

FSEM100-18 Utopias in Fiction, Real Life, and Virtual Reality

TR 11:30 am-12:45 pm Elizabeth 316

Are you drinking the Kool-Aid?

This seminar allows students to explore the phenomena of utopias (idealized communities) created to show us a better way of life. We read and discuss classic utopian works of fiction. We study real world utopias and explore the reasons for their success or failure. Finally, we take on the role of participant observers by embedding ourselves in utopian communities on the internet.

Objectives

This course is designed to meet the goal and objectives of the Stetson University First Year Seminar course, namely:

The goal of the first year seminars is to improve students' ability to analyze critically, integrate fully, and express coherently knowledge and ideas. The intent is to increase their ability and their desire to engage enthusiastically in intellectual conversations.

The first year seminars approach an area of study using a theme, or set of interrelated themes; they are not meant to be introductions to specific disciplines. Though the readings for the seminars may be specific to a field of study as far as style and source (e.g. articles may be more important in the natural and social sciences and books may be more important in other areas), when appropriate, they place emphasis on primary works and scholarly interpretations. The seminars are writing intensive, requiring a minimum of 20 pages of written work distributed throughout the semester, and revised with substantial guidance from the instructor and, when appropriate, from peers. The seminars are discussion-based, encouraging students to engage in substantive intellectual discussion. They require two critiqued oral presentations.

Instructor:

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Office hours:
01:30-02:30 TR
and by appointment

Books (all required):

Claeys, Gregory and Lyman Tower Sargent (eds.). 1999. *The Utopia Reader*. NYU Press. ISBN: 0814715710
Pitzer, Donald (ed.). 1997. *America's Communal Utopias*. U. North Carolina Press. ISBN: 0807846090.
Vonnegut, Kurt. 1999. *Player Piano*. The Dial Press. ISBN: 0385333781

Rothstein, Edward, Herbert Muschamp, and Martin E. Marty. 2004. *Visions of Utopia*. Oxford University Press. 195144619.

Other readings on SOCS, library reserve, and the net.

In addition you will be required to participate in the virtual world SecondLife. We will discuss in class the means to do so.

Required work:

Active participation at all classes is expected. The course grade will be comprised of the following.

Midterm	20%
Final	25%
Paper 1 (including revisions and presentation)	20%
Paper 2 (including revisions and presentation)	20%
Attendance and participation	15%

Exams will be in essay format. The final will be comprehensive. The participation grade includes minor discussion assignments. Details of the paper assignments are provided in the following and will be expanded upon during the semester. I will provide expectations about all assignments and exams before they are due. However it is important to realize that, unlike the contemporary K12 system in the U.S., higher education does not “teach to the test” and thus is more like the real world outside of institutional education. I may return substantially incomplete assignments for resubmission for reduced credit at my discretion.

Grading:

The distribution of grades varies tremendously from class to class. Given our relatively small class sizes, no true “grading on the curve” is possible. Yet within general guidelines, grading expectations are adjusted to my cumulative experience of teaching the subject, and the specific set of performances on a particular assignment/exam. Some general guidelines for overall course grades follow for you to keep in mind:

A, A- are marks of excellence, not averageness. To earn one of these grades a student has to complete all assignments on time and attend and participate actively in all, or virtually all, class sessions. In addition, a student has to rise above these basic expectations on each assignment, providing evidence of great attention to detail, a passion for learning, and considerable time invested outside of class. A grade of “A” is truly a special mark, earned by few, and indicating that the student’s performance is among the best of those who have taken the course.

B+, B, B- are indications of good but not outstanding work. To earn a grade in the B range a student has to complete all assignments satisfactorily and on time, and attend and participate in most class sessions. A grade of B+ indicates a student has occasionally

distinguished themselves on graded components in the class, but not consistently enough to move into the A range.

C+ through F are indications of substantial shortcomings in one or more major components of the course. Simply showing up and turning in largely complete assignments is C-level work. Less than that (i.e. failing to turn in major assignments and not attending regularly) endangers a passing grade.

