

FANTASY IN THE REAL WORLD: LITERATURE THROUGH THE SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

IFSA London Global Flagship

US Semester Credit Hours: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Course Code: EN281-16 / SO281-16

Course Length: Semester

Delivery Method: Face to face

Language of Instruction: English

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Fantasy literature has great power – but does it also have great responsibility? This course looks at the impact of popular fantasy, folklore, and their fan culture in modern society. We will examine various texts' creation, consumption, and their ability to impact the real world.

Using works such as *Harry Potter*, *Marvel Comics*, *The Hunger Games*, *His Dark Materials*, and *The Lord of the Rings* (subject to change), we will use fantasy as a safe space to explore sociological topics that are difficult to clarify in the real world, such as race, gender, class, and political processes.

This course will also take advantage of our London location, exploring sites important to these works including the Harry Potter studio tour, and feature guest speakers who have worked or participated in various aspects of the texts' remediations.

COURSE DELIVERY

Students are expected to read, or view assigned resources in advance, and be prepared to actively discuss them in class. In most meetings, the instructor will provide an overview of the topic, and then facilitate a group discussion, drawing out relevant themes, following up on specific lines of inquiry, and prompting students' thoughtful engagement with the topic.

Students are encouraged to bring their prior learning experiences into class discussions (based on experiential learning theory) and to make cognitive connections between this course and others whenever possible (based on the philosophy of integrative learning). As we are discussing potentially contentious subjects, civility, patience and kindness are always expected from all students.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The class will introduce students to a wide range of fantasy literature, reading them through the lens of creative construct and social issues. Part of class will be devoted to learning how to design and carry out research. Each student will carry out an original creative research project on a subject of the student's choice, with the approval of the professor.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Learn to orally present analyses, reflections on others' works, and listen to others;
- Learn to design a creative project, and conduct independent research;
- Understand general history of fantasy literature as it relates to audience creation, fan communities, and social constructs;
- Recognize the reaction of industry and adapted practices within the creative industries to these topics;
- Explore fantasy literature to recognize construction, world-building, societal creation, and its inclusion or exclusion of groups, concepts, or ideals;
- Interrogate the role of the author in the interpretation of a creative work;
- Use concepts and methods of intercultural communication to appreciate cultural differences and mitigate cultural conflicts both between individuals, groups, and institutions;
- Acquire skills related to short video production and techniques for articulating social science topics through that medium;
- Leverage digital journaling techniques to document personal reflections on this course, learning progress and perception of course concepts;
- Become familiar with resources available for further research on fantasy literature and the social sciences; and
- Make cognitive connections between learning in this course and other learning experiences.

COURSE OUTLINE

Session One: Introduction

Topics – Introductions, syllabus overview and assignment details. terminology (Intersectional, Sociology, anthropology, ethnography, etc.) Overview of Fantasy Literature, and why we're using mostly Young Adult (YA) literature as a backdrop for sociological discussion.

Central Questions – What designates a story as fantasy? What is the hero's journey and how does it provide a structure for exploring life, growth, and place in society? What are archetypes, and what can they show us? Why are we looking at youth/teen lit?

In-Class Screening – "The Power of Myth" by Joseph Campbell

Session Two: Power

Topics – Authority and control, governmental structures, hierarchies.

Central Questions – What are the pros and cons of governmental control/influence? What real world examples do we see in fictional worlds? How does this affect fate? Free will? Autonomy?

Reading – Excerpts from *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins

COURSE SYLLABUS

Session Three: Social Class

Topics – School and community structures, leadership roles and propaganda, birth right and family/blood.

Central Questions – Where do you see specific class structures in these texts? What are the rights to each group? Are they right/wrong/problematic? How does one celebrate their class? Or balk against its restrictions?

Reading – Excerpts from *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins

ESSAY DRAFT DUE

Session Four: Adaptation

Topics – Adaptation (changes to screen/stage), and creative considerations in remediation.

Central Questions – How are decisions made when changing mediums? What is cut and what is kept? What influences are/should be considered? What is lost or gained in the new medium? How can adaptation affect audience/fans?

Reading – Excerpts from *Harry Potter*, JK Rowling

Session Five: Field Visit

Itinerary – Warner Bros. Studios Tour London: The Making of Harry Potter

Central Questions – What can we see on the process of adaptation? World creation? What is highlighted and what is overlooked? What can we observe about tourism practices? Fandom management and consideration? Merchandising?

Session Six: Race & Adaptation

Topics – Casting and PR, representation. Discussion of *Lovecraft Country* (TV), *The Cursed Child* (play), *The Last Airbender* (film), *Doctor Strange* (film). We'll also introduce authorship.

Central Questions – How can we rectify a problematic author with a beloved text? (Harry Potter, Lovecraft, etc.) What decisions are made in casting? Does colour-blind casting work? How are these decisions made, and how are they represented in the publicity?

