Honors English 0924
Quest for Utopia
Spring 2015
M-W-F 11-11:50
Tuttleman 203

Professor: Ted Howell
Office: 937 Anderson
Email: ted.howell@temple.edu

Ecotopia: Building a Sustainable Society

To “quest for utopia” is to envision a better world, either through imaginative writing or through experiments in living an alternative lifestyle apart from the mainstream. This course will specifically investigate how utopias throughout history have sought to imagine and/or practice a more sustainable relationship between humankind and the environment. Whether it be through efforts to manage the natural world through human ingenuity, or through a return to a more "natural" way of living, human beings have written, discussed, and even built ecologically-minded utopian societies. Through readings of classic literary, evaluations of real-world efforts to live more a more sustainable, and current, more technologically-infused manifestations of the utopian impulse, we will explore how the quest for utopia can help us imagine a better, more sustainable future for the human race.

Required texts (available online and in the Temple University bookstore). It is essential that you obtain the exact same version listed below, so I’ve included ISBN numbers.

- Walden, Henry David Thoreau. ISBN: 978-0807014257
- Herland, Charlotte Perkins Gilman. ISBN: 978-0486404295
- Oryx and Crake, Margaret Atwood. ISBN: 978-0385721677
- PDF Course Packet (CP) – available on Blackboard

Course Requirements and Grading

Class Participation: 15%
Mid-term Exam: 15%
Group Assignment: 15%
Online Participation: 15%
2 Mini-Essays: 20% (10% each)
Final Paper: 20%
Class Participation (15%)
To ensure that we make the most of our time together, come well-prepared for each class period, having not only read the day’s assignment, but annotated it, thought about it, and anticipated what aspects of the reading you wish to discuss in class. I will keep note of your participation. It’s not enough that you merely attend each class – you must also participate. Be prepared to answer questions from me about the day’s reading, or to respond to it in writing during class.

Don’t even think about taking out your phone, tablet or laptop during class unless you have received special permission from me. Anything electronic can wait. Suffice to say that if you’re looking at your phone, you’re not participating.

Mid-term Exam (15%)
The mid-term exam will consist of a handful of short answer questions, and one longer essay-style response to a prompt. No need to write full sentences to answer the short questions – just provide the correct answer. For the essay, you’ll want to write at least 2 chunky paragraphs in response to the topic you choose. Be straightforward and provide support for your answer.

Group Assignment (15%)
Your group project will take one of two forms: a plan for a utopia of your own, or a report on a contemporary utopian project. Whichever project you choose, you will work with an assigned group of 3-5 students to present your ideas to the class. You will not have to agree on all elements of the utopia you present, but you do have to plan a coherent 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. A detailed handout about the group assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Online Participation (15%)  
Note. We will discuss the specific format for the online portion of our course on the first day of class in order to choose a workflow that works well for everyone. Whatever we decide, take note of three things: (1) you will be graded holistically at the end of the semester, rather than by individual contributions. (2) At midterm, you will write an “Audit” of your online work that reflects upon your contributions to that point of the semester. For this assignment, you’ll be, in a sense, blogging about blogging. (2) At the close of the course, you’ll return to this Audit and reflect once again upon your online participation.

Real talk: online participation needs to be more than just “busy work” to be meaningful. As I see it, the purpose of creating an online portion of the course, in whatever form we choose, is three-fold: first, to provide a space for you to share your work with the rest of the class, not with me only, and to interact with one another beyond the bounds of the classroom. Second, it will remind us that the issues we are considering in this course are of great significance, and that it’s our role as learners, thinkers, and writers, to think in public and share our expertise with others. Third, it enables you as a student and me as a teacher to come into class having thought carefully about that day’s reading, and to gain a sense of what your peers are thinking about before class even begins.
2 Mini-Essays (10% each)
Twice throughout the semester you will write a “mini-essay” on a topic of your choice. You must submit one mini-essay before Spring Break and another one afterwards. Before you write your mini-essay, you will “pitch” the idea to me, either in person, via email, or online. This will give me a chance to provide you with some helpful guidance and give you a chance to sit with the idea before writing about it. A mini-essay is a 2-3 page treatment of one of the course readings, or even of one passage or section of a reading. The most important aspect of your mini-essay is that you have a point you wish to make and spend some time working through this point in writing. As you read, think about what issues, passages, topics, or ideas really grab you—stuff that’s really thought-provoking. You may also find that a class discussion gives you a good idea for a mini-essay, or that you want to extend an online post or question into a mini-essay. As I see it, there are two good ways to write these mini-essays: you can either go deeper into a text or passage—really digging into it, analyzing it, picking it apart to see how it works—or you can take a text or passage and expand it into a larger issue—maybe something that’s important to you about contemporary society (e.g. education, scientific research, politics, gender roles, art, public health etc.)

