

## Course Proposal

### English 372: Science Fiction and/or Fantasy

#### A. *Course objectives*

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is hard to deny the conspicuousness, cultural importance, and intrinsic value of the varieties of so-called “speculative fiction” (an umbrella term that is still not universally recognized, otherwise we would have used it in the course title). Once “niche” phenomena, science fiction and fantasy are now consumed right across the cultural spectrum, by mass and “cult” audiences alike, and in a range of media, including film, television, graphic novel and digital media, as well as print. Science fiction and fantasy works have “crossed over” multiple times in recent decades to the sphere of serious literary fiction, and vice-versa, literary fiction has recurrently embraced the themes and conventions of science fiction and fantasy. Of all the current genres of popular fiction, none is more deserving of serious academic attention.

In view of the literary value and cultural importance of fantasy and science fiction, the absence from the current OSU undergraduate English curriculum of any course specifically devoted to these genres appears to be a serious oversight. In recent years, fantasy and science fiction have been nomadic genres, with no curricular home of their own. Science fiction has been taught in an ad hoc fashion at the 200 level, as well as under the rubrics of English 561 and 575, upper-level “special topics” courses that fill readily whenever this particular topic has been offered. It seems high time to give fantasy and science fiction a more secure foothold in the undergraduate curriculum, especially at a time when we are seeking ways to build new bridges between the sciences and the humanities.

English 372 is conceived (and titled) in such a way that it could be delivered in a variety of packages, to address a range of student and faculty interests, as the accompanying sample syllabi will confirm. It could, first of all, be designed as a course on science fiction alone, *or* as a course on fantasy literature alone, *or* as a course on both science fiction *and* fantasy literature. It could adopt a formalist approach, addressing the poetics of science fiction and/or fantasy, or it could approach them from a historicist or cultural-studies perspective. As a historically-oriented course, it could cover these genres’ modern history from the nineteenth century on (and perhaps even “flash back” to earlier precursors), or it could focus on particular periods or historical episodes in their development. It could emphasize specific varieties of science-fiction or fantasy, *e.g.*, feminist fantasy, African-American science fiction. It could emphasize particular themes or topics, *e.g.*, medievalism, the cyborg figure, alternative history. Finally, it could restrict itself to written texts exclusively, or could incorporate materials in other media: film, television, graphic novels, video games, *etc.*

### *B. Course rationale*

English 372 will complement the English Department's curricular offerings in a number of growth areas, including Twentieth & Twenty-First Century Literature, Popular Culture, Film and Narrative Theory. Apart from filling a gap in the undergraduate English curriculum, this course is ideally suited for inclusion in the General Education Curriculum (presumably under the Literature section of the Arts and Humanities "Breadth" category). Fantasy and science fiction appeal to students majoring in scientific, engineering and other fields outside the Humanities, as well as to those in the Arts and Humanities, so English 372 is likely to attract non-majors, and to enroll heavily from outside the College. It has the potential to function as a "gateway" course to the discipline of English, engaging the interest of students who might not otherwise have considered English studies, and inducing at least some of them to minor in English, and perhaps even to become English majors. There are at present at least six faculty members (Galvan, Gardner, Heaphy, Hewitt, McHale, Tannenbaum) who have expressed interest in teaching a version of this course, and have the expertise to do so, and no doubt others would welcome the opportunity to teach it from time to time. Given this level of faculty interest, and the very high level of interest we can confidently expect on students' part, we should certainly be able to offer and fill English 372 at least once a year.

### *C. Assessment plan*

This course will be assessed during its first five years by the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

#### 1. Indirect measures.

- Course evaluations (SEI) will be evaluated to determine how well the class is fulfilling its goals in the eyes of the students.
- Students are asked to complete a discursive evaluation which the instructor will consider after each iteration of the course in order to assure that course objectives are being met.
- At year 3 and 5 of the assessment, we will conduct a sample follow-up survey of 25 randomly selected students who had taken English 372 earlier in their careers to assess the long-term benefits of and satisfaction with the class.

#### 2. Direct Measure

- Written assignments, i.e. written essays, will be used to determine if learning outcomes as stated in each syllabus, are being met.