



NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ENG 1773 Weird Science: Interpreting and Redefining Humanity

Flexible Core: Individual and Society

College Option: Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts and Sciences course

Spring 2016 (3 credits)

Prerequisites: ENG 1101, CUNY proficiency in mathematics; students must also have a level of computer competency necessary for taking an online course.

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Office: Namm 525

Office Hours: Thursday from 10:00 a.m.–noon

Class Location: Namm Hall, room N 921

Meets Thursday 2:30 to 3:45 p.m. on 2/4, 2/18, 2/25, 3/24, 4/7, 4/21, 5/5, 5/12, and 5/19.

All other days, 2:30 to 5:00 p.m.

Course Description

This writing-intensive interdisciplinary course will allow students to explore the literature of shifting and expanding definitions of humanity and post-humanity from the perspectives of the natural and social sciences, technology, and engineering, incorporating digital media.

Course Goals

To provide and engage students with an understanding of ideas and connections in the natural and social sciences, technology, and engineering, including:

- Cultural factors that affect these disciplines
- Philosophical, historical, and ethical perspectives
- Methods for finding pertinent information
- Critical evaluation of ideas and their sources
- Developing the critical writing skills to discuss these ideas in an academic context
- Using multimedia and simulations to communicate information

Final Course Grade Breakdown

Annotated bibliographies	10%
Case studies	30%
Responsible Conduct of Research certification	5%
Midterm literature review	10%
Interdisciplinary project proposal presentation	5%
Final paper topic proposal	5%
Group interdisciplinary project	10%
Group interdisciplinary project presentation	5%
Final paper	20%

Annotated bibliographies: Write one paragraph summarizing, assessing and reflecting on assigned course readings. Research your topic and find references that will support your thesis. Evaluate any new references that you have added to the class readings for relevance, expertise, currency, accuracy, and purpose.

Case studies: Complete assignments before class, in class, and after class, as directed. Facilitated by guest lecturers, these may include answering pre-case questions individually prior to undertaking the case study in class, working on case questions in small groups in class, and submitting an individual write-up to these questions after class. Also, answer post-case study questions, as appropriate.

Midterm literature review: Write a five-page review of the literature addressing *On Being Human*, using pertinent readings from the course to date.

Group project proposal presentation: Using your media of choice, individually propose your idea of where you think humanity is going based two or more disciplinary perspectives presented by the guest lecturers, and explain how you intend to create a virtual world that represents this idea. The best few ideas will be chosen to move forward and be developed as part of a group.

Final paper topic proposal: After contacting at least two of the guest lecturers (one from each of the two parts of this course) and having your topic approved by me, write a one-page description of your proposed final term paper. Be sure to note the two or more disciplines that will inform your research, your working title, a clear thesis statement, and your concept map.

Group project: Imagine a future world that represents the connection between two or more disciplinary perspectives presented by the guest lecturers (e.g., combining psychology and physics to depict heightened visual perception, allowing avatars to see the quantum world and move between atoms and nature, as well as interactions that explore the relationship between the individual and society). With your group, create a virtual world that represents this redefined humanity and define what it means to be human in a virtual world. Animate your simulation as appropriate. Engineer the virtual space to meet the interdisciplinary needs of your project.

Final group presentation: Explain the interdisciplinary nature of your project. Demonstrate important aspects of your virtual world and provide the rationale for its appearance, movements, and interactions. Be sure that each member of the group has a role in this presentation.

Final paper: Write a 10-page term paper. Revise and expand your midterm literature review to include topics, concepts, and readings from the second half of this course—*On Being Virtually Human* (or *On Being Human Virtually*)—that are pertinent to your thesis. Including at least six additional references that support your thesis. Web sites will be considered as supplementary references, not as primary references.

Required Format for Papers

All papers should be typed with 12-point standard font (e.g., Times New Roman or Arial). Page margins should be 1-inch on all sides. Handwritten papers will not be accepted.

Policy for Late Papers

Assignments should be handed in at the beginning of class. If an assignment is turned in late because of an emergency, the grade will decrease as follows:

One day late: One letter grade reduction for the assignment for each day late.

One class late: No credit for the assignment.

New York City College of Technology Policy on Academic Integrity:

Students and all others who work with information, ideas, texts, images, music, inventions, and other intellectual property owe their audience and sources accuracy and honesty in using, crediting, and citing sources. As a community of intellectual and professional workers, the College recognizes its responsibility for providing instruction in information literacy and academic integrity, offering models of good practice, and responding vigilantly and appropriately to infractions of academic integrity. Accordingly, academic dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and at New York City College of Technology and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion. The complete text of the College policy on Academic Integrity may be found in the catalog.

Attendance and lateness:

You are expected to attend each class meeting. A student may be absent without penalty for ten percent (10%) of the number of scheduled class meetings during the semester. This percentage translates to two allowable absences from class. Two instances of lateness will equal one absence. For online meetings, students who did not complete the online assignment due on a given date will be marked absent that day.

Required Text

Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. 30th ann. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Kakalios, James. *The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics: A Math-Free Exploration of the Science That Made Our World*. New York: Gotham Books, 2011.

Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Crown Publishing, 2011.