Other Policies:

Students are expected to do the reading and study assignment prior to the class period in which they are discussed. I will regularly call upon individual students to report on the reading assignment to the rest of the class. This is a small seminar. There is no "back row" to hide in. The participation grade will be based on all class discussion and other minor assignments as noted.

All work submitted for a grade in this class must be the student's own work and must be done exclusively for this class.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below. Late work will lose 10 percent of its grade for every day that it is late, up to a maximum of 50 points. The only exceptions will be for extreme, documented cases in which the student has made a serious attempt to contact me beforehand. Computer/disk/printer failure is not a valid excuse for late work--back up your files often.

Please be careful to avoid plagiarism. Any case of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with University regulations.

The Honor Pledge is the central statement of the Stetson Honor System. All incoming students are expected to subscribe to the Pledge upon entrance to the university. They are asked to reaffirm the Pledge on a regular basis, by writing the word "Pledged" in front of their signature when they submit exams and papers.

Topic and reading list

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Topic & Assignment</u>	<u>DUE</u>
08/20	Class introduction	
08/25	Utopias prior to 1800: The Garden of Eden (c. 9-12), Ancient Greeks (c. 15-55), More, <i>Utopia</i> (c. 77-93), Swift <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> (c. 141-151).	
09/01	Utopias of Convenience Burning Man: http://www.burningman.com/ , blogs/feeds/videos of your choice SecondLife: Biruk, "Are Slaves Free?" (online), Llewelyn, "It's a Country?" + responses (online)	

09/08	Religious utopias The Shakers (c. 182-186, p. 37-56) The Amanas (c. 186-190, p. 181-203) Mormon communities (p. 135-158) Monasteries (p. 204-252) (Burning Life)	IM me (Rembrandt Ordinary) in SL before class on 09/10
09/15	Father Divine/Peace Mission (p. 432-447) Jonestown / Heaven's Gate (online) Utopian Economic Systems Capitalist: Robert Owen (c. 207-219) & New Harmony (p. 88-134).	
09/22	Socialist and Communist: Fourier, <i>Phalanstery</i> (c. 192-202) & Brook Farm (p. 159 -180). Bellamy, <i>Looking Backward</i> (c. 240-273) & Icaria (p. 279-296).	
09/29	Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i> (c. 273-291), Donnelly, <i>Caesar's Column</i> (c. 292-300). American socialist utopias (p. 419-431). The Theosophical Communities (p. 396-418).	Paper 1 proposal due 9/29
10/06	Midterm Exam Fall Break 10/08	Midterm 10/06 No class 10/08
10/13	Workshop on research papers and presentations Utopias, Partying and Sex: Oneida (c. 190-191, p. 253-278), The Koreshan Unity (p. 375-395)	
10/20	Presentations on paper 1 SecondLife lab	Paper 1 due 10/20
10/27	Utopias in Film and Literature in the 20th Century Lang, <i>Metropolis</i> (film) Vonnegut, <i>Player Piano</i>	
11/03	<i>Player Piano</i> (cont.)	Paper 2 proposal due 11/05
11/10	Gilman, <i>Herland</i> (c. 319-328), Zamiatin <i>We</i> (c. 329-343), Skinner, <i>Walden Two</i> (c. 372-389), Le Guin " <i>The Day Before the Revoution</i> " (c. 407-420).	
11/17	Utopia in the late 20th century and beyond Communes and intentional communities (online)	
11/24	Presentations on Paper 2 Thanksgiving break 11/26	Paper 2 due 11/24 No class 11/26
12/1	Disney World and Celebration (online) Final reflections on Utopia: <i>Visions of Utopia</i> essays 1 & 3.	

Paper Assignments

Note: these are short, directed papers. Do not waste space on long introductions, reviews of material we have covered in class, long conclusions, or general passages that are not making

specific points. Introduce your thesis in a sentence or two, make a series of well outlined and argued points supported by evidence from your research, and wrap up you paper with a conclusion of a paragraph or two.

