

SSP 100 Scribner Seminar

Human / Machine

Oscar A. Pérez
Office: PMH 408

Skidmore College
operezhe@skidmore.edu

Course Description

From the very first one created, machines have been a source of both excitement and unrest for humans. At any given time, machines have been admired as the expression of humanity's genius and feared as the embodiment of our deepest flaws. The mere existence of machines has posed recurrent questions, should we love them or hate them? Or more pragmatically, what should be the role of machines, as they get more complex and autonomous, in our present and future? Or more philosophically, what makes us human and what, if anything, separates us from machines? In this course, students will examine how such questions have been answered by people around the world in different fields, from scientists and engineers to humanists and science fiction writers, by looking at a variety of texts that include essays, short stories, films, and TED talks. We will keep in mind that, beyond how we feel about it, the relationship between humans and machines has shaped and will continue to shape our history, our identities, and our planet.

Course Objectives

This course will introduce students to disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on the relationship between humans and machines. This is a course about knowing, particularly about ways to identify problems, formulate productive questions, and go about answering those questions. Students in this course will demonstrate the ability to:

- distinguish among, and formulate, types of questions asked by different disciplines
- read critically, and gather and interpret evidence
- distinguish among the evidence and methodologies appropriate to different disciplines
- consider and address complexities and ambiguities
- make connections among ideas
- recognize choices, examine assumptions and ask questions of themselves and of their own work
- formulate conclusions based upon evidence
- communicate ideas both orally and in writing
- relate the results of the course to their educational goals

Required Materials

Catherynne M. Valente. *Silently and Very Fast*. Wyrn Publishing, 2012.

Scanned readings (Blackboard).

Selected films (YouTube, Netflix, and Blackboard).

Course Policies

Meeting Times

This course will meet three times a week. Two of those sessions will be devoted to the discussion of readings and assignments related to the course content. The third session (on Monday) will be dedicated to a range of different experiences designed to develop and strengthen the students' academic skills and to introduce them to college academic life. These will include workshops on note taking, preparing for exams, managing stress, international study programs, use of library resources, and internship opportunities available at Skidmore. The fourth credit hour will also provide the students the opportunity to meet with the peer mentor to discuss issues of academic life, such as the use of alcohol, personal integrity policies, and other challenges during their first semester at Skidmore.

Grading/Evaluation Criteria

Your final grade will be based on the following:

Preparation/Participation	10 %
Attendance	5 %
Response papers	25 %
Presentation	10 %
Midterm exam	20 %
Final exam	30 %

Grading Scale:

A+	99-100%	C+	77-79%
A	94-98%	C	73-76%
A-	90-93%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	63-66%
B-	80-82%	F	<63%

A: Distinguished: Shows mastery of the material, participates regularly and meaningfully; excellent attitude.

B: Superior: Knows material well, but lacks in some areas; very good to excellent attitude.

C: Satisfactory: Adequate, average, passing.

D: Poor: Little understanding, lacking in most areas.

F: Failing: Poor work, insufficient learning, little to no evidence of understanding.

Preparation/Participation (10%)

Students are expected to complete all readings (or watch videos and films) before each class. In addition, students are required to actively participate in class discussions. Each week, students are responsible for evaluating their own preparation/participation by **answering weekly surveys/quizzes on Blackboard**. The survey/quiz will be available from the end of class on Thursday to the beginning of class on Monday the following week. If a student forgets to answer the survey before the deadline, they will lose 1 out of 10 possible points and the instructor will assign the grade.

Attendance (5%)

Regular attendance is vital and worth 5 points (up to 5% of your final grade): 0-3 absences =5 pts., 4 absences=4 pts., 5 absences=3 pts., 6 absences=2 pts., 7 absences=1 pt., over 8 absences=0 pts. You may miss up to 3 days (1 week of classes) for any reason, without losing any attendance points; all absences count. If participation in Skidmore College-sponsored events (i.e., sports team competitions) requires you to miss class, bring a note on letterhead or ask for an email from coach/supervisor citing your name, your participation and the date(s) you will miss class.

Response Papers (25%)

Students are required to write **four** response papers (no less than 500 words each) on any of the texts studied in the course (check the Schedule). Response papers should be submitted to the instructor through the Blackboard site. One of response papers has to be on the summer reading *The Book That Change America* to be submitted by **Friday, September 15**. The other three are due the day before we discuss the corresponding text. Papers should followed the most recent **MLA guidelines** (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>) and include the **word count**. For additional guidance on how to write a response paper, check the documents titled "Writing a Response Paper-Duke U Writing Studio" and "Sample Response Papers-McGee, Longwood U" available on Blackboard. **At least two response papers should be turned in before Wednesday, October 11.**

Presentation (Case Study) (10%)

Students (individually or in pairs) will be in charge of choosing a text for the calls and prepare a presentation as indicated in the Schedule. The presentation will consist on a 15-20 min introduction to a relevant text or case study. Students can look for a recent article related to the theme of the course. The text will be an assigned reading for the day of their presentation. Students will then highlight important points for further discussion and suggest a path to establish a dialogue between their presentation and other previously studied texts. Each team or individual needs to come to the instructor's office at least **one week** before the date of their presentation to discuss their presentation and talk about the text they have chosen.

Midterm Exam (20%)

There will be one take-home midterm exam during the semester. Students are expected to write a 1000-word essay on a given topic that is informed by our discussions and readings. The exam should be submitted through the Blackboard site before 11:59pm on **Friday, October 13**.

Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will cover the major themes discussed throughout the semester. The format will be similar to the midterm exam, that is, a take-home exam where students are expected to write an essay informed by our discussions and readings of the whole semester. The exam should be submitted through the Blackboard site before 4:30pm on **Wednesday, December 13**.

No Barriers!

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

Title IX Statement and Reporting Responsibilities

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

Academic Integrity

All work turned in must be your own. Studying and practicing for class with another person is encouraged, but copying someone else's work is inexcusable. It is college policy that all violations to the academic Honor Code must be reported and, if the charge is sustained, the infraction may have consequences for the student beyond any grade penalty. For more information visit:

<http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/>

Schedule

(I reserve the right to make modifications to the schedule below)

Introduction to the Course and the Liberal Arts Perspective

Week 1 (Sep 4-8)

Thursday: Introduction to the course.

The Historians and Cultural Critics

Week 2 (Sep 11-15)

Monday: Workshop on time management (Peer mentor)

Tuesday: Pacey. "Concepts in Technology, 1550-1750" from *Technology in World Civilization A Thousand-Year History*, 1990.

Thursday: Daniel R. Headrick. "The First Industrial Revolution (1750-1869)" from *Technology: A World History*, 2009.

Friday: Response paper on *summer reading* due.

Week 3 (Sep 18-22)

Monday: Workshop on taking notes at the college level (Peer mentor)

Tuesday: Patrick K. O'Brien. "Deconstructing the British Industrial Revolution as a Conjuncture and Paradigm for Global Economic History," 2010.

Thursday: Donna Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 1991.

Week 4 (Sep 25-29)

Monday: Workshop on using the library (Library 118, Johanna MacKay)

Tuesday: Arturo Escobar. "Sustainable Development: The Death of Nature and the Rise of Environment" from *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, 1995.

Thursday: Joel Mokyr. "Progress Isn't Natural," 2016.

Presentation 1. Case study from historian or cultural critic perspective.

The Scientists and Engineers

Week 5 (Oct 2-6)

Monday: Workshop on sources and citation (Library 118, Johanna MacKay)

Tuesday: Kevin Warwick. "The Turing Test," "Cyborgs: A Personal Story" 2016

Thursday: A Conversation With Stephen Wolfram. "AI & The Future Of Civilization," 2016.

Presentation 2. Case study from scientist or engineer perspective.

Week 6 (Oct 9-13)

Monday: Workshop on writing strategies (Writing Center, Martha Wiseman)

Tuesday: Cynthia Breazeal. "The rise of personal robots," 2010.

Wednesday: At least two response papers due.

Thursday: Fei-Fei Li. "Towards Visual Intelligence: A Human Perspective," 2016.

Presentation 3. Case study from scientist or engineer perspective.

Friday: Midterm Exam due.

The Social Scientists

Week 7 (Oct 16-20)

Monday: Workshop on career services (Career Development Center, Megan Jackson)

Tuesday: David Collingridge. *The Social Control of Technology*, 1980. (excerpts)

Genus and Stirling, "Collingridge and the Dilemma of Control," 2017.

Thursday: Sheila Jasanoff. *The Ethics of Invention*, 2016. (excerpts)

Presentation 4. Case study from social scientist perspective.

Week 8 (Oct 23-27)

Monday: Workshop on registration for the upcoming semester (Peer mentor)

Tuesday: Levi Obijiofor. *New Technologies in Developing Societies*, 2015. (excerpts)

Thursday: Morgan C. Ames. "Translating Magic: The Charisma of One Laptop per Child's XO Laptop in Paraguay," 2014.

Presentation 5. Case study from social scientist perspective.

The Fiction Writers

Week 9 (Oct 30-Nov 3)

Monday: Workshop on visual literacy I (LI 113, Jesse Wakeman)

Tuesday: Isaac Asimov. "Robbie," 1950.

Thursday: Philip K. Dick. "The Electric Ant," 1969.

Week 10 (Nov 6-10)

Monday: Workshop on visual literacy II (LI 113, Jesse Wakeman)

Tuesday: Stanisław Lem. "Non Serviam," translated by Michael Kandel, 1971.

Thursday: N. K. Jemisin. "Valedictorian," 2012.

Presentation 6. Case study from fiction writer perspective.

Week 11 (Nov 13-17)

Monday: Workshop on Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (Anna Burnett)

Tuesday: Catherynne M. Valente. *Silently and Very Fast*, 2012.

Thursday: Catherynne M. Valente. *Silently and Very Fast*, 2012.

Presentation 7. Case study from fiction writer perspective.

The Filmmakers

Week 12 (Nov 20-21, Thanksgiving Vacation)

Monday: Workshop on oral presentations (Instructor/Peer mentor)

Tuesday: *Blade Runner* (1982). Dir. Ridley Scott

Week 13 (Nov 27-Dec 1)

Monday: Workshop on preparing for final exams (Peer mentor).

Tuesday: *The Matrix* (1999). Dirs. Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski.

Thursday: *Sleep Dealer* (2008). Dir. Alex Rivera.

Presentation 8. Case study from filmmaker perspective.

Week 14 (Dec 4-8)

Monday: End-of-semester gathering.

Tuesday: *Advantageous* (2015). Dir. Jennifer Phang.

Thursday: *Futurestates* (2014), <http://www.futurestates.tv/>

Final Exam Due

Wednesday, December 13

4:30pm