

Sample Syllabi – Subject to Change

Collegiate Writing: The Meaning of Fantasy Immersion Program

Course Instructor: Michael Subialka (msubialka@uchicago.edu)

Course Description:

Fantasy has often been regarded as a somehow inferior genre because it supposedly leads us to “escape” from reality. But what if fantasy is in fact a pursuit to uncover things that otherwise confound us about the human condition, especially in unsettling moments that lack precedent? Could fantasy provide a necessary way to reimagine our world and our lives? This intensive course in analytical writing at the collegiate level will offer a chance to think through these questions and to craft rhetorically-effective essays that explore the meaning of fantasy. The course considers fantasy across various media. We will read literary works including stories by Jorge Luis Borges, Ursula K. Le Guin, HP Lovecraft, and Nnedi Okorafor alongside an overlooked novel by Harlem Renaissance writer Pauline Hopkins; we will watch and discuss films spanning from *The Lord of the Rings* and *Indiana Jones* to *Inception*; we will analyze visual art, including the imaginary realms of Surrealism; and we will investigate the construction of immersive fantasy spaces, from the highly commercial (like Disneyland) to “alternative” spaces (like Burning Man or Meow Wolf). In our writing sessions, we will work closely to develop and refine the techniques of writing and revision that will allow you to transform your ideas and insights into powerful essays, using rhetorical instruction materials and small group workshops that replicate the intensive writing seminars taken by University of Chicago undergraduates.

Objectives:

My main goal is to help you craft more insightful, powerful academic essays. In order to do this, we will need to focus on at least three fundamental skills that go into academic writing:

1. Close, analytical reading
2. Engagement with alternative views (discussion/debate)
3. Thorough revision

All of these skills will be taught and practiced in our daily class meetings with the goal that by the end of the course you will be comfortable: (1) analyzing a variety of texts (written, visual, and filmic) with a careful eye for *nuance*, (2) considering alternative viewpoints about those texts, and (3) revising your initial analysis to construct more persuasive essays that will communicate your nuanced argument to a reader.

We will engage with writing in a two-step process. For each essay, you will write a draft that develops a close reading of the text in question and makes an argument about that text (or

makes an argument through that text). We will then go through an intensive process of revision, using techniques developed during our morning sessions and in the writing seminars; these techniques will help you re-frame your arguments to make them more persuasive and compelling for a reader who may be reluctant to agree with the points you want to make.

We will thus treat reading and writing as closely-integrated skills to be developed together. By the end of the course, you should come away with new habits of reading and revising that will help you to make more profound and compelling academic arguments in the future.

Required Course Texts (available to purchase from campus bookstore or as e-book online):

Hopkins, Pauline. *Of One Blood. Or, The Hidden Self*. Intro. by Minister Faust. MIT Press, 2022: 9780262544290. Available in the bookstore or online: <https://bookshop.org/p/books/of-one-blood-pauline-hopkins/10914537?ean=9780262544290>

Short Text Selections (available to download on Canvas or online):

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Circular Ruins." Trans. Anthony Bonner; pp. 57-63. "The Garden of Forking Paths." Trans. Helen Temple and Ruthven Todd; pp. 89-101. *Inn Ficciones*. Ed. Anthony Kerrigan. New York: Grove Press, 1962. (Full book recommended for purchase, though not required: https://www.amazon.com/dp/BooXUYQUZ2/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_U_ACPEEb3RYMCM9)

Le Guin, Ursula K. "Introduction," "The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas," "The Rule of Names," and "She Unnames Them." In *The Unreal and the Real. Volume 2: Outer Space, Inner Lands*. Gollancz, 2001; pp. vii-x, 1-7, 279-289, and 331-333.

Lovecraft, HP. "The Colour out of Space." *Amazing Stories*, 1927: <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/cs.aspx>

---. "Supernatural Horror in Literature." *The Recluse*, 1927: <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx>

Okorafor, Nnedi. "Biafra." *Margin Anthology of Magical Realism*, 2005: <https://www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/Okorafor2.html>

---. "Poison Fish." WBEZ 91.5, Chicago Public Radio, 2014: <https://soundcloud.com/afterwater/afterwater-ep-1-poison-fish>

---. "Spider the Artist." *Lightspeed Magazine*, 2011: <https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/spider-the-artist/>

Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy Stories." From *Tree and Leaf, Including Mythopoeia*. Allen and Unwin, 1964. ---. *The Silmarillion*. [Selection]

(These texts are marked with * in the schedule when they are required reading)

Class Films (to be watched before class for in-class discussion):

Inception. Dir. Christopher Nolan. 2010.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Dir. Peter Jackson. New Line Cinema, 2001.

Raiders of the Lost Ark. Dir. Steven Spielberg. 1981.