Your mini-essays will be graded on a 4.0 scale (C+, B, A-, etc.). I will be grading them by three criteria: engagement with the text or passage (that you really understand it and care about it), the originality of your points (that you’re coming at it from your own perspective, rather than restating common knowledge about the subject), and the connections that you make between either the ideas in the text or the larger issue you’re writing about.

Final Paper (20%)
The final paper will synthesize the research and ideas we have explored throughout the course. This will be a formal academic essay of 5 pages that should represent the culmination of your thinking about utopian writing and experiments as it has developed throughout this term. So that I can tailor it to the interests of our class, I will provide a detailed handout about the final paper later in the semester (well before it is due, I promise). We will work periodically on the final paper (brainstorming, discussing, outlining, freewriting) in the weeks leading up to the due date.

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 also significantly affect your participation. Therefore, if you miss more than six classes, you may quickly be in danger of failing the course. You are responsible for any work missed during class; contact your classmates for appropriate notes.
Email
I am happy to answer questions over email, and I will get back to you within 24 hours (except on
the weekends, when I'll be less quick to respond, if I respond at all). However, **before** you write
to ask a question, be sure that it is not a question that can be answered by looking at the syllabus
and that it’s a question that can’t wait until the next class period. It’s much better for everyone if
you ask questions during class – that way everyone can benefit from the clarification.

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 at
guides.temple.edu/english824.

Policies
Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should
contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability
Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable
accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The
University has a policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy
#03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link:
http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.

Academic Dishonesty
Plagiarism and Violating the Rules of an Assignment (Excerpted from the Temple University
Statement on Academic Honesty for Students in Undergraduate Courses)

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor: another person's ideas, words,
or assistance. In general, all sources must be identified as clearly, accurately, and thoroughly as
possible. Academic cheating is, in general terms, the thwarting or breaking of the general rules
of academic work and/or the specific rules of individual courses. It includes falsifying data;
submitting, without the instructor's approval, work in one course that was done for another;
helping others to plagiarize or cheat from one's own or someone else's work; or actually doing
the work of another person.

**Penalties for Academic Dishonesty**
The penalty for dishonesty can vary from a reprimand and receiving a failing grade
for a particular assignment, to failure for the course, to suspension or expulsion
from the University. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, ask
BEFORE you hand in the work. It will be too late afterwards.
Course Schedule
This schedule may be revised as necessary throughout the semester.
Changes to the schedule will be announced in class or via email.

Key
(CP) = Course Packet

Week 1: Why Utopia?
M 1/12 First Day
W 1/14 Ruth Levitas, “Introduction” to The Concept of Utopia (CP)
F 1/16 Devon Maloney, “2014 Kinda Sucked: A Look at Our Slow Descent Into Dystopia” (CP)

Week 2: Classic Utopias
M 1/19 NO CLASS (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
W 1/21 Plato, from The Republic (CP)
F 1/23 Thomas More, from Utopia (CP)

Week 3: The Politics of Utopia: Another World is Possible
M 1/26 Erik Olin Wright, from Envisioning Real Utopias (CP)
W 1/28 Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party (54-75) (CP)
F 1/30 Manifesto of the Communist Party (75-86) (CP)

Week 4: Working in Utopia
M 2/2 William Morris, News from Nowhere, Chapters 1-8
W 2/4 News from Nowhere, Chapters 9-15
F 2/6 News from Nowhere, Chapters 18-20, 32

Week 5: One Man’s Utopia
M 2/9 Henry David Thoreau, Walden 1-73 (“Economy”)
W 2/11 Walden 122-132 (“Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”)
F 2/13 Walden 299-312 (“Conclusion”)

Weeks 6-7: The Gender of Utopia
Noah Berlatsky, “Imagine There's No Gender: The Long History of Feminist Utopian Literature” (CP)
W 2/18 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland 1-31
F 2/20 Herland 32-61
M 2/23 Herland 62-92
W 2/25 Herland 93-124
F 2/27 Mid-term Exam

3/2-6 = SPRING BREAK
Week 8: What Comes after Utopia?
W 3/11   *The Time Machine* 32-75
F 3/13   *The Time Machine* 76-86

H.G. Wells, from “The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Suggestions” & “Popularizing Science” (CP)