Guest Speaker – TBC

Reading – Excerpts from *Harry Potter*, JK Rowling

FINAL ESSAY DUE

COURSE SYLLABUS

Session Seven: (dis)ability

Topics – Fan culture, fan studies. Disability/Ability/Power, projection and use in literature.

Central Questions – What is fan culture? How do fan communities work? What are their spaces like (online and in person – cons etc.) and how do they communicate? How is disability presented in this literature? What does it suggest? What issues arise or what is overlooked?

Reading – Excerpts from *Dead Before Dark*, Charlene Harris (first book in the “True Blood” series)

Session Eight: Gender & Sexuality

Topics – Hero leads compared to heroines historically, and the new movement for gender bending/construction. Sensitive men and strong women. Harry Potter and the Gender Issue.

Central Questions – What is the importance of mise-en-scène, i.e., painting the setting to support or subvert the expected? What are the depictions of gender? Are they wrong? Other? Powerful? Dangerous?

In-Class Narration – Instructor to read aloud a selection such as Tamsyn Muir’s [Gideon the Ninth](#), starring the best cast of lesbians the world has ever seen; Arkady Martine’s [A Memory Called Empire](#), which makes space in its epic sci-fi plot for a romance between two women; and Jennifer Giesbrecht’s [The Monster of Elendhaven](#), in which the central gay couple break every norm – except their universe’s rules on sexuality, because there aren’t any.

Reading – <https://www.shaabaandjamie.com/post/jk-rowling-essay>

CREATIVE PROJECT IDEAS DUE

Session Nine: Female Authors & Characters

Topics – The ‘strong female lead’ wave, discuss perspective, percentage of creators and climate in the community, and we’ll take a look at contract differences between genders.

Central Questions – What are the traditional roles of women? What is the concept of the Damsel in Distress and how is it used/subverted? How is the role of women changing in these popular YA texts? How is the fandom engaging with these characters and what is the possible continued trajectory or impact?

Guest Speaker – An author or media creator in female-led fantasy literature or adaption.

Reading – Excerpts from *Divergent*, Veronica Roth

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COURSE SYLLABUS

Session Ten: Religion

Topics – Projection vs. preaching, interpretation, supporting or ostracising.

Central Questions – How is religion depicted in these texts? How is it used as a device for story or character development/progression? What are the positive and negative influences of religion here? Does the creator have a responsibility to be moral? To consider religious reactions?

Reading – Excerpts from *Golden Compass*, *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and/or *Twilight*

Session Eleven: Field Visit

Itinerary – Victoria and Albert Museum’s Videogames: Design/Play/Disrupt exhibit

Destination is subject to change. Based on rotating exhibits in London, we will visit an exhibit or presentation with diverse representation or intersectional attention.

Session Twelve: Other Medias - Freedom and Form

Topics – Gaming, Transmedia Storytelling. Workshops for final project.

Central Questions – How are these topics seen in other fields? Has the gaming world been affected by similar conversations and issues? How are considerations incorporated into other media now (i.e. does Disney look to diversify its stories? Has the remediations of Harry Potter moved towards a more gender-fluid interpretation?)

Reading – Excerpts from *Golden Compass*, *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and/or *Twilight*

Session Thirteen: Other Medias – Freedom and Form

Topics – Fan Fiction/re-invention/retellings. Business decisions and PR affects

Central Questions – Why do creators make the decisions they do? What affect does that have on financial return and popular reception? How much should that influence decisions/creative practice?

Session Fourteen: The Changing Landscape

Topics – Legal changes, social changes, community changes

Central Questions – How has the landscape changed in the last 2, 5, 20 years? What guides are in place to affect change? Legal/professional/cultural? Where is this going? What’s on the horizon?

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

COURSE SYLLABUS

RESOURCES

The following texts will be assigned reading as part of this class; students are encouraged to view the film adaptations if possible, though it is not required.

- *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins
- *Harry Potter*, JK Rowling
- *Dead Until Dark*, Charlene Harris
- *Divergent*, Veronica Roth

Novels and book series are not necessarily intended to be read in their entirety and the designated excerpts to be explored in this class will be communicated with students at the beginning of the term.

Additional fantasy books and films to be referenced in this class may include:

- *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman
- *The Lord of the Rings*, JRR Tolkien
- *The Chronicles of Narnia*, CS Lewis
- *Twilight*, Stephanie Meyer
- Marvel Comics graphic novels and Marvel Cinematic Universe films
- DC Comics films and graphic novels

Supporting texts that provide sociological context for class discussions and assignments may include:

- *The Sociology of Harry Potter*, ed. Jenn Sims
- *Enterprising Women* (ethnography), Camille Bacon-Smith
- *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, John Storey
- *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon
- *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins
- *Fandom*, Henry Jenkins
- *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, Henry Jenkins
- *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*, Helen Young
- *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas
- *The Fantasy of Disability: Images of Loss in Popular Culture*, Jeffrey Preston
- “Devices and Desires: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Disability in Literature for Young People”, Jane Stemp, *Disability Studies Quarterly*
- *Harry Potter and the Issue of Gender* (www.shaabaandjamie.com/post/jk-rowling-essay)

COURSE SYLLABUS

EVALUATION METHODS

The course instructor will provide specific requirements and grading rubrics for individual assignments for the course. Your final grade in the course will be comprised of the following course requirements.

