



**COLA 100LA, Sec. 1004**  
**First Year Seminar:**  
**Science Fiction and Philosophy**  
**Fall 2017**  
**MW 1pm-2:15pm**  
**CBC C219**

**Professor:** James Woodbridge

**Email:** james.woodbridge@unlv.edu

**Course Webpage:** WebCampus

and at <http://faculty.unlv.edu/jwood/unlv/COLA100LAF17syl.htm>

**Office Hours:** M 2:30pm-4pm, T 12:30pm-2pm, and by appointment

**Office:** CDC 426

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**Dept. Phone:** 895-3433

**Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to philosophy with the specific long-term goal of helping you be a successful college student. To achieve this goal we will cover skills and information related to success in college, in the context of exploring some central philosophical issues raised in various works of science fiction. Science fiction (sci-fi) provides an accessible, informal platform for asking and attempting to answer certain questions that philosophy investigates in a more systematic way. We will consider some interesting questions raised in various works of sci-fi, determine their philosophical underpinnings, and examine how various philosophers have investigated those underlying issues. Some of the questions we will consider include: Could the world around you just be an elaborate computer simulation? (What can you know about the world outside of your mind?) If my memories and consciousness were uploaded into a computer or a robot when my body died, would the result still be me? (What makes me the particular being that I am?) Could a very sophisticated robot or android count as a genuine person? (What are the criteria for personhood?) Should we punish someone for a crime he has not yet committed but is predetermined to commit in the future? (Do we have free will, and how does this issue relate to morality?) Would an alien species' morality be just as legitimate as ours? (Are there universal moral principles?) What would you think if an advanced alien species came here and dictated how we are to live? (What responsibilities do the powerful have to the less powerful?) What sorts of problems with our own society might be revealed in reactions we might have to alien (or long-isolated human) societies—and they might have to us? (Where do we manifest racism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression?) Could our love of technology lead to a horrible future? (What makes for a good society?) What sort of life can someone have in a corporatized, resource-poor, dystopian setting? (What aspects of current society might threaten our future, and how might we resist them?)

A primary objective of this course is to introduce students to college life at UNLV. In the process, you will become familiar with the resources the university provides as well as the learning goals expected of all undergraduate students. The course will also address the acquisition of critical thinking and study skills, as well as accessing and evaluating information from a variety of sources. Finally, emphasis will be placed on the importance of preparing yourself to function in a diverse world, as well as becoming an ethical and engaged citizen. As such, this course serves as preparation for both your academic career at UNLV and your future professional goals.

**Course Goals:** This course will introduce you to each of the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes, skills and information related to college success, along with the general nature of philosophical thought and its basic methods and goals, by introducing classic philosophical questions through the format of science fiction.

**University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs):**

1. **Intellectual Breadth and Life-Long Learning** - Integrate differing perspectives of the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and fine arts, and develop skills and desire for life-long learning.
2. **Inquiry and Critical Thinking** - Use qualitative and quantitative methods to guide the collection, analysis, and use of information and produce reasoned arguments and explanations.
3. **Communication** - Communicate effectively in written, spoken, visual, and digital modes.
4. **Global/Multicultural** - Develop knowledge of global and multicultural societies and an awareness of one's place in and effect on them.
5. **Citizenship and Ethics** - Participate knowledgeably and actively in the public life of our communities and make informed, responsible, and ethical decisions in one's personal and professional life.

**Other Learning Outcomes:**

6. **An overview of UNLV and the resources available to students**
7. **College success skills including how to study and manage your time effectively**

**Course-Specific Learning Goals. By the end of the course you should be able to:**

8. Define philosophical terms, concepts, and theories introduced in the course (UULOs: 1, 3).
9. Explain the major theoretical approaches in ethics and the challenges each faces (UULOs: 1, 2, 3, 5).
10. Recognize presuppositions/assumptions underlying a view or presented scenario (UULOs: 1, 2, 4, 5).
11. Formulate, defend, and critique arguments and theoretical positions (UULOs: 1, 2, 3—possibly 5).
12. Think critically about difficult and abstract issues (UULOs: 1, 2—possibly 5).

**Required Textbooks (Available at the UNLV Bookstore):**

Heavey, C. and Gianoutsos, D. *Achieving Success: A Guide for College and Life*. Second Edition. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2013  
Nagel, T. *What Does it All Mean?* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987  
Perry, J. *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978

You will also be required to read around **30 science-fiction short stories**, along with several **philosophy selections**, which will be made available through the WebCampus page for this course.