Week 9: An Ecological Utopia
M 3/16    Ernest Callenbach, from *Ecotopia* 1-37 & 77-97 (CP)
W 3/18    from *Ecotopia* 107-115, 126-144 & 163-165 (CP)
F 3/20    Ernest Callenbach, “Epistle to the Ecotopians” (CP)

Week 10: Utopia and Science Fiction
W 3/25    Kim Stanley Robinson, selections from *Red Mars* (CP)
F 3/27    *The Hunger Games* (in-class movie viewing)

Week 11: The Popularity of Dystopia
3/30     Andrew O’Hehir, “‘Divergent’ and ‘Hunger Games’ as capitalist agitprop” (CP)
4/1      Group Presentations: Group 1
4/3      Group Presentations: Group 2

Weeks 12-14: Margaret Atwood’s Speculative Future
M 4/6      Margaret Atwood, “Writing *Oryx and Crake*” & “The Road to Utopia” (CP)
W 4/8      *Oryx and Crake* 3-33
F 4/10     *Oryx and Crake* 34-92

J. R. Hennessy, “The tech utopia nobody wants: why the world nerds are creating will be awful” (CP)

M 4/13     *Oryx and Crake* 95-144
W 4/15     *Oryx and Crake* 147-169

Benjamin A. Wurgaft, “The In Vitro Meat Cookbook” (CP)
F 4/17     *Oryx and Crake* 173-238

M 4/20     *Oryx and Crake* 241-329
W 4/22     *Oryx and Crake* 333-374 (end)
F 4/23     Johnathan Miles, “The Billionaire King of Techtopia” (CP)

M 4/27     Last Day
Utopia: Group Project

Your final 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 your group to present your ideas to the class during the last few weeks of the term. You will not have to agree on all elements of the utopia you present (you can offer alternatives and minority views), but you do have to plan a coherent presentation.

Suggestion: a great place to start with research is the library’s Quest for Utopia research page: guides.temple.edu/english824

Option A: Your Utopia

As a group, you will give an account of a utopian society, either as a description of a fictional utopia or a proposal for founding a society. Either way, you should address at least some of the issues that we have investigated in this course: in your utopia, what is your attitude towards the natural world? Where is your utopia located in space and time? How is your utopia governed? How do men and women relate to each other? How are children educated? (Please do not feel the need to answer all of these questions, or only these questions—they’re for guidance).

You should also consider the obstacles or shortcomings that your utopian society will have to overcome. Who is included in your utopia? Who is excluded? Can people enter or leave? How will this society deal with change? (Again, you won’t need to answer all of these questions, but your project should take most of these issues into account).

In proposing/describing your utopian society, you should draw comparisons to the texts we have read in class and the issues we have discussed. Your presentation can be either serious or humorous, or both, and it should include talk, written texts, and images. (What does a city look like in your utopia? What about a house? What do people wear?)

Since this is in part an imaginative and creative project, you are permitted, if you choose, to construct conditions for your fictionalized utopia that are not fully realistic – similar to Gilman’s play on parthenogenesis in Herland. However, such fictionalizations should be justified in relation to your utopia’s overall vision and part of your presentation will need to reflect on the role of fiction/science-fiction in utopian thinking.

The presentation itself should be twenty minutes long. Not every member of the group needs to speak, but every member needs to contribute to the presentation in some identifiable way. After you present, we will, as a class, respond to your presentation with questions, comments, and discussion.

After the presentation, you will hand in a one-page account of the work you have done, identifying each individual’s contribution.

You will also have to submit a works cited page for any outside research you complete.
Option B: Utopia on the Ground
If you choose this option, you will give a critical account of a currently existing utopian project. The project you choose can be either a functioning community or a proposal for one. Your presentation should include three elements:

- Describe the community. Does it have a history? Who are its members? How does it support itself? How are decisions made? What is distinctive about this community?
- Relate this community to the issues we have discussed in class. Have the issues we have encountered in utopian literature surfaced for this community? How have they been resolved?
- Analyze this community. What choices have the members of this community made? What have they gained, and what have they lost? What distinctive contributions does this community make? What problems does it face?

Your presentation should include all three of these elements, but you do not have to give them equal emphasis. Your presentation can be either serious or humorous, or both, and it should include talk, written texts, and images. (What does this community look like? What are meals like? How does it relate to the surrounding environment?)

The presentation itself should be twenty minutes long. Not every member of the group needs to speak, but every member needs to contribute to the presentation in some identifiable way. After you present, we will, as a class, respond to your presentation with questions, comments, and discussion.

After the presentation, you will hand in a one-page account of the work you have done, identifying each individual’s contribution.

You will also have to submit a works cited page for any outside research you complete.