Participation	-10%
Article Presentation	-15%
Essay	-25%
Journal	-20%
Creative Presentation	-30%

Participation:

Students are expected to complete the weeks' reading at the time of class starting (i.e. if Week Two says *The Hunger Games*, you must complete the text before week two's class starts). Students are expected to participate in class discussion, be attentive, respectful, and engaged.

Article Presentation:

Students will present an article from that weeks' news that engages on some aspect of art and intersectional issues. Each student will present once over the course of the semester, with a few presentations at the start of each class. This may be on any subject, in any industry, but it must present an issue regarding the creative industries and human engagement (e.g. should we restore native art? Cultural appropriation in the fashion industry, civic funding to the arts, etc.). An example of the presentation will be given in the first class.

The student needs to 1) state where the article is from, 2) Summarize the main points, and 3) Present two questions to lead the class in a general discussion. 3-5 minutes to present, and around 5 minutes for discussion. PowerPoint/Prezi is optional.

Essay:

The essay draft will be 1500 words and serve as an exercise that will help you to work through your readings of the texts in question, sharpen your argumentative skills, examine your writing process, and work with constructive criticism to improve your work. For this reason, there is a required revision of the essay, which you will submit after comments from and consultation with your professor. This final essay will be 1500 words, graded, informed by the comments you receive from your professor, illustrating growth from the draft, and consideration of critical feedback.

Journal (written or video):

Each week, students must write a one-page (250 word minimum) journal entry or create a 2-minute video discussion. Using whatever creative elements desired to get their idea across (imagery, graphs, special effects, quotes, etc.) considering and reflecting on a topic discussed in class, or response to an element of the reading, talk, or field trip. These are meant to be informal, but practiced, illustrate effort, critical thought and attention. More formal than a letter to your parents, less formal than a submission to BBC.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Creative Project:

For this project, students will be asked to select one work of literature from the course and provide a summary of one issue explored in the text and its adaptation and propose a 'fix pitch.' This pitch will present a way for the work to better represent the underrepresented, or respond to criticism, reclaiming the story for a new purpose. This 10-minute presentation should be professional, persuasive, utilize research, evidence, and a PowerPoint/Prezi is expected to clearly get your ideas across. It must also be accompanied by a 500-word **Pitch Document**, summarizing your pitch for professional consideration.

TIMELY SUBMISSIONS

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be accepted at the discretion of the course instructor and generally only in the event of a documented illness or emergency.

ATTENDANCE

Academics and learning are at the core of your study abroad experience. Based upon research, studies show that students perform and learn better when they attend class regularly. Therefore, it is IFSA's expectation that students on our programs attend class regularly. Active and engaged attendance includes regularly scheduled classes, mandatory field visits, studios, recitations, workshops and laboratory sessions. Attendance will be recorded, and all absences are treated equally, regardless of reason.

The Resident Directors and professors of IFSA classes set the specific attendance policy for each location, including how absences impact final grades. Refer to your IFSA Student Handbook for full attendance policies.

IFSA Class Attendance Standards:

Percentage of Total Class Hours Missed	Minimum Penalty
Up to 10%	No academic penalty
10 – 20%	Reduction of final grade
More than 20%	Automatic course failure

- You must notify instructors and the appropriate on site IFSA staff member prior to an absence from class or class-related activities.
- Attendance policies also apply to any required class co-curricular excursion and internship or field/lab study hours.
- If participation is part of the overall class evaluation, you will not earn participation points for classes you are absent.
- Penalties or grade reductions for assignments that are turned in late due to absence are at the discretion of the instructor.
- Late arrivals to class may be considered absenteeism.

COURSE SYLLABUS

- Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% or more of total course hours missed) may lead to:
 - A written warning;
 - Notification to the student's home school; and/or
 - Dismissal from the program
- Any requests for exceptions related to IFSA's minimal class attendance expectations should be discussed with the Resident Director for approval.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any academic endeavor must be based upon a foundation of honesty and integrity. Students are expected to abide by principles of academic integrity and must be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work while studying abroad. Any academic work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill an academic requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic misconduct, such as cheating, fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty, will subject a student to disciplinary action.

IFSA takes academic integrity very seriously. Students must not accept outside assistance without permission from the instructor. Additionally, students must document all sources according to the instructions of the professor. Should your instructor suspect you of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty, you may receive a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action may result. The incident will be reported to the IFSA resident director as well as your home institution.