In addition, you will be required to watch a few **science fiction movies**, as well as several **episodes of *Star Trek***, from The Original Series (*TOS*), The Next Generation (*TNG*), and Deep Space Nine (*DS9*). The movies will be set up to stream via the WebCampus page. The *Star Trek* episodes will be available via the course Netflix account, which I will activate in September.

**Attendance Policy:**

You must attend class and engage in discussion of the material. There is such a thing as an excused absence (when verified with me); if you know in advance that you will have to miss class for a legitimate reason (this does not include work—you must schedule work around school), email me to let me know what is happening. More than two **unexcused** absences lowers your final course grade by one level (i.e., a B becomes a B-). More than 4 unexcused absences lowers your course grade by a full letter (i.e., a B+ becomes a C+). More than 7 unexcused absences results in automatic failure of the course.

**Missed Class(es):**

If you miss a class, the **first** thing you need to do is **get notes** for that meeting from one of your classmates. Then, **after reviewing** the notes, come see me in office hours to discuss what you missed.

**Special Materials Needed:**

You need access to a computer with a connection to the Internet, in order to access the majority of the course readings and to stream the video assignments for the course.

## **Assignments, Projects, WebCampus Posts and Class Contributions**

You must satisfactorily complete all of the class assignments in order to pass the course.

### **Class Participation** (UULOs: 1, 3)

You are expected to attend every class, to have read and watched everything assigned for each meeting before that meeting, to have written down some notes about what you read and watched, and to be ready to discuss the material—by asking questions, answering other students' questions, making observations or suggestions, etc. This still applies when there is also an assignment you must turn in for the class. Everyone should contribute to the discussion of the material in every class meeting.

### **College Success Activities** (UULOs: 1, 3)

Throughout the term, mostly in the beginning, there will be a number of Activities you will engage in and verify, pertaining to chapters of *Achieving Success*, as well as learning about other UNLV resources.

### **WebCampus Journal Entries** (UULOs: 2, 3—sometimes 4, 5)

Nearly every week you will need to make an entry to the journal section of your WebCampus page for the course. These entries will involve your reactions to, explanation and discussion of, and relating together some of the assigned readings. Each entry should be at 500-600 words. The focus is more on content than writing niceties.

### **Essays: Drafts and Rewrites** (UULOs: 2, 3—sometimes 4, 5)

You will write two 4-5 page (1200-1500 word) Essays during the term, both of which you will initially submit as a First (but complete) Draft and then revise in light of my comments (and advice from the Writing Center) to submit as a Rewrite. The First Essay Draft is due by noon on Wednesday, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>, with the Rewrite due by noon on Wednesday, Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>. The Second Essay Draft is due by noon on Monday, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>, with the Rewrite due by noon on Monday, Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **Class Group Presentation** (UULOs: 1, 2, 3—possibly 4, 5)

Starting in mid-November, most class meetings will include student group presentations. In these presentations, a 4-student group will introduce and summarize two different works of science fiction (a short story, novel, film, or TV-show episode)—outside of the works assigned for the class—that raise a common philosophical issue, explain the issue, explain the views of some philosopher on that issue, and explain how the issue arises and is covered in the sci-fi works. Each presentation should be about 30 minutes long and include some sort of visual aid (power-point, drawn posters, drawings on the classroom whiteboard). Each group must submit a **1200-1500 word** write up of their presentation.

### **Final Exam** (UULOs: 1, 2, 3, 5)

At **1pm on Monday, Dec. 11, 2017**, in our regular classroom, we will have a timed, in-class, closed book **Final Exam** for the course. The exam will consist of some sort answer questions and some essay questions, pertaining to the course materials and the lectures and discussions about them.

### **Grade Breakdown:**

<b>Class Participation =</b>	<b>100 Points</b>
<b>College Success Activities =</b>	<b>150 Points (10 each)</b>
<b>WebCampus Journal Entries =</b>	<b>250 Points (25 each)</b>
<b>Essays =</b>	<b>500 Points (250 each)</b>
<b>Class Presentation =</b>	<b>200 Points</b>
<b>Final Exam =</b>	<b>300 Points</b>

**Total Points for Course = 1500.**

<b>Grade Ranges</b>	<b>A: 1390-1500</b>	<b>B: 1240-1299</b>	<b>C: 1090-1149</b>	<b>D: 940-999</b>	<b>F: 0-894</b>
	<b>A-: 1345-1389</b>	<b>B-: 1195-1239</b>	<b>C-: 1040-1089</b>	<b>D-: 895-939</b>	

### **Individual Study**

For this course, students are expected to engage in at least *five hours* per week of individual study outside the classroom (e.g., reading, writing, reviewing, researching, class preparation).

