



## Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Spring Semester 2025

### 8,634: Gesellschaft/Society: Dystopian Fiction and the Social Sciences

ECTS credits: 3

#### Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)

decentral - Written work, Digital, Individual work individual grade (50%)

Examination time: Term time

decentral - Presentation, Analog, Group work group grade (25%)

Examination time: Term time

decentral - Written work, Digital, Individual work individual grade (25%)

Examination time: Term time

#### Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer

[8,634,1.00 Gesellschaft/Society: Dystopian Fiction and the Social Sciences](#) -- English -- [Felder-Stindt Alina](#)

#### Course information

#### Course prerequisites

None

#### Learning objectives

Students who have participated in this course can

- Compare dystopian fiction (novels, films) through analytical lenses from literary studies;
- Distinguish dystopian motifs and use dystopias as alternative ways to apply social science concepts such as power, authority, and justice;
- Connect dystopian concepts discussed in class to current societal and cultural context and assess how society and culture are shaped by utopian and dystopian tendencies.

Students reach these goals through various teaching and examination formats (e.g. group discussions, presentations, review writing). Throughout the course students develop their skills in researching, writing, critical thinking, and presentation skills.

#### Course content

Dystopian tales such as “The Hunger Games” enjoy great popularity. As critical mirrors of our society they are intrinsically political. This course examines dystopian works as commentaries on social relationships and societal institutions. By bringing dystopian fiction into dialogue with the social sciences, the course will show how fictional works can enhance our abilities to discuss and assess current political issues. The objective of this course is to analyze the reciprocal relationship between fictional content and social science. In fact, the imaginative elements of science fiction are often plausible within current scientific paradigms, and writers explore the potential consequences of social, scientific, and technological changes in society. We will assess recurring features of dystopias and their role in public discourse through the study of fictional works and through social science scholarship.

#### Course structure and indications of the learning and teaching design



The course is structured along a logic where each two sessions speak to each other. In the respective first session, students familiarize themselves with key characteristics of dystopian motifs in fictional works. In the second session, the focus lies on social science concepts that have (been) inspired (by) dystopian writing.

- The introductory session that defines the core concepts such as dystopia and social science fiction, is followed by a session on analytical toolkits to assess fictional writing and writing in the social sciences. In this session, students also learn how to review fictional work.
- The course addresses dystopian themes and their scientific roots and/or their uptake in the social sciences in a broadly chronological fashion. This leads to the following four themes from session II to session V.
  - Session II a) traces the intellectual and imaginative impact of Darwinism and fictional debates over possible socialist societies. Session II b) tackles Social Darwinism from a critical social science perspective.
  - Session III a) focuses on attempts to make sense of totalitarianism and nuclear war in dystopian fiction. Session III b) deals with political theory on the origins of totalitarianism and with international relations scholarship on nuclear proliferation.
  - Session IV a) turns to the potential of bio-technological transformation and of environmental catastrophe, culminating in discussion of artificial intelligence and post-human beings. Session IV b) reflects on the tragedy of the commons and zooms into socio-economic and ecological theories.
  - Session V a) pays particular to the gendered and racialized dimensions of future visions in dystopia. Session V b) unpacks these through feminist and post-colonialist theories.
- The two final sessions serve to summarize the core contents of the course, with Session VI a) focusing on the dystopian motifs discussed throughout the course and Session VI b) focusing on the analytical lenses the course has addressed. The final session also serves to guide the writing of the term papers.

Contextual Studies are considered part of **Contact Learning**; thus, taking part properly implies **regular attendance**. It is the students' own responsibility to ensure that there is **no timetable clash** between the courses they have chosen. A detailed course outline and all relevant documents will be made available on **StudyNet**. Only the current timetable as published on **Courses** does apply.

