

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term: Spring 2027

Faculty Name: Alexandra Neel

Course Category: ENGL 4698.02 (Upper-Division Elective)

Course Title: From Frankenstein to AI

Course Description:

This course takes a deep dive into arguably the first novel expression of our fear and fascination with artificial intelligence—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). The first third of the semester will be devoted to the Romantic cultures that gave rise to Shelley’s “hideous progeny,” from scientific experiments and global explorations to artistic and literary trends (e.g., the gothic novel) during the period. We’ll explore the novel’s legacy in contemporary fiction, film, and television, including works such as *Poor Things* (novel and film), *Ex Machina*, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and conclude the semester with an exploration of the various ways we understand AI and our posthuman future today. How has the discourse surrounding machines and learning shifted? What are the limits of both human and artificial intelligence? Can we think of non-human intelligence as something other than a power to be mastered and harnessed by human wrangling?

Students will learn how to close read, research, and contextualize their work within larger debates about AI and its impact on society and the humanities.

List of anticipated readings for this course:

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818)

Alistair Gray’s *Poor Things*

Ted Chiang’s *Exhalation*

W.E.B. DuBois, “The Comet”

Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds”

Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.

Including films like *Deus Ex Machina* and *Poor Things*

Theoretical texts TBD

Please explain how the readings for this course will align with the content requirements for the course category (no more than 200 words):

Learning outcomes will be addressed in our reading, research, lecture, and discussion, which will cover terms and concepts related to the posthuman and AI. Students will be challenged to think about radical difference through different theoretical approaches to our understanding of new technologies. Can we conceptualize what a feminist approach to AI might look like? How does Afrofuturism conceptualize the non-human? How is AI impacting the environment? In part, I hope to uncover and explore a genealogy of how robots have been understood from the Romantic period to the present moment.

List of anticipated assignments for this course:

Three writing assignments, culminating in a research paper will constitute the bulk of their work.

Students will also be tasked with presenting their final project through a public-facing platform, i.e., a podcast, TikTok, or short video presentation.

- Bi-weekly postings, class presentations, and participation: 25%
- Response paper (3-5 pages): 15%
- Literature review and proposal (3-5 pages): 15%
- Final research paper (10-15): 30%
- Oral presentation (10 minutes): 15%

All assignments will address the reading and concepts we'll be working through during the semester; each will be based on a skill, e.g., the ability to read literature closely for its nuance, ambiguity—with close attention to detail; the skill of being able to read secondary criticism and theory in the service of their final research papers; and finally, how to convey their findings to a wider audience through visual and oral means.

COURSE ATTRIBUTES:

☒ UPPER-DIVISION ELECTIVE (UD)

CORE ATTRIBUTES:

N/A