All papers should be turned in on paper at the beginning of the class period in which they are due.

Paper 1 Historical Research Paper

8-9 pages, double spaced, plus bibliography. Use a 12 point font and 1 inch margins. Cite all references using the parenthetical format.

Select one of the historical utopian communities assigned in the syllabus from *America's Communal Utopias* and research it independently of what we cover in class. Focus on two points: the historical context within which the community arose, and your choice of a selection of the standard discussion questions. Do not review the basic facts of the community as we covered them in class. Instead go beyond what we covered in class to address how the historical setting interacted with the evolution of the community. This is a paper based on research outside of class. You will be provided an introduction to the parenthetical system of citation in class. Your bibliography should contain at least eight journal articles or scholarly book chapters & books. You will be graded based on how well you meet these specifications as well as the overall quality of your writing. You will present your findings in class on 10/20. As part of the research process for the first paper you will turn in a proposal for paper 1 on 9/29. The proposal will consist of 1-2 pages outlining the specific questions you will address in your paper and your primary thesis. It will also include 1-2 pages of annotated bibliography indicating the primary sources your plan to use and why they are the most important sources for your paper.

Paper 2 Contemporary Utopias of Convenience

8-9 pages, double spaced, plus bibliography. Use a 12 point font and 1 inch margins. Cite all references using the parenthetical format.

This paper will be more open-ended than the first. But it must argue for a thesis concerning the contemporary utopias of convenience (Burning Man and SecondLife or similar phenomena). To conduct research for this paper you need to study first-hand at least one community in SecondLife or similar virtual world. This includes interviewing at least two inhabitants (cite them in the final bibliography). You can use some of our standard discussion questions as guidance or consider comparing these utopian experiments to other fictional or historical ones (do not use the utopia you wrote about in your first paper).

You will present your findings in class on 11/24. As part of the research process for the first paper you will turn in a proposal for paper 2 on 11/05. The proposal will consist of 1-2 pages outlining the specific questions you will address in your paper and your primary thesis. It will also include 1-2 pages of annotated bibliography indicating the primary sources your plan to use

and why they are the most important sources for your paper (note that these are more likely to be online sources than in the first paper).

Standard Discussion Questions

These will be used extensively throughout the semester in class and in the papers. Unless otherwise instructed, you should come to class prepared to discuss these for the communities on the topic and reading list. They will also be used for exams and can be used for your papers. Not all questions are relevant to or covered by the material assigned for each community.

1. Why was the utopia created?
What was the need for it felt by the creators?
What were their primary objectives?
Who were the leading figures in the creation of the utopia?
Who were the initial residents?
Where did they come from?
How were they recruited?
What types of residents were desired?
2. What was the physical structure of the community?
Where was the community created and how was the site selected?
How were the buildings and other physical structures of the community created to reflect the community's objectives and functions?
3. What was the political structure of the community?
How were the leaders selected?
What powers did they have?
What decisions were left in the hands of the residents?
What mechanisms of decision-making did the community employ?
How did the community interact with outside governments?
4. What was the economic structure of the community?
How was its initial creation financed?
What economic activities did its members engage in?
How were earnings used--who got to keep what for what purpose?
What economic interactions did it have with the outside world?
5. What was the social structure of the community?
What was the system for marriage and family?
How were children educated?
What were the gender roles?
What were the key moral principles of the community?
6. What was unique about this community?
7. How did the community evolve over time?

What changes occurred in the physical, political, economic, or social structure of the community?

Were these changes choices made by the community or as a result of forces the community could not control?

8. How successful was the community?

Did it reach its goals for size?

Did it accomplish its objectives?

Did members live up to its principles?

How was it treated by the outside world?

What were the factors that accounted for the relative success or failure of this community?

9. What is the social learning value of this community?

Did it influence other utopian efforts?

Did it have an impact on outside society?

Can we learning anything about how we should live from this community?