## Class Schedule

***The instructor reserves the right to amend this schedule. Any changes will be announced and/or distributed in class. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of changes.***

<b>WK</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
1	Aug. 28	Introduction to class, syllabus, and WebCampus	N/A	N/A
	Aug. 30	Getting Started in College  What is a Liberal Arts Education?  Success strategies  Philosophy, thought experiments, and science fiction	Chap. 1-3, <i>Achieving Success</i>  "Message to My Freshman Students" by Keith Parsons  "On the Study of Philosophy" by J. Perry and M. Bratman  Chap. 1, <i>What Does it All Mean?</i> by Thomas Nagel	College Success Activity I: Email your professor to schedule a visit.  College Success Activity II: Do the Exercises at the ends of Chapters 2 and 3 of <i>Achieving Success</i> (pp. 33-37 and 62-66)
2	Sep. 4	<b>Labor Day—No Class!</b> (But do the reading and problems assigned.)	Chap. 8, <i>Achieving Success</i>	College Success Activity: Practice Problems from <i>Achieving Success</i> , Ch. 8 (hand in on Wed)
	Sep. 6	Arguments and critical thinking  Appearance and Reality  What can we be sure of?	"The Allegory of the Cave" from <i>The Republic</i> by Plato  "The Electric Ant" by Philip K. Dick	Journal Entry #1: Discuss parallels between the Plato and PKD readings
3	Sep. 11	Academic Success Center presentation  Time Management  Belief and knowledge	Chap. 5, <i>Achieving Success</i>  Chap. 2, <i>What Does it All Mean?</i> by Thomas Nagel  "Appearance and Reality" by Bertrand Russell	College Success Activity I: complete the Personal Time Inventory from <i>Achieving Success</i> , Ch. 5  College Success Activity II: come to my office hours by Friday 9/15
	Sep. 13	Knowledge of the world beyond experience  Skepticism	Chap. 6, <i>Achieving Success</i>  "A Brain in a Vat" by Jonathan Pollock  Watch <i>The Matrix</i>	College Success Activity: visit another of your professors this week to discuss his/her course. Get the visit certified for me.

4	Sep. 18	<p>Learning strategies</p> <p>Skepticism and solipsism</p> <p>Could we be living in a simulation?</p> <p>Would it be a bad thing if we were?</p>	<p>"They" by Robert Heinlein</p> <p>"Meditations I and II" by Rene Descartes</p> <p>"The Existence of Matter" by Bertrand Russell</p> <p>"The Experience Machine" by Robert Nozick</p> <p>Watch <i>Star Trek TNG</i>, "Ship in a Bottle" [S6:Ep12]</p>	<p>Journal Entry #2: Take one sci-fi story or viewing and one philosophy reading assigned 9/11-18, and discuss why there is a problem about knowledge.</p>
	Sep. 20	<p>What am I? A mind (soul)? A body?</p> <p>Could I continue to exist after death?</p>	<p>"The Meeting" by F. Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth</p> <p>Chap. 4 of Nagel</p> <p>"The First Night" from <i>A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality</i> by John Perry</p> <p>"Where am I?" by Daniel Dennett</p>	<p>College Success Activity: Learn about Financial Aid (download a FAFSA form) and scholarships you can apply for.</p>
5	Sep. 25	<p>Personal Identity through time</p>	<p>Chap. 7, <i>Achieving Success</i></p> <p>"The Second Night" and "The Third Night" from the Perry book.</p> <p>Chap. 9 of Nagel</p> <p>"Learning to Be Me" by Greg Egan</p> <p>Watch <i>Star Trek TNG</i>, "Second Chances" [S6:Ep24]</p>	<p>Journal Entry #3: Pick one sci-fi reading and one philosophy reading assigned 9/20-25 and explain, discuss, and relate them</p> <p>College Success Activity: Answer the Journal Questions at the end of Chap. 7 of <i>Achieving Success</i>.</p>
	Sep. 27	<p>Critical Essay Writing</p> <p>Writing Center visit</p> <p>What does it take to be a person?</p> <p>Could a robot or android count as a person?</p> <p>The Turing Test</p>	<p>"The Bicentennial Man" by Isaac Asimov</p> <p>"Turing Test" in <i>Wikipedia</i></p> <p>Chap. 3 of Nagel</p> <p>Watch <i>Star Trek TNG</i>, "The Measure of a Man" [S2:Ep9]</p>	<p>College Success Activity: Make an appointment to visit the Writing Center by 10/3 to discuss your First Essay.</p>
6	Oct. 2	<p>Artificial intelligence (AI) and synthetic persons</p> <p>Against the Turing Test and the possibility of AI</p>	<p>"Evidence" from <i>I, Robot</i> by Isaac Asimov</p> <p>"Searle and the Chinese Room Argument: Parts I and II" Webpages by D. Anderson</p> <p>Watch <i>Ex Machina</i></p>	<p>Journal Entry #4: Pick one sci-fi work and one philosophy reading from 9/27-10/2 and explain, discuss, and relate them.</p> <p>Find a chatbot online and have a "conversation". Report a bizarre reply it gives you.</p>