Schedule: (Summer Session I)

Week 1:

- Principles of Writing Topic: Argument
 - o Argument I – Arguing for your Reader
 - o Argument II – Nuanced Claims
 - o Argument III – Claims, Evidence, and Reasons
 - o Argument IV – Close Reading and Interpretative Claims
 - o Argument V – Counterarguments
- Readings/Discussion Topic: Fantasy Escapes: Rediscovering the Magical World
 - o Ursula K LeGuin
 - o Lovecraft
 - o Okorafor, “Spider the Artist”
 - o Tolkien
 - o *Lord of the Rings*

Week II:

- Principles of Writing Topic: Discourse Structure
 - o Discourse Structure I – Coherence and Index Positions
 - o Discourse Structure II – Macrostructure of Deep Arguments
 - o Discourse Structure III – Information Flow
 - o Discourse Structure IV – Complex Index Positions
- Readings/Discussion Topic: Fantasy Politics: Rewriting the (Future) World
 - o Hopkins
 - o Okorafor, “Biafra”
 - o Oriental Institute Visit
 - o *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

Week III:

- Principles of Writing Topic: Problems and Significance
 - o Problem I – Textual Conflicts (Resolving a Problem)
 - o Problem II – Significance in Introductions, 1
 - o Problem III – Significance in Introductions, 2
 - o Problem IV – Significance in Conclusions
- Readings/Discussion Topic: Fantasy Immersion
 - o Borges
 - o Disneyland
 - o Burning Man, Meow Wolf, and Immersive Theater
 - o *Inception*

[Note: Writing Seminars will be scheduled at the beginning of class (students will be assigned groups but will have the opportunity in Week 1 to change groups if needed for schedule purposes. Plan on being in the same seminar group all three weeks, so you will need to schedule all three meetings.)]

Grading:

Papers: 60% (Paper 1, 10%; Paper 2, 20%; Paper 3, 30%)

Participation: 20% (attendance of all meetings, preparation, discussion, and writing exercises)

Presentation: 10% (student presentation and discussion leader)

Writing Seminars: 10% (attendance of all meetings, timely posting of drafts, active seminar participation, comments on peer drafts)

Writing Seminars:

As a key component of our focus on developing strong, college-level academic writing techniques, you will have the opportunity to work in a **small, intensive writing seminar**. These seminars are led by University of Chicago writing instructors and are designed to put the skills we work on into immediate practice. **These seminars will be scheduled during the first week of class, and you will need to sign up for a group.** You will have the same group for all three seminars, allowing you to build rapport with each other as you help each other to improve through peer review and feedback. If you have time constraints and need to sign up for a particular seminar meeting time, please let us know right away so we can accommodate you.

For each seminar, you will be expected to submit a complete draft of the essay assignment for that week; these drafts should be submitted online via the course Canvas site, and they are due on **7pm Chicago Time (CST) the day before your scheduled writing seminar, unless otherwise instructed by the Writing Seminar Instructor (some deadlines may be changed to accommodate the different times that the different groups meet)**. This is a **strict deadline**, as your peers will need to have time to read and comment on each essay submitted. That means you will also be responsible for reading each of your colleague's draft submissions and preparing constructive criticism of those drafts. The Writing Seminar Instructor will provide detailed guidance for this process of peer review and constructive feedback each week.

Writing seminars will focus on using the skills we learn in class to help diagnose areas in need of revision and to come up with revision possibilities to make each essay's argument more compelling for its readers. You should focus on using the concepts/vocabulary from our writing lectures as you comment on your peers' drafts. This will also help you practice recognizing these same features in your own writing.

Attendance and active participation for all three writing seminars are required.

Student Presentations:

Each student will be responsible for leading the class discussion for a period of approximately 15-20 minutes. Presentations will be modeled off of the instructor's multimedia sessions from the beginning of the course; they will aim to (a) introduce new material to enrich the class' perspective on the specific topic of the week and (b) encourage active discussion and debate among the whole class. These presentations should make use of techniques of argumentation discussed in class – make a claim, support it with reasoning and evidence, etc. They will be an opportunity for students to develop skills in oral communication, argumentation, and peer

leadership. Students will sign up for presentations in the first week of class, and dates/times will be assigned for each.

Office Hours:

Course Instructor: Daily during class write-in session, or by appointment

Writing Seminar Instructor: Available by appointment

Class Write-Ins:

Writing is a skill that is developed through practice, and professional writers work on their writing every day. Research shows that the best way to write large amounts effectively is by writing regularly, bit-by-bit, rather than waiting until the last minute and doing it all at once. This is especially true in a class like ours, where we are writing and revising continuously to practice new skills and concepts.

For this reason, part of our daily schedule is a group writing session, a kind of “write-in,” in which we will work on our writing tasks each day. This is a part of the regular class meeting, and attendance is required. During this session, you are welcome to talk with one another – conversation is a good way of helping to work out your ideas, encounter alternative perspectives, and thus sharpen and deepen your own claims and analysis. Writing together will help us keep each other on track and productive – your instructors included.

Writing Tutor:

The summer session also organizes a writing tutor who will be available for drop-in tutoring. She will also lead seminars on making the transition to doing college-level reading and writing. You should have received information from the summer session office about how to contact the writing tutor for an appointment if you want one. Please feel free to make use of these resources.

Tech Support:

UChicago’s ITS has a virtual tech bar at bit.ly/virtualtechbar, which could be useful for you if you have technological issues. The link above opens up an on-demand Zoom meeting. Like the phone help at 773-702-5800, it is available Monday - Friday 7:30am to 6:00pm Central US time. Phone or the tech bar are both better for urgent needs than emailing itservices@uchicago.edu

Disability Statement:

If you have any kind of disability, please talk to the Instructor or TA immediately. We are more than happy to provide any kind of accommodation that will help you succeed in this class.

If you require any accommodations for this course, as soon as possible please provide us with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that you may discuss with us how your accommodations may be implemented in this course.

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services.

Please contact the office at 773-702-6000 or email: disabilities@uchicago.edu or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu.