

Build Your Own Utopia Spring 2007

English 3300-002
Instructor: Dr. Roemer
T/Th 9:30-10:50; Preston 101

Office Hrs: T/Th 2-3:30; W by apt., 405 CH
Phone: 817-272-2729 voice mail
Please schedule all appointments.

Nature of the Course, Goals (outcomes), and Means

"Build Your Own Utopia" is an interdisciplinary course designed to help students to clarify and evaluate their ideals as they improve reading, writing, and group/individual decision-making skills. To achieve these goals, I've structured the course around three hypothetical problems similar to those encountered by authors of literary utopias (imaginary better worlds) and founders of utopian (or intentional) communities. (See the class handout for definitions of literary utopias and utopian communities.) Students read several well-known utopian (and dystopian) authors and documents from intentional communities (e.g., Plato, More, Campanella, Swift, Bellamy, Skinner, Wells, Huxley, Orwell, and documents from the Oneida and Owenite communities), as well as authors and communities discovered or rediscovered during the late twentieth century (e.g., Margaret Cavandish, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Abraham Maslow, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and the White Hawk Community, which we hope to visit).

In small discussion groups the students use the assigned readings (and any other readings they deem relevant), the Internet (e.g., <www.utoronto.ca/utopia> and www.nypl.org/utopia), and personal experiences in attempts to define possible solutions to the hypothetical problems. For example, in Problem 2, "The Spartan Family and the New Mexico Commune," students receive a brief introductory handout that acquaints them with an imaginary community characterized by tensions among the adults and chaotic adult-child relationships. In a step-by-step process called Guided Design, printed instructions and feedbacks direct students through a series of stages (problem definition, information gathering, examining possible solutions, selecting, defining, and justifying a particular option, etc.) toward an articulation of ways of helping this community.

The two papers support the broad goals of the course by asking students: (1) to develop a model of one utopian individual, and (2) to define influences in their own lives that shape their responses to a particular example of utopian literature. Each in-class exam is related to issues raised in each problem. The final written goal of the course is a synthesis of in- and out-of-class work and the individual assignments: each student composes a detailed outline of his or her utopia.

For more specific information about the course, see my articles and textbook: "Using Utopia to Teach the 80s," *World Future Society Bulletin* 14 (July-Aug. 1980): 1-5; *Build Your Own Utopia* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); and "Utopian Literature, Empowering Students, and Gender Awareness," *Science-Fiction Studies* 23 (1996): 393-403.

Required Readings

(selections from) *The Utopian Reader*, Claeys and Sargent (designated as UR)
Walden Two, B. F. Skinner
Looking Backward, Edward Bellamy
Woman on the Edge of Time, Marge Piercy
Herland, Charlotte Perkins Gilman
The Harrad Experiment, Robert Rimmer
The Dispossessed, Ursula K. Le Guin
 HO - "Utopia," from *Omni*; Kumar from *Utopianism*; Maslow's "Eupsychia"; Black Elk's Vision; "Report on Fourierism"; Plutarch, "Lycurgus"; Swift from *Gulliver*

Discussion Problems, Reading Assign., Exams, Papers, Tentative Dates

Introduction to the Course: Readings -- HO: *Omni* and Kumar

Course description; ungraded definitions of utopia	
Group discussions of <i>Omni</i> "celebrities utopias";	
Exam study sheet (on Kumar) distributed	1/16, 18

Short Answer Exam on Kumar	1/23
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Note: The most practical way to approach the reading for the group discussions is to divide up the readings so that throughout the discussion, someone in the group will know something about each of the readings. All the readings should be completed before the problem is finished. As students discuss each problem, they can refer to previous readings in the course, outside readings, the Internet, and personal experiences. A single page for a *Utopian Reader* (UR) assignment indicates the beginning page; the entire selection should be read. Two pages (e.g., Plato [42-56]) indicate students only have to read those pages. HO indicates the short separate readings.

Problem #1: The BG Will and the Utopian Individual

Readings & Film: UR: Plato (42-56), Isaiah (59), Iambulus (60), Condorcet (176), Amana (186-87), Owen (207), Wells (316-19), Huxley (347); Maslow Film	1/23, 25, 30, 2/1,6,8,13
HO: "Eupsychia," "Report on Fourierism," Black Elk Books: <i>Walden Two</i> and <i>Looking Backward</i>	

Group Report on Problem #1 Due	2/ 13, 5 PM
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Exam on Problem #1 Readings	2/15
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Utopian Individual Paper	Due 2/22
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Problem #2: The Spartan Family and the New Mexico Commune

