



# NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

## ***ENG 1773 Weird Science: Interpreting and Redefining Humanity*** Spring 2015 (3 credits)

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

Prof. Reneta D. Lansiquot, Ph.D.  
[rlansiquot@citytech.cuny.edu](mailto:rlansiquot@citytech.cuny.edu)

**Office:** Namm 525  
**Office Hours:** Wednesday noon to 2:00 p.m.

**Class Location:** Wednesday 2:30 to 3:45 p.m., Namm Hall, room N 601B

### **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 bibliography	10%
Case studies	30%
Responsible Conduct of Research certification	5%
Midterm literature review	10%
Group project proposal presentation	5%
Final paper topic proposal	5%
Group project	10%
Final group presentation	5%
Final paper	20%

Annotated bibliography: 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. Include online references, as appropriate.

Group project proposal presentation: Using your media of choice, individually propose your idea of where you think humanity is going and how you will simulate this trajectory in an online virtual world. We will consider all ideas, and the best few 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. Attach your updated annotated bibliography and then post your entire proposal online. We will discuss all topics in class.

Group project: Imagine the future (molecule, animal, human or beyond, as well as future interactions that explore the relationship between the individual and society) and, with your group, create a representation (an avatar) of what it means to be human in a virtual world. Animate, simulate, and annotate your avatar, as appropriate. Engineer the virtual space to meet the needs of the prediction (i.e., the virtual human and its required interactions).

Final group presentation: Explain the process, demonstrate an important aspect of your avatar, and provide the rationale for its appearance, movements, interactions, and surroundings. 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**

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.

### **Recommended Text**

Dawkins, Richard. *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*. New York: Norton, 2004.

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

## Course Calendar

Week	Topics	Online Assignments
<b>1</b> January 28	<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

<b>2</b> February 4 (ENG/PHIL)*	<p><i>Descartes and the Problems of Seeing Ourselves</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Laureen Park, Philosophy, School of Arts &amp; 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>
<b>3</b> February 11 (BIO/ENG)	<p><i>Soul Searching</i> Guest Lecturer: Dr. Davida S. Smyth, Biological Sciences, School of Arts &amp; Sciences</p> <p>Read excerpts from <i>The Blind Watchmaker</i></p>	<p><b>Case study 1 due</b></p> <p>Watch <i>Where Did We Come From?</i></p> <p>Annotate: Skloot, "Part One: Life"</p>

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

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Online Assignments</b>
<b>4</b> February 25 (DEN/ENG)	<i>Gender &amp; Sexuality Studies</i>  <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Chapter 17, "Illegal, Immoral, and Deplorable"  Guest Lecturer: Dr. Gwen Cohen-Brown, Dental Hygiene, School of Professional Studies	<b>Case study 2 due</b>  Annotate: Huxtable and Woodley, "Gaining Face or Losing Face? Framing the Debate on Face Transplants" and Wilchins, "It's Your Gender, Stupid!"  Watch <i>Boy I Am</i>
<b>5</b> March 4 (ENG/PSY)	<i>Human Subject Research Ethics</i>  Guest Lecturer: Dr. Jean E. Kubeck Hillstrom, Chair, Department of Social Sciences CUNY University Integrated IRB Member  <a href="https://www.citiprogram.org">https://www.citiprogram.org</a>	Annotate: Skloot, "Part Two: Death" and "Part Three: Immortality"
<b>6</b> March 11 (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  Watch <i>The Story of Stuff</i>	<b>Responsible Conduct of  Research (RCR)  certification due</b>  Annotate: selections from Panayotakis  Watch <i>Meltdown: The  Men Who Crashed the  World</i>
<b>7</b> March 18 (ENG/LIB)	Concept mapping <i>Visual Understanding Environment (VUE)</i> <a href="http://vue.tufts.edu">http://vue.tufts.edu</a>  <i>Literature Review RECAP</i> Guest Lecturer: Librarian	<b>Annotated bibliography  draft due online</b>

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

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Online Assignments</b>
<b>8</b> March 25 (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	<b>Midterm literature review due online</b>  Annotate: Kakalios, "Introduction: Quantum Physics? You're Soaking in It!" and "Section 1: Tales to Astonish"
<b>9</b> April 1 (ENG/ENT)	<i>Modeling Real Identity in the Virtual</i>  Guest Lecturer: Dr. David Smith, Interim Dean, School of Professional Studies	<b>Case study 3 due</b>  Create an avatar in Second Life, then log onto Second Life and go through the orientation.  <a href="https://join.secondlife.com">https://join.secondlife.com</a>
<b>10</b> April 15 (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"
<b>11</b> April 22 (MAT/PHYS)	<b>Group proposal presentations</b> and group assignments  <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	Annotate: Kakalios, "Section 6: The World of Tomorrow" focus on Chapter 21, "Seriously, Where's My Jet Pack?" and Hayles, "Conclusion: What Does It Mean to be Posthuman?"
<b>12</b> April 29 (ENG/ENT)	<b>Final term paper discussion</b>  Group project modeling	<b>Final term paper topic proposal due online</b>

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Online Assignments</b>
<b>13</b> May 6 (ENG/ENT)	Group project writing workshop  <b>Research Mixer</b>	<b>Annotated bibliography due online</b>  Group project draft due
<b>14</b> May 13 (ENG/ENT)	Group project student critiques and remodeling, as appropriate	Optional final term paper daft due (electronic copy)
<b>15</b> May 20	<b>Group project presentations</b>  What does it mean to be virtually human?  Group project clean-up City Tech island in Second Life	<b>Final term paper due</b>

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