

ENGLISH 318

Writing the Future

Professor Mark Brazaitis

Office: 219 Colson Hall

Office telephone: 304-293-9707

Office Hours: Tuesday (11:30-12:45) and by appointment

Email: Mark.Brazaitis@mail.wvu.edu

Class Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 10-11:15 a.m.

Class Location: Armstrong 121

Objective: In this class, you will learn to become a better fiction writer, nonfiction writer, and/or poet by writing about the future. You will also learn how prominent writers have written about this subject.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read two novels, a work of futuristic speculation, a book of nonfiction, six short stories, three essays, and at least a dozen poems. You will complete three take-home assignments, one rough draft of your final project, and one final draft of your final project.

Quizzes: Whenever a piece of writing is assigned to read, you will be quizzed on it. This brief, objective quiz is designed to give credit to students who do the reading and to encourage everyone to participate in class discussion about the works we read. Although there will be no make-up quizzes, your worst quiz score, including a quiz you might have missed, will be eliminated. If you are unable to attend a class and would like credit for the quiz, you may email me (as an attachment) a 250-word summary of the reading before class.

Take-Home Assignments: Take-home assignments are given below. They should consist of three poems or at least five pages of prose. You should type all take-home assignments because you will be handing them in for a grade. For full credit, please hand in the take-home assignments on time. Late assignments will be accepted (with a 10-point penalty) only during the week after they are due. After this, they will receive a zero. If you are going to miss class, have your take-home assignment delivered to my mailbox (Colson Hall 100) or send it to me as an email attachment before class.

Final Project: Your final project should be your best creative work. It should be composed of at least six poems or at least 12 pages of prose (short story or work of creative nonfiction) or some combination thereof. You may use material from your take-home assignments in your final project, but at least half of your final project should be new work. You will present a draft of your final project to a workshop of your classmates as well as to your professor. Your draft will receive a grade so make it a good draft.

Texts: *1984* by George Orwell; *Utopia* by Thomas More; *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert; *The Circle* by Dave Eggers; and *I'm With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet* by Mark Martin (editor). There will also be handouts containing poetry and essays.

Grades: Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance/class participation (10 percent), quizzes (30 percent), written feedback given to fellow students on their final

projects (10 percent); take-home assignments (20 percent), rough draft of final project (10 percent); final project (20 percent). Grading Key: 100=A+; 94-99=A; 90-93=A-; 85-89=B+; 83-84=B; 80-82=B-; 75-79=C+; 73-74=C; 70-72=C-; 65-69=D+; 63-64=D; 60-62=D-; 59 and below=F.

Attendance: Attendance will be graded as follows: 0-2 absences (A); 3 absences (B); 4 absences (C); 5 or more absences (F). If you miss 5 or more class sessions, you will be in danger of failing the course.

Extra credit: You may attend and write a one-page review of any two of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. (Please type your review.) Each of the extra credit assignments counts for a maximum of five extra points on a take-home assignment. You are encouraged to attend all the events.

Feedback on Your Peers’ Rough Draft of Final Project: You should provide a page or so of typed (12 point) comments on each piece you critique. In-text comments are helpful and appreciated. Your comments should be professional, courteous, and clear.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, August 19 Get acquainted.

Thursday, August 21 Read: Book One, Chapters 1 through 5 of *1984*. Read: Book Two, opening and “Their Cities, in particular Amaurot,” “Magistrates,” and “Occupations” in *Utopia*.

Tuesday, August 26 Read: Book One, Chapters 6 through 8 of *1984*. Read: Book Two, “Social Relations” in *Utopia*.

Thursday, August 28 Read: Book Two, Chapters 1 through 5 in *1984*. Read: Book Two, “On the Travels of the Utopians” in *Utopia*.

Tuesday, September 2 Read: Book Two, Chapters 6 through 10 of *1984*. Read: Book Two, “Slaves” in *Utopia*.