	<b>Oct. 4</b>	Free will, foreknowledge, and determinism	"The Minority Report" by Philip K. Dick Chap. 6 of Nagel	Submit First Essay via email by noon.
7	<b>Oct. 9</b>	Lied Library visit  What if determinism were true?	Chap. 9, <i>Achieving Success</i>  "What's Expected of Us" by Ted Chiang  "Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends" by Thomas Davis	Journal Entry #5: Pick one sci-fi reading and one philosophy reading from 10/4-9 and explain, discuss, and relate them.  College Success Activity: Do Practice Activities #1 and #2 at the end of <i>Achieving Success</i> , Ch. 9.
	<b>Oct. 11</b>	Why be moral? Does might make right?  What is the basis of morality? Is morality based on religion?	"The Ring of Gyges," from <i>The Republic</i> by Plato  Watch <i>The Invisible Man</i> (1933).  Chap. 7 of Nagel  "Does Morality Depend on Religion?" by James Rachels	College Success Activity: Visit the Writing Center over the next 8 days to discuss revising your First Essay.
8	<b>Oct. 16</b>	Ethics: the right and the good  Is morality subjective?  Do the ends justify the means?	Chap. 12, <i>Achieving Success</i>  "Axiomatic" by Greg Egan  Watch <i>Star Trek DS9</i> , "In the Pale Moonlight" [S6:Ep19]	College Success Activity: Do the Self-Test and Review Questions from <i>Achieving Success</i> , Ch. 12
	<b>Oct. 18</b>	The Intersection visit  What conclusions should we draw about morality because of moral difference?	"The Monsters" by R. Shekley  "Cold-Blooded" by Margaret Atwood	Work on your First Essay Rewrite, due via email by noon on Wednesday 10/25.
9	<b>Oct. 23</b>	Is morality relative?  Could there be general universal moral principles?	"Three Worlds Collide" by E. Yudkowsky  "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" by James Rachels  Watch <i>Star Trek: TOS</i> , "The Devil in the Dark" [S1:Ep25]	Journal Entry #6: Pick one sci-fi work and one philosophy reading from 10/11-23 and explain, discuss, and relate them.
	<b>Oct. 25</b>	Could morality be a matter of purely rational duties?  Do universal moral principles apply absolutely?	"Kant's Duty Ethics" Webpage by Jan Garret  "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin  Watch <i>Star Trek: TOS</i> , "Journey to Babel" [S2:Ep10]	Submit First Essay Rewrite via email by noon.

