The study of utopia (a genre that includes dystopia) is a staple of political thought. Imagining how we might structure our lives in radically better ways has yielded imagined systems of living together as varied as Plato’s *Republic*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*. In the study of politics utopian and dystopian spaces provide both experimental spaces for imagining how people live together and fodder for thinking about how we live now and how we might live differently.

In this class we will three contemporary novels and three novels from the turn of the last century. I have paired these with the goal of examining how these warnings and imaginings complement and instruct us today. The success of this class is dependent on everyone’s close reading and thoughtful participation. We will likely disagree, which is expected! Underneath the relevant particular issues, each author is interested to consider how humans live together and what tears us apart.

This class is also sustainability related. Utopian studies itself is enmeshed within sustainability even if the two academic discourses do not often intersect. Each of the novels that we read has an understanding of what sustainable and unsustainable means in terms of the warnings the novels set for readers and the imaginings of what might be better.

**Student learning outcomes:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of key utopian texts (exams and papers)
- Apply ideas about utopia and dystopia to new situations (papers and project)
- Identify policies and practices that have led to unsustainability (paper)
- Design a solution to a given sustainability problem (project)

**Required Texts:**

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
Evgeny Zamiatin, *We*
Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*
Margaret Atwood, *Year of the Flood*
Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
Mark Jendrysik, *Utopia*
Course Requirements:

3 papers (10% each) 30%
3 exams (10% each) 30%
Participation 15%
Project 15%
Reflection 10%

Course scale:
A (93-100)  A- (90-92)  B+ (87-89)  B (84-86)  B- (80-83)  C+ (77-79)
C (74-76)  C- (70-73)  D+ (67-69)  D (64-66)  D- (60-63)  F (0-59)

Schedule of Readings:

8/26: Introduction: what is utopia?

8/31: **Reading**: Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walked away from Omelas” and N.K. Jemisin, “The Ones Who Stayed and Fight” (please read in this order, Le Guin and then Jemisin) (OAKS)

**Discussion**: identify three ways in which Jemisin is responding to Le Guin, highlight the moment in the Le Guin story where you thought everything might not be as it seemed. For both stories identify at least two ways in which the stories are utopian (to you).

9/2: **Reading**: Mark Jendrysik, *Utopia*, pp. 1-56 (chs. 1-4)

**Discussion**: Jendrysik talks about utopia as dream, escape, method, plan, connect these modes to the short stories.

Unit 1: Is Nature the answer?

9/7: **Reading**: Margaret Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, pp. 3-131

9/9: **Reading**: Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, pp. 132-192

9/14: **Reading**: Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, pp. 195-308

9/16: **Reading**: Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, pp. 311-434

Paper due date

9/21: **Reading**: Eugene Zamiatin, *We*, First to Twenty Fifth entry
9/23: **Reading:** Eugene Zamiatin, *We*, Twenty Sixth to Fortieth entry

Exam due by 9/25, 11:59, on OAKS)

**Unit 2: Utopia: skeptical and dogmatic**

9/28: No Class (Yom Kippur)

9/30: **Reading:** Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, pp. 1-125 (chs. 1-4)

10/5: **Reading:** Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, pp.126-191 (chs. 5-6)

10/7: **Reading:** Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, pp.192-307 (chs. 7-9)

10/12: **Reading:** Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, pp. 308-387) (chs. 10-13)

10/14: **Reading:** Le Guin “The Day Before the Revolution” (OAKS)

**Paper due date**

10/19: **Reading:** Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, Chs I-XV

10/21: **Reading:** Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, Chs XVI-XXVIII

10/26: Jendrysik, Chs. TBD

Exam due by 10/27, 11:59

**Unit 3: Postapocalyptic Community**

10/28: **Reading:** Evie Shockley, “Separation Anxiety”

**Initial project idea due**

11/2: **Reading:** Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chs 1-8

11/4: **Reading:** Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chs 9-16

11/9: **Reading:** Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chs 17-21

11/11: **Reading:** Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chs 22-25

**Paper due date**

11/16: **Reading:** Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *Herland*, Chs 1-6

11/18: **Reading:** Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *Herland*, Chs 7-12

11/23: Jendrysik, Chs, TBD

Exam due by 11/25, 11:59

11/30: online, project presentations

12/2: online, project presentations

Final project due by 2pm on 12/11 (OAKS)
**Class participation**: Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the daily reading. Discussion questions will be posted on OAKS to help guide the reading. In addition, there will be open discussion threads for students to share ideas about links between what we are reading and happenings in the world. These questions will help guide our discussion in class, and will give a space for more active participation for those of you who are less excited about speaking up in class! Threads particular to the novels we are reading will be closed after we complete that novel.

Assuming that we will be able to meet in person, each in person class time will only be able to have 11 students present. We shall discuss in the first few weeks the best system for dividing students into groups. There will be discussion threads for students not in class for any given day and students who will keep track of in class discussions, posting those on OAKS.

**Short papers**: Students are assigned three short 3-5 page papers analyzing some aspect of the class readings. Paper prompts will be available on OAKS. Each paper must include textual evidence for the argument you are making. Papers will be turned in on OAKS (please do not upload documents saved in pages! Save those documents in pdf format before uploading!).

Any failure to cite materials used for papers in this class is considered plagiarism. **Plagiarism is pretending as if the words and ideas of another are in fact yours. This includes a failure to use quotations, a failure to indicate when you are paraphrasing and the failure to give credit to the author whose ideas you are using. Plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code and will be treated as such.**

**Final projects**: each student will choose one idea that they think can make a radical difference for the better in the world. On OAKS you will submit your idea and the initial pieces of your project. By the end of the semester your project will include the following: an explanation of the idea (e.g. how does the technology work), an explanation for why the idea will produce radical change for the better (why it will work), a discussion of who supports the use of this idea, a connection between the idea and one of the novels we have read and an explanation for how its use could potentially go terribly wrong. More information on this project will be distributed mid semester.

**Additional Policies:**

**OAKS:**

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.
Accommodations: The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.

Food and Housing Resources

Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php). Also, you can go to http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need.

Weather: In the event of class being cancelled on account of the weather, I expect you to use OAKS and to have your books available. Every effort will be made to have discussions online during a weather event.