tell us about the limits of computers/artificial intelligence & automation? What does the movie tell us about the limits of human intelligence & logic? How are the answers to these questions related to order, chaos, & politics?

### June 19: Democratic Government & Stability

- Watch by this date (only if you haven't seen them, & **before you do today's reading**): *Star Wars: Episodes I, II, III, IV, V, & VI*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to buy via Amazon Video. We'll discuss them in class starting today.

- *They Live*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. This movie has several strong critiques of American political culture. What are they? What is the role of media in providing or undermining government stability? What does the movie imply about income & social groups?

Read: Chapter 10 in Van Belle

- Chapter 5, pgs. 137-149, in Van Belle

- "Part III: Political Institutions" (EXCEPT Lem's "Are You Divergent?") in Allen and Vaughn

- Masket's "The Star Wars Galactic Senate Needed A Minority Party," available at <http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2015/10/6/9459735/galactic-senate-minority-party>

- The Economist's "What's Gone Wrong With Democracy," available at

<http://www.economist.com/news/essays/>

21596796-democracy-was-most-successful-political-idea-20th-century-why-has-it-run-trouble-and

- Frye's "Representative Democracy and Alternative Models," available at <http://thedemocracypapers.ssrc.org/representative-democracy-and-alternative-models/>

### June 20: Government & Disaster Response

Read: Isaac Asimov's "The Last Question," available at

[http://multivax.com/last\\_question.html](http://multivax.com/last_question.html)

Watch: *Interstellar*, available free via Amazon Prime. What is the disaster that causes American society to fall apart before the chronological start of the movie? What is the disaster that prompts Matthew McConaughey's character to go into space? What political solutions are adopted to solve each of these challenges? Why are they successful or unsuccessful? How are they related to contemporary political debates? What do they tell us about science fiction and analyzing politics in general?

June 21 (W)

Exam 2

June 22: Government, the Nature of Humanity, & Morality

Read: Chapter 6 in Van Belle

Watch: *The Giver*, available free via Netflix. What is the morality in the society in the movie? What fundamental assumption about human nature does this society make? What are the positive political aspects of the society in the movie? What are the negative ones?

June 26: Religion & Government

Read: Pew's "The American-Western European Values Gap," available at

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/11/17/the-american-western-european-values-gap/>

- Ladd's "The Problem With The Galactic Republic Was The Jedi," available at

<http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2015/10/9/9486477/jedi-coup-politics>

June 27: Solving Political Problems: Markets & Individualism vs. Authoritarianism

Read: Ayn Rand's "Anthem," available at

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1250/1250-h/1250-h.htm>

Watch: *V For Vendetta*, available free via Netflix. What enables the authoritarian government to take control of English society? Is the answer a real threat to democratic governments like ours? How this relate to contemporary debates about individual liberty and national security? How does individualism challenge the authority of the state in contemporary American politics? What lessons does the movie have about the serious threat of oppressive government and ways to defeat it?

June 28: Solving Political Problems: Markets & Individualism vs. Authoritarianism

Read: Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," available at

<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/harrison.html>

- Bueno de Mesquita and Downs' "Development and Democracy," available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2005-09-01/development-and-democracy>

June 29 (T)

Exam 3

July 3: American Political Culture: Its Antecedents, Effects, & Future

Read: Chapter 5, pgs. 149-162 in Van Belle

- Chapter 14 in Van Belle

- Gao's "How do Americans stand out from the rest of the world?" available at

[http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/12/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/12/how-do-americans-stand-out-from-the-rest-of-the-world/)

[how-do-americans-stand-out-from-the-rest-of-the-world/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/12/how-do-americans-stand-out-from-the-rest-of-the-world/)

- H. Beam Piper's *A Planet For Texans* (also known as *Lone Star Planet*), available at

<https://archive.org/stream/lonestarpplanet20121gut/pg20121.txt>

- "Part II: Political Behavior" (EXCEPT Evans' "One Choice Can Transform You") in Allen and Vaughn

Watch: *Idiocracy*, available to borrow from Dr. Ferguson or to rent inexpensively via Amazon Video. What is the movie's forecast about America's future? What does it have to do with American political & popular culture? What policy problems does future America have? How are they related to contemporary policy issues?

July 4: Independence Day - No Class

Celebrate the birth of our republic!

July 5: The Future of Media: Threat or Savior?

Read: Chapters 11 & 13 in Van Belle

July 6 (T)

Final Exam

11:20 AM - 1:15 PM (regular class time)