## Course literature

The course literature will come from literary studies and social science textbooks and academic journals. The course is further based on excerpts from fictional works such as novels and films which next to the literature will be made available on the online learning platform. Students will be provided with a list of fictional works from which they can draw from to write their review papers. The list below includes examples of literature that will be covered in class:

Fiction and films (selection):

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2011).
- Butler, Octavia. *Dawn* (Warner, 1987)
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2008)
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007).
- Orwell, George. *1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
- Niccol, Andrew. *Gattaca* (1997)
- Wells, H. G. *The Time Machine*. (London: Penguin, 2005)

Monographs, edited volumes and journal articles (selection):

- Atchison, Amy and Shames, Shauna. *Survive and Resist. The Definitive Guide to Dystopian Politics*. (Columbia University Press, 2019)
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Penguin Modern Classics, 2017)
- Claisse, F., & Delvenne, P. (2015). Building on anticipation: Dystopia as empowerment. *Current Sociology*, 63(2), 155-169.
- Claeys, Gregory: The 'survival of the fittest' and the origins of Social Darwinism, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61/2, 2000, pp. 223-240.
- Gordin, Michael D., Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, eds. *Utopian/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.
- Seeger, S., & Davison-Vecchione, D. (2019). Dystopian literature and the sociological imagination. *Thesis Eleven*, 155(1), 45-63.



- Weber, Michael and Kevin Vallier, eds. Political Utopias: Contemporary Debates (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Womack, Ytasha. "Evolution of a Space Cadet." Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture, Lawrence Hill Books, 2013, pp. 5-24.

## Additional course information

Alina Felder-Stindt is a political scientist by training with a background in literary and cultural studies. She is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Political Science, researching European integration and public policies.

## Examination information

### Examination sub part/s

#### 1. Examination sub part (1/3)

##### Examination modalities

Examination type	Written work
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Written work
Examination mode	Digital
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	Off Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	50%
Duration	--

##### Examination languages

Question language: English

Answer language: English

##### Remark

Term paper

##### Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

##### Supplementary aids

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#### 2. Examination sub part (2/3)

##### Examination modalities

Examination type	Presentation
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Oral examination
Examination mode	Analog
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	On Campus



Grading type	Group work group grade
Weighting	25%
Duration	--

## Examination languages

Question language: English  
Answer language: English

## Remark

Group presentation

## Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

## Supplementary aids

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### 3. Examination sub part (3/3)

## Examination modalities

Examination type	Written work
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Written work
Examination mode	Digital
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	Off Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	25%
Duration	--

## Examination languages

Question language: English  
Answer language: English

## Remark

Review paper

## Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

## Supplementary aids

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### Examination content

1. Sessions IIb, IIb, IVb and Vb feature student presentations in groups. The presentations (25%) address key social science theories.
2. Students write a review (25)% of one fictional work that speaks to the dystopian themes in sessions Sessions IIa, IIIa, IVa and Va. This review is due after the final thematic bloc (i.e. after Session IVb) and before the two sessions that conclude the course.



3. In the term paper (50%) students choose a dystopian theme through which they reflect on three issues: how writers and scholars (1) imagine alternative social, political, and economic structures; (2) reimagine the role of social science and science fiction in relation to socio-political and socio-economic developments; and (3) debate the societal value of exploring dystopian/utopian scenarios.

## Examination relevant literature

To draft their presentations, reviews and term paper students may use the course literature which draws on literary studies and social science textbooks and academic journals. This literature will be made available on StudyNet, but students are encouraged to conduct their own research and include additional literature.

### Please note

Please note that only this fact sheet and the examination schedule published at the time of bidding are binding and takes precedence over other information, such as information on StudyNet (Canvas), on lecturers' websites and information in lectures etc.

Any references and links to third-party content within the fact sheet are only of a supplementary, informative nature and lie outside the area of responsibility of the University of St.Gallen.

Documents and materials are only relevant for central examinations if they are available by the end of the lecture period (CW21) at the latest. In the case of centrally organised mid-term examinations, the documents and materials up to CW 13 (Monday, 25 March 2025) are relevant for testing.

Binding nature of the fact sheets:

- Course information as well as examination date (organised centrally/decentrally) and form of examination: from bidding start in CW 04 (Thursday, 23 January 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for decentralised examinations: in CW 12 (Monday, 17 March 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised mid-term examinations: in CW 14 (Monday, 31 March 2025);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised examinations: two weeks before ending with de-registration period in CW 15 (Monday, 07 April 2025).