Nature and Goals of the Course

This is a particular type of selective survey of utopian literature. It begins in a rather traditional way, posing questions about how concepts of “utopia” and “utopian literature” have been defined and used, and by offering a brief historical overview. (See the course packet and the handout for a selection of brief and three extended attempts to answer the defining question by modern scholars (Sargent, Roemer, Vieira) and a variety of non-scholars as different as Confucius, Dostoyevsky, Mr. Rogers, and Oprah; for the history overview, see Sargent’s Utopianism). Each major section of the course also uses a traditional organizational device: chronology. This is appropriate. Utopian literature is a literature grounded in dialogue. Authors often respond to earlier writings. Hence to understand the context of a particular work, it is often useful to know what preceded it. Finally, the course’s focus on utopias of the “Western World” is also traditional, though Sargent’s chapters (part of 3 & 4) on indigenous utopianism and utopianism from “other traditions” do stress the importance of non-Western utopias. What makes this course different from other traditional surveys is its arrangement on a spectrum beginning with forms of expression that were not to be questioned and ending with utopias that question themselves. To be more specific, we begin with visions of better worlds that depend upon divine authority and then move on to utopias (religious and secular) that sometimes do allow alternative viewpoints (e.g., dialogue forms) but clearly imply that one alternative is much better than the others. We next examine satiric works (from light-hearted to frightingly dystopic) that either present their vision of better worlds indirectly or ironically or even as frightening warnings that emphasize the dire extrapolations of the worst in the present. The course concludes with discussion of utopias that offer representations of better worlds that offer “answers” but also pose questions about alternative forms of utopia and even questions about the possibility of imagining utopia, while still maintaining that utopian speculation is a crucial means of understanding the past, present, and future.

Students who successfully engage in class discussions and complete the readings and in- and out-of-class written assignments should have a awareness of the nature and importance of some of the most significant American, British, European, and non-Western utopian thought and works and should be able to articulate orally and in writing their views on (1) how utopian concepts have been defined, (2) some of the most important issues raised in the utopias (e.g., economic and gender equality, impact of technology, environmentalism, the nature of happiness, individual vs. communal identity and responsibility), and (3) the importance of how the variety of types of literary utopias suggests different forms of authority for utopian expression and different readers’ attitudes about and responses to utopian literature. (For evaluation criteria, see “Examinations,” “Paper,” and “Encouragements.”)
Required Readings in Approximate Order of Discussion
(All except the handouts and Cambridge Companion are available at the UTA Bookstore)

Course Packet
Class Handouts (e.g., from Vieira’s “Concept of Utopia” and Le Guin’s “Omelas”)
Sargent, Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction
Sargent and Claeys, The Utopian Reader (selections)
Bellamy, Looking Backward
Skinner, Walden Two
Gilman, Herland
McCarthy, The Road
Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time
Le Guin’s The Dispossessed
[Not required but an important recent source: Claeys’s The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature.]

Tentative Schedule Topics, Readings, Assignments
[The beginning pages of assignments in The Utopia Reader are in brackets.]

Introduction to the course and Scholarly Resources 1/18
Defining Nowhere 1/20, 25

Readings: Course packet (2-44) & Sargent’s Utopianism, esp. ch. 1.

First Examination (take-home essay + in-class short answer) 1/27
Ordained Utopias 1/27; 2/1

Readings:

Garden of Eden: Genesis (King James) [9]; Golden Age:
Hesiod (8th C BC) [7], Ovid (43 BC-AD 17?) [8], Vergil (70-19BC) [8];
Islands of the Blest: Horace (65-8 BC); [12]; Telecleides (5th C BC) [71];
Cockaigne (71]; Prophecies: Isaiah (King James) [59]; Revelation:
John (King James [67]

Unambiguous Utopias

Readings:

Plato (427-328 BC), The Republic [27] 2/[1], 3

Campanella, City of the Sun (1623) [106]; Bacon,
New Atlantis (1629) [118]; Cavendish, Inventory (1655)
[128]; Harrington, Commonwealth [137] 2/8
Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1888); Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1890) [273]