Additional materials to read or view assigned for each class (see Course Calendar).

Course Calendar

Week	Topics	Online Assignments
1 February 4	<p>Introduction to an interdisciplinary writing-intensive hybrid course: topics, guest lecturers, requirements, multimedia and virtual world simulation applications.</p> <p>What does it mean to be human? Prior knowledge assessment, writing diagnostic</p> <p>Preparing an annotated bibliography</p>	Annotate: Clarke, "Why Africana History?" and Skloot, "Prologue: The Woman in the Photograph"

Part I: On Being Human

2 February 11 (PHIL)*	<p><i>Descartes and the Problems of Seeing Ourselves</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Laureen Park, Philosophy, School of Arts & Sciences</p> <p><i>The Terri Schiavo Case: Legal, Ethical, and Medical Perspectives</i></p>	<p>Read Aristotle "Nichomachean Ethics, Books I" sections 1-7 (skip 6 if so desired); Descartes "Meditations II: On the nature of the human mind; and that it is more easily known than the body"</p> <p>Annotate: Leland, "Did Descartes Doom Terri Schiavo?" and Slotnik, "Brittany Maynard, 'Death With Dignity' Ally, Dies at 29"</p>
3 February 18 (DEN)	<p><i>Soul Searching</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Gwen Cohen-Brown, Dental Hygiene, School of Professional Studies</p> <p>Read excerpts from <i>The Selfish Gene</i></p>	<p>Case study 1 due</p> <p>Watch <i>Where Did We Come From?</i></p> <p>Annotate: Skloot, "Part One: Life"</p>

* Parentheses include disciplinary perspectives that can be used to facilitate this interdisciplinary course on the enduring question of what it means to be human.

Week	Topics	Online Assignments
4 February 25 (NUR)	<i>Gender & Sexuality Studies</i> <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Chapter 17, "Illegal, Immoral, and Deplorable" Guest Lecturer: Dr. Aida Egues, Nursing, School of Professional Studies	Case study 2 due Annotate: Huxtable and Woodley, "Gaining Face or Losing Face? Framing the Debate on Face Transplants" and Bissinger, "Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story"
5 March 3 (PSY)	<i>Human Subject Research Ethics</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Jean E. Hillstrom, Chair, Department of Social Sciences CUNY University Integrated IRB Member https://www.citiprogram.org	Annotate: Skloot, "Part Two: Death" and "Part Three: Immortality" Watch video clips and take notes
6 March 10 (ECON/SOC)	<i>I Consume, Therefore I Am: Capitalism's Humanity</i> Guest Lecturers: Dr. Costas Panayotakis, Sociology and Dr. Sean P. MacDonald Economics, School of Arts & Sciences	Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) certification due Annotate: selections from Panayotakis Watch <i>The Story of Stuff</i> and <i>Meltdown: The Men Who Crashed the World</i>
7 March 17 (ENG/LIB)	Concept mapping <i>Visual Understanding Environment (VUE)</i> http://vue.tufts.edu <i>Literature Review RECAP</i> Guest Lecturer: Librarian Nora Almeida	Annotated bibliography draft due online

Part 2: On Being Virtually Human (or On Being Human Virtually)

Week	Topics	Online Assignments
8 March 24 (CST/ENG)	<i>A Network of Everything: Ecology, Complexity, and the Ways of being Human</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Candido Cabo, Computer Systems Technology, School of Technology & Design	Midterm literature review due online Annotate: Kakalios, "Introduction: Quantum Physics? You're Soaking in It!" and "Section 1: Tales to Astonish"
9 March 31 (ENT)	<i>Modeling Real Identity in the Virtual</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. David Smith, Dean, School of Professional Studies	Case study 3 due Create an avatar in Second Life, then log onto Second Life and go through the orientation. https://join.secondlife.com
10 April 7 (ARCH/MAT)	<i>The Vitruvian Man, Le proporzioni del corpo umano secondo Vitruvio</i> Guest Lecturers: Paul C. King, RA Architectural Technology, School of Technology & Design and Dr. Janet Liou- Mark, Director of the Honors Scholars Program Mathematics, School of Arts & Sciences	Annotate: Kakalios, "Section 2: Challengers of the Unknown" focus on Chapters 6, "The Equation That Made the Future!" and 7, "The Uncertainty Principle Made Easy" and "Section 4: Weird Science Stories"
11 April 14	Interdisciplinary proposal presentations and group assignments	Annotate: Kakalios, "Section 6: The World of Tomorrow" focus on Chapter 21, "Seriously, Where's My Jet Pack?"
12 April 21 (PHYS)	<i>Quantum Mechanics and the Soul: The Absence of Evidence is not Evidence of Absence</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Reginald A. Blake, Physics, School of Arts & Sciences	Final paper topic proposal due online Attend Research Mixer Wednesday, May 4, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., Namm 119

Week	Topics	Online Assignments
13 May 5	Final paper discussion and group project workshop	Annotated bibliography due online Group project draft due
14 May 12	Group project student critiques and remodeling workshop, as needed	Optional final paper draft due online (optional)
15 May 19	Group interdisciplinary project presentations What does it mean to be virtually human?	Final paper due

Bibliography

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