

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOCIOLOGY 3362G-200 (Sociology of Utopia)

TERM:	Winter Term 2024
INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Michael E. Gardiner (megardin@uwo.ca)
DELIVERY METHOD:	Online
OFFICE HOURS:	By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will concentrate on the formation of the Western utopian tradition in sociology, including the ideas of the main theorists of utopia, the history of modern "intentional communities," and current debates within utopian social thought. We'll conclude with a consideration of the utopian/dystopian possibilities of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis.

Prerequisite(s):

Registration in third year or above

Antirequisite(s): N/A

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will:

- * Have a deep and broad understanding of contemporary social theory as it relates to utopianism
- * Understand how social theory informs other branches of sociology
- * Significantly develop their critical and creative thinking & writing skills
- * Develop presentation skills (clearly express ideas and arguments orally & lead discussions)

MAIN TEXTS

All readings are online via OWL/CT with one exception:

Peter Frase, *Four Futures: Visions of the World after Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2016.

Physical copies can be purchased through the campus bookstore; alternatively, electronic copies can be ordered via:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/246224/four-futures-by-peter-frase/9781781688151>

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

THE EVALUATION METHODS DESCRIBED IN THE COURSE OUTLINE ARE ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE.

Synchronous Class participation	15%
Forum responses (asynchronous)	10%
Class presentation	20%
Term paper proposal	10% - Feb 16
Term paper	45% - April 8
Total:	100%

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. SYNCHRONOUS VIRTUAL MEETINGS (15% PARTICIPATION)

All seminars will be synchronous sessions via Zoom scheduled during the allotted time above, between 1:30 pm – 4:20 pm weekly (transitional break 2:50 pm – 3:00 pm). Attendance is mandatory. Half the class will participate in the first hour and twenty minutes (1:30 pm – 2:50 pm), and the other half in the second hour and twenty minutes (3:00 pm – 4:20 pm), organized typically around one to two oral presentations (more on this below). **Web cameras must be normally be turned 'on' at all times during class unless formal dispensation from Western has been obtained.**

2. Asynchronous responses to readings (10%)

10% of the final grade will be allotted to written responses to class discussion questions for two marks each, 150-200 words each post. Five answers should be posted over the course of the term, no more than one per week. Such postings also cannot involve questions or readings student base their oral presentation on (see below). Students can respond to such postings for discussion purposes, but only in a respectful and scholarly manner.

3. Class presentation (20%)

Each student will be required to present orally on one of the readings assigned in a given week. This will be a critical précis that raises questions for class discussion. Prepare for a 10-12 minute presentation. The use of (very) short video clips or other materials is acceptable, but has to be approved by the Professor in advance. A week after the presentation, the student will submit a written version of the talk for grading (20% of final grade). What this entails is a short essay-type paper, 5-6 pages long, 12-scale font, double-spaced, with cleaned-up text and a clear beginning, middle, and end, that engages critically with the major themes and positions taken up by the reading(s) as you see them. Try to give me a sense of what you think of the claims made, whether they hold up to scrutiny, etc. Citations should be properly referenced. You can refer to outside sources, but this is not mandatory. You can use any citation style you like, so long as it is a recognized format and consistently applied.

4. Term paper proposal (10%)

Term paper proposals will be due Friday 16th Feb. by 4:00 pm. Two pages maximum point form, single-spaced, plus one page of references (minimum five). The Professor will comment on the proposal and provide feedback and additional references relevant for the writing of the final term paper.

5. Term paper (45%)

The final term paper, 10-12 pages, double-spaced, 12-scale font Times Roman), worth 45% of the final grade, will be due April 8th by 4:00 pm. (Comments on major term papers will only be provided if requested in advance of submission, and late assignments will receive no written feedback.)

Student Absences:

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below.

Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade:

For work totaling 10% or more of the final course grade, students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible. Extensions will be negotiated for any valid absences so that the essential requirements of the course are still met.

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty of Social Science Academic Counselling Office.

READING AND SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan. 8) (Orientation)

Week 2 (Jan. 15) (Concepts and Definitions)

"Introduction" (Sargisson, 1-5).

"Definitions, Debates and Conflicts: Utopianism, Anti-utopianism and Anti-Anti-Utopianism" (Sargisson C1, 6-40).

Week 3 (Jan. 22) (Fundamentalisms)

John Gray, "Armed Missionaries," in *Black Mass: How Religion Led the World Into Crisis*, Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2007.

"Religious Fundamentalism" (Sargisson C2, 41-54).

Week 4 (Jan. 29) (Gender and Sexuality)

"Feminism and Gender" (Sargisson C3, 55-78).

"Sex and Sexual Identity" (Sargisson C4, 79-97).

Week 5 (Feb. 5) (Utopia and Nature)

"Climate Change and Catastrophe Fiction" (Sargisson C5, 98-115).

"Human Attitudes to Nature" (Sargisson C6, 116-128).

Week 6 (Feb. 12) (Intentional Communities)

"Green Intentional Communities" (Sargisson C7, 129-146).

Chris Land, "Flying the Black Flag: Revolt, Revolution and the Social Organization of Piracy in the 'Golden Age'," *Management & Organizational History*, 2(2), 2007: 169-192.

Week 7 (Feb. 19) (Spring Reading Break – no classes)

Week 8 (Feb. 26) (Cities and Architecture)

"Fantastic Architecture and the Case of Dubai" (Sargisson C8, 146-66).

"Domestic Architecture: New Urbanism and Cohousing" (Sargisson C9, 167-88).

Week 9 (Mar. 4) (Utopia and Mass Culture)

John O'Neill, "McTopia: Eating Time," in *Utopias and the Millennium*, Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (eds.), London: Reaktion Books, 1993, 129-37.

"Computer Gaming" (Sargisson C10, 189-207).

Richard Keller Simon, "Advertising and Utopia," in *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999, 77-90.

Week 10 (Mar. 11) (Technology and Futurism)

"Introduction: Technology and Ecology as Apocalypse and Utopia" (Fraser, 1-34).

"Cloning, Cyborgs and Robots" (Sargisson C11, 208-38).

Week 11 (Mar. 18) (Possible Futures I)

"Communism: Equality and Abundance" (Fraser, C1, 35-68).

"Rentism: Hierarchy and Abundance" (Fraser, C2, 69-90).

Week 12 (Mar. 25) (Possible Futures II)

"Socialism: Equality and Scarcity" (Fraser, C3, 91-119).

"Exterminism: Hierarchy and Scarcity" (Fraser, C4, 120-143).

"Conclusion: Transitions and Prospects" (Fraser, 144-50).

Week 13 (Apr. 1) (Post-pandemic and Anthropocene Utopias)

Benjamin Bratton (2021) "Conclusion: What is the Post-pandemic?," *The Revenge of the Real: Politics for a Post-Pandemic World* (London and New York: Verso), 153-66.

Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass, "News from 2047," *Half-Earth Socialism*, London and New York: Verso, 2022, 134-64; 225.

Week 14 (Apr. 8) – Term Paper Workshop

Important Policies

AI Policy: Students are expected to write their essays unaided and in their own words. Using AI programs such as ChatGPT to write an assignment will be treated as a Scholastic Offence in a manner similar to plagiarism.

ACADEMIC POLICIES:

Please review the Department of Sociology "[Important Academic Policies](https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic_Policies.pdf)" document https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic_Policies.pdf for additional information regarding:

- Scholastic Offences
- Plagiarism
- Copyright
- Academic Accommodation
- Accessibility Options
- Mental Health