Readings: from UR: Genesis, Garden of Eden (9), Plato (27-42), More (90-93), Campanella (111-17), Winstanley (126), Cavendish (132-33), Swift (145-49), de la Brentonne (163) HO: Plutarch "Lycurgus"; Swift, Gulliver (excerpt) Books: <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i> and <i>Herland</i>	2/20,22,27, 3/1,6,8,20
Spring Break	3/12-18
Group Report on Problem #2 Due	3/20, 5 PM
Exam on Problem #2 Readings	3/22
Reader-Response Paper Due	3/29
Problem #3: A Utopian Community on Campus (includes a student/administrator panel)	
Readings: from UR: Ovid (8), Islands of the Blessed (12) Cockaigne (71-76), Rabelais (94), Campanella (106-11), Oneida (191), Fourier (192), Morris (273-80), Stapleton (363-70) Books: <i>The Harrad Experiment</i> and <i>The Dispossessed</i>	3/27, 29, 4/3,5,10 4/12,17,19
Group Report on problem #3	4/19, 5 PM
Exam on Problem #3 Readings	4/24
Re-Discussion of Final Outline	4/26
Individual Conferences on Final Outlines	5/1, 3
Outlines Due by 5 PM	5/4
Outlines Returned	5/10

Examinations and Outline

The first exam will be a short-answer exam on Kumar (HO). I will give students a study sheet with a list of possible identifications/questions from which I will choose 20 for the test. The three other exams will consist of two parts: (1) short answer questions/identifications taken from the readings (closed book); (2) essay questions related to the three problems and class/group discussions (open book). I will distribute a detailed study sheet before each exam. The "final" outline of your utopia calls for a

synthesis of your thoughts on the individual, family, community, and culture. Near the end of the semester I will distribute a detailed sample outline “composed” by Edward Bellamy.

Papers

For the first paper (due 2/22; approx. 5-7 pp., 1250 - 1750 wds.) there are two options: (1) A close analysis of one of the utopian individual readings (e.g., Plato's, Owens', Bellamy's, Wells', Skinner's, *Brave New World's* method of developing better human beings) or of one of the other readings in the course as it relates to the development of better individuals; (2) an analysis of the nature and formation of a particular type of model individual (e.g., father, mother, political leader, lover, musician, scientist, financial aid administrator, teacher, comedian, priest-rabbi-minister-guru). Grading criteria: students selecting the latter should demonstrate their ability to integrate the reading assignments and outside readings and thoughts to formulate convincing arguments. See the general comments about introductions, conclusions, paragraphs, and editorial matters below. I will expect you to support your analyses or models with relevant and specific evidence, including examples from the readings (which in the second option may include readings or Internet materials "outside" this course).

The second paper (due 3/29; approx. 5-8 pp.; 1250-2000 wds.) begins with the selection of one of the assigned book-length works. I would recommend choosing a book that evoked strong positive or negative reactions. If you think you might like to use Rimmer or Le Guin, read ahead of the assigned dates, so that you can begin the paper well before the 3/29 due date. When you think you have made your selection, I'd recommend noting down each time you have a strong positive or negative reaction to a section of the text and jotting next to the note a possible explanation for the response (e.g., immediate circumstance while reading, past courses, past reading experiences or tastes, memories of people or experiences that remind you of the characters or episodes, general political, religious, economic attitudes, etc.) When you have finished reading and note-taking, look for patterns in your notes: Did you focus on any particular parts of the text? Are there types of memories, tastes, attitudes, or beliefs that influenced you repeatedly. Narrow the types of influences (transformational associations) down to the FIVE most important influences that shaped your responses. In the paper, these patterns will correspond to five sections of the paper. In each section (in whatever order you deem appropriate), define the nature of the influence and how that influence shaped your response (e.g., added, subtracted believability, personalized, depersonalized) to particular parts of the text. Discuss the **most important influence** in the fifth section of the paper. In the introduction, give a very brief indication of the type of reader you are, especially what may have shaped your attitudes toward reading. In the conclusion, indicate what you may have learned from this reading and writing experience. Grading criteria: I certainly will not be "grading" the types of influences you decide to discuss. You are the experts on those matters. I will be especially concerned about how clearly you define the influences and their relationships to your responses to the text. This may be a bit more difficult than you expect. Your "personal" influences and responses may be perfectly understandable to you, but to an “outside” reader, they may seem vague and unimportant. Interesting and

appropriate illustrations from your background and the text should help to clarify your arguments. Engaging, informative introductory and concluding sections will help. Paragraph coherence and unity and editorial matters (grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, etc.) will also be considered.

Grading Weights, Warnings, and Encouragements

Approximate Weights:

Short Answer and Three Essay Exams (30%)
 Two Required Paper (30%)
 Outline of Utopia (20%)
 Group Work (20%)*

*Everyone in a group will receive the same group grade, except in cases of poor attendance (see below) or consistent lack of preparation.

Constructive Warnings

(1) Because the class is structured around group, problem-solving experiences, ATTENDANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT. Poor attendance will hurt a student's group grade; also for every four unexcused absences, a student's semester grade will drop a half a grade. (Note: Professors are no longer allowed to drop a student for excessive absences. If you plan to withdraw, please follow University procedures. Otherwise a computer will give you an F for the semester.) (2) In the past I have had few problems with plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. (Note: chapter 2 of the *MLA Handbook* offers good definitions of plagiarism.) Instances of academic dishonesty will be turned over to the Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs.

Encouragement

(1) Improvement in test and paper grades and active participation in class and group discussions can raise group and individual semester grades. (2) I am more than willing to work with students with disabilities. At the beginning of the semester, these students should provide me with documentation authorized by the appropriate University office. (3) Students needing academic or personal counseling should consult their department's Academic Advisor and, if necessary, the Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107).