2/ 10, 15, 17


Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (1975) 3/1, 3

Modern Capitalist and Right-Leaning Utopias
(course packet: 45-65: Sargent, Fitting, Rand) 3/8

**Second Examination**

3/10

Spring Break (Contemplate research paper possibilities) 3/14-18

Satire – Lighthearted to Apocalyptically Dystopian

Readings:

Aristophanes (448-380 BC), *Ecclesiazusae* [56];
Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1776) [141] 3/22

Gilman, *Herland* (1915) 3/22, 24, [29]

Zamiatin, *We* (1921, 1924) [329]; Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932) [347]; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) [398 ]

3/29, 31


Ambiguous Utopias

Readings:

More, *Utopia* (1516) [77]
Butler, *Erehwon* (1872) [229]

4/12

4/14

**The last day the prospectus can be turned in** 4/21


Le Guin, “Omelas” handout (1973) and

*The Dispossessed* (1974) 4/[26], 28,

5/3, [5]

5/7

Research paper Due (4/21 is the last day to turn in the prospectus) 5/8

Third Examination 5/12
Examinations

The first exam (1/27) will be a combination take-home short essay and in-class short-answer test. For the take-home, I will ask students to select one of the attempts to define utopia or utopian literature in the course packet and the Vieira handout. Using our class discussions as models, they will be asked to concisely define the strengths and weaknesses of the selected definition (two paragraphs). For the second in-class part of the test, I will select twenty identifications or questions from a study-sheet list of 50 derived from Sargent’s *Utopianism*. The two other exams will also have two parts: the first (closed book) will be short-answer identifications and questions based on the readings that preceded the exam in that section of the course. The second will be an essay question that will draw upon class discussions and require students to apply the arguments and concepts discussed to several of the readings. The class before these exams I will distribute a detailed study sheet that will either indicate the nature of the question but not which of the readings that I will select or present several essay questions without indicating which one I will select. Part one of these exams will be closed book. Part two will be open-book. (Students can bring books, notes, and outlines to possible questions.) *Grading criteria for the essays:* (1) how well has the student focused directly on the elements of the question; (2) how well has s(he) supported arguments with relevant examples from the readings and discussions. The exams will be graded “anonymously”: each student will be assigned a number.

Research Paper

Approximate length (12–15 pages, 3000-3750 words, plus notes and works cited page, MLA format). Think of the paper as a conversation which begins in your head and then, possibly with your classmates. Begin jotting notes – a possible thesis, argument, or at least a definition of a topic. Try to add ideas about which parts of the text or texts might be most useful in clarifying and supporting your viewpoints. Once you have come this far, you are ready to expand the conversation by finding and reading relevant critical articles and books related to your topic. (See suggestions below). As you read you will probably modify your thesis and even the scope of the paper (broader or narrower). The grading criteria: I will be looking for evidence of the following processes. As you write the initial draft(s) of the paper, you can use the primary and critical sources in many ways – to lend authority to your argument, to clarify your concepts, to demonstrate that you are aware of academic discussions of the topic, to support general or specific points you want to make. Sometimes exact quotes are effective (if you include a long quote [block indented MLA form]), the reader will expect an appropriate discussion of that quote (otherwise long quotes look like padding). Sometimes paraphrasing or referring to a particular critical source will be sufficient. In terms of organization, be sure that all sections of the paper relate directly to the thesis (paragraph and paper coherence are important). In most cases it is also important to use an order of increasing importance so that the paper isn’t anti-climactic. The introduction (and title) should inform and engage the readers. Inform them by defining the topic and scope of the paper; engage them with illustrative examples and by clarifying the significance of the topic. The concluding section should of course effectively summarize major points and their significance, but it
should also open the conversation suggesting how your paper might illuminate other related issues. That type of relevant opening-up can help avoid a dead-end finish to a paper. I will also, of course, expect that the “mechanics” of the paper (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.) to be appropriate for a senior seminar paper. **Note: If you are interested in some of the modern and contemporary works (feminists, environmentalist, dystopias) read ahead to see if you would like to do a paper on one of these texts.)**