10	Oct. 30	Wilson Advising Center visit  Are there universal and absolute rights?	Chap. 13, <i>Achieving Success</i> "The Sharing of Flesh" by Poul Anderson  Watch <i>Star Trek:</i> <i>TNG</i> , "Pen Pals" [S2:Ep15]	College Success Activity: Pick 3 programs as your possible major from the UNLV Catalog and complete the form in Ex. 13.1 for each of them.
	Nov. 1	Are consequences what determine the morality of actions?	Chap. 1-2, <i>Utilitarianism</i> by J.S. Mill  "The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. LeGuin	Journal Entry #7: Pick one sci-fi work and one philosophy reading from 10/25-11/1 and explain, discuss, and relate them.
11	Nov. 6	Society, gender roles, patriarchy	Chap. 10, <i>Achieving Success</i>  "When it Changed" by Joanna Russ  "Understanding Patriarchy" by bell hooks	College Success Activity: Complete the Exercises and Case Study Questions from <i>Achieving Success</i> , Ch. 10  Work on Second Essay, due via email by noon Wednesday 11/8.
	Nov. 8	Peer Educator from Jean Nidetch Women's Center "Bystander Intervention and Consent"	Watch <i>Steven Universe</i> clips	Submit Second Essay via email by noon.
12	Nov. 13	International Programs visit  Society and oppression	"The World Well Lost" by Theodore Sturgeon	College Success Activity: Search for and report on (to hand in on 11/15) two different Study Abroad programs that interest you.
	Nov. 15	Societal oppression and prejudice  Student presentations	<i>The Racial Contract</i> , Intro and Ch. 1, by Charles Mills  "Out of All Them Bright Stars" by Nancy Kress  "The Space Traders" by Derrick Bell  Watch <i>Star Trek:</i> <i>TOS</i> , "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" [S3:Ep15]	Journal Entry #8: Pick one sci-fi work and one philosophy reading from 11/1-11/15 and explain, discuss, and relate them.
13	Nov. 20	Prejudice, inequality and justice  Student presentations	"Beggars in Spain" by Nancy Kress  Chap. 8 of Nagel	
	Nov. 22	YES, we have Class!  The limits of equality  Student presentations	"Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut  "Justice as Fairness," Charles Kay (Webpage)  "Rawls and Nozick," Gaura Rader (Webpage).	

<b>14</b>	<b>Nov. 27</b>	Technology and society Student presentations	"The Machine Stops" by E.M. Forster Watch V (the original 1983 two-part TV miniseries).	Journal Entry #9: Pick one sci-fi reading and one philosophy reading from 11/20-11/27 and explain, discuss, and relate them.
	<b>Nov. 29</b>	Are we doomed as a culture? Student presentations	"The Marching Morons" by C.M. Kornbluth	
<b>15</b>	<b>Dec. 4</b>	Considering a possible resource-scarce, dystopic future Student presentations	"The Calorie Man" by Paolo Bacigalupi	Submit Second Essay Rewrite via email by noon.
	<b>Dec. 6</b>	The Big Picture	"The Last Question" by Isaac Asimov Chap. 10 of Nagel	Journal Entry #10: Pick one sci-fi reading and one philosophy reading from 11/29-12/6 and explain, discuss, and relate them.
<b>16</b>	<b>Dec. 11</b>	Final Exam at 1pm in our regular classroom.	Study your notes! Go over the readings! Form study groups!	Bring an Exambook! Bring an extra one for a classmate!

## **University of Nevada, Las Vegas Additional Information**

**Academic Misconduct** – “Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution.”

An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism: “Using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources.” See the “Student Academic Misconduct Policy” (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>.

**Copyright** – The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize them and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. **You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws.** Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. To familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, you are encouraged to visit the following website: <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/>.

**Disability Resource Center (DRC)** – It is important to know that over two-thirds of the students in the DRC reported that this syllabus statement, often read aloud by the faculty during class, directed them to the DRC office.

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) coordinates all academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The DRC is the official office to review and house disability documentation for students, and to provide them with an official Academic Accommodation Plan to present to the faculty if an accommodation is warranted. Faculty should not provide students accommodations without being in receipt of this plan.

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are: Voice (702) 895-0866, TDD (702) 895-0652, fax (702) 895-0651. For additional information, please visit: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>.

**Religious Holidays Policy** -- Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor no later than the last day at late registration of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. This policy shall not apply in the event that administering the test or examination at an alternate time would impose an undue hardship on the instructor or the university which could not be avoided. <http://catalog.unlv.acalog.com/content.php?catoid=1&navoid=44&bc=1>

**Tutoring** -- The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring and academic assistance for all UNLV students taking UNLV courses. Students are encouraged to stop by the ASC to learn more about subjects offered, tutoring times and other academic resources. The ASC is located across from the Student Services Complex, #22 on the current UNLV map. Students may learn more about tutoring services by calling (702) 895-3177 or visiting the tutoring web site at: <http://academicsuccess.unlv.edu/tutoring/>

**UNLV Writing Center** -- One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 895-3908. The student’s Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>