Thursday, September 4 Read: Book Three, Chapters 1 and 2 of *1984*. Read: Book Two, “Military Matters” in *Utopia*.

Tuesday, September 9: Read: Book Three, Chapter 3 to the end of *1984*. Read: Book Two, “The Religions of the Utopians” in *Utopia*.

Special Event: Tuesday, September 9, at 7:30 p.m. in room 130 of Colson Hall, fiction writer George Singleton will be reading.

Thursday, September 11: **Due:** Take-home assignment: Write three poems or an essay, memoir, or work of fiction (of at least 5 pages) about a government of the future.

Special Event: Monday, September 15, at 11 a.m. in room 130 of Colson Hall, poet Kelly Moffett will be reading.

Tuesday, September 16 Read: Pages 1 through 101 in *The Circle*.

Thursday, September 18 Read: Pages 102 through 205 in *The Circle*.

Special Event: Thursday, September 18, at 7:30 p.m. in the Robinson Reading Room (downtown library), fiction writer and poet Michael Blumenthal will be reading.

Tuesday, September 23 Read: Pages 206 through 306 in *The Circle*.

Thursday, September 25 Read: Pages 309 through 402 in *The Circle*.

Tuesday, September 30 Read: Page 403 to the end of *The Circle*.

Thursday, October 2 **Due**: Take-home assignment: Write three poems or an essay, memoir, or work of fiction (of at least five pages) about a current trend, company, cultural phenomenon, etc. that becomes much, much bigger than it is. (Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is up to you.)

Tuesday, October 7 Read: "7 Reasons America Will Fail on Climate Change" (handout) or online at: <http://www.vox.com/2014/6/5/5779040/7-reasons-America-fail-global-warming> Read: Poems (Packet A)

Thursday, October 9 Read: "The Climate Fixers" (handout) or online at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/14/the-climate-fixers> Read: Poems (Packet B)

Tuesday, October 14 Fall break

Thursday, October 16 Read: "The Turning Point" (handout) or online at: <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-turning-point-new-hope-for-the-climate-20140618> Read: Poems (Packet C)

Special Event: Thursday, September 16, at 7:30 p.m. in the Robinson Reading Room of the downtown library, Marianne Boruch will be reading.

Tuesday, October 21 Read: "The Siskiyou, July 1989" by T.C. Boyle, "Zoogoing" by Lydia Millet, and "Sacred Space" by Kim Stanley Robinson in *I'm With the Bears*.

Thursday, October 23 Read: "Hermie" by Nathaniel Rich, "Diary of an Interesting Year," by Helen Simpson, and "New Romancer" by Toby Litt in *I'm With the Bears*.

Tuesday, October 28 **Due**: Take-home assignment: Write three poems or an essay, memoir, or work of fiction (of at least 5 pages) about global warming.

Thursday, October 30 Read: *The Sixth Extinction* (from "Prologue" through "The Sea Around Us")

Tuesday, November 4 No Class – Election Day – Please Vote Responsibly

Thursday, November 6 **Due**: Rough draft of your final project. Bring in enough copies for your professor and everyone in the class.

Tuesday, November 11 Workshop of rough drafts

Thursday, November 13 Workshop of rough drafts

Tuesday, November 18 Workshop of rough drafts

Thursday, November 20 Read: *The Sixth Extinction* (from “Dropping Acid” through “The Rhino Gets an Ultrasound”)

Thanksgiving Break --- Enjoy

Tuesday, December 2 Read: *The Sixth Extinction* (from “The Madness Gene” to the end of the book)

Thursday, November 4 **Due: Final draft of your final project.**

Tuesday, December 9. Final drafts returned. Final grades given.

Social Justice at West Virginia University

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

English Major Program Goals

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Four aspects of Goal 1 are especially important. A student should be able to:

- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
- Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity
- Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
- Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts

Not all English courses will address all three goals; some will focus particularly on one goal. However, the English major curriculum as a whole will provide multiple opportunities to address all of the goals.