Composing a *prospectus* is a good way to approach a research paper. Students will be required to **turn in a prospectus no later than April 21.** This is the format for the prospectus:

1. Thesis / Significance (one paragraph): indicate the concepts and or text(s) selected for examination; define the primary argument(s) claim(s), or question(s); indicate the significance of your thesis (i.e., address the “So what?” question).
2. Feasibility (short paragraph): Is it possible to address this thesis adequately in an twelve-to-fifteen-page research paper? Does our library or do other Metroplex libraries have the hard copy and Internet resources you will need?
3. Method (one paragraph): identify the critical approach(es) to interpretation that you will use (e.g., biographical, feminist, New Critical, ethnic studies, post-colonial). Indicate why these are appropriate for your book(s) and your thesis.
4. Tentative Organization (brief paragraph): In a few sentences justify how you will order the paper.
5. Preliminary Bibliography (list): In addition to your primary source(es), the paper requires at least six critical sources in your Works Cited list that will be well integrated into your discussion (i.e., not just tacked on to reach the six minimum).

The UTA Central Library offers excellent online sources for research papers: e.g., Academic Search Premier, JESTOR, Project Muse, Library Resource Center, and the MLA International Bibliography. For American texts, the older bound copies and more recent online versions of the annual *American Literary Scholarship* is especially valuable. The reference librarians on the second floor are especially helpful. Ms. Rafia Mirza is the Humanities librarian, but any of the reference librarians can help.

Some of the most important reference sources for utopian studies will be displayed during the first class (e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010), the journal *Utopian Studies*, and the newsletter *Utopus Discovered*). The Society for Utopian Studies Web site (www.utoronto.ca/utopia) offers links to the newsletter’s recent bibliographies, an index to the journal, and links to many relevant Web sites. Another useful Web site is <utopia.nypl.org>, the site for the NYPL utopias exhibition in 2000. Also, an online journal is starting up: *Spaces of Utopia* [Univ. of Porto, Portugal].

**Grades and Course and University Policies and Support**

**Approximate Weights:** First Exam (10%); Third Exam (25%); Third Exam (30%); Prospectus/Research Paper (35%).
Constructive Warnings: (1) Plagiarism will be handled according to University disciplinary procedures. Consult chapter 2 of the MLA Handbook if you are confused about plagiarism. (2) If you plan to withdraw, you must follow University procedures. Professors cannot drop students; if they disappear without dropping, they receive F semester grades. (3) Under normal circumstances, I do not accept late or e-mailed work. (4) For every FIVE unexcused absences the semester grade will be lowered a half grade. I do not have a specific policy for lateness, but I do have an "attitude." Late arrivals disturb students and teacher. If there is a persistent problem with lateness, I will begin to count the tardiness as unexcused absences.

Encouragement: (1) Class participation (especially in the assigned group presentations) and improvement can be important factors in elevating the semester grade. (2) I am very willing to accommodate students with disabilities. These students should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide me with authorized documentation from the appropriate University office (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities, 817-272-3364). (3) Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the Office of Student Success programs (817-272-6107).

Contents of Course Packet
Brief, General, Traditional and Scholarly Definitions
2 American College Dictionary
2 Oxford English Dictionary Online
3 Karl Mannheim (1935)
3 Ruth Levitas (1990)
3 Lyman Tower Sargent (1994)

Brief, Scholarly Definitions of Utopian Literature
4 Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick (1971)
4 Darko Suvin (1979)
5 Kenneth Roemer (1981)
5 Tom Moylan (1986)
5 Tom Moylan (2000)
6 Fredric Jameson (2005)
6 Wilhelm Vosskamp (2008)
[handout supplement: Fátima Vieira (2010)]

Brief, Popular Notions of Utopia Defined by Celebrities, Reformers, & Intellectuals
7 “Utopia” section of Omni magazine (1988)

Article-Length Definitions of Utopia and Utopian Literature
Capitalist and Right-Leaning Utopias
45 Sargent, ”Capitalist Utopias”
52 Fitting, “Utopias Beyond Our Ideals”
60 Rand, “The Goal of My Writing”