

Learning Community Proposal: Fall 2012

ISL 101: From Apeman to Spaceman: Anthropology and Science Fiction

Sponsoring faculty members: Dr. Arthur Murphy, Dorothy Davis, Mika Cohen Jones

Planning team members and their departmental units:

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Meeting time: TBA

Meeting location: TBA

Number of credits: 1 credit

Overview: Anthropology is the scientific study of humankind. It has been referred to as the most scientific of the humanities and the most humane of the sciences. It is a discipline that deals with the past, the present and the future studying various periods from apeman to spaceman. It is an eclectic discipline drawing from and feeding into all sources of knowledge. In this community we are proposing linking two anthropology courses: ATY 253 is a science course meeting GLS requirements and the other ATY 213 is a social anthropology course carrying GSB and GN credits. Students will experience Physical Anthropology, the study of human biological variation and evolution, as well as Cultural Anthropology, a holistic and comparative study of human cultural variation and societies. There are common themes addressed in both of these courses, including the natural environment, human variation, and culture. A proposed lab section (ISL 101) on Anthropology and Science Fiction links these two courses in a unique way that we believe will attract considerable interest from students of various backgrounds and academic interests. One biological anthropology lab for ATY 253 and one section of cultural anthropology are reserved exclusively for students of the Apeman to Spaceman Community. The professors for these two courses are creating links to the two ATY courses and the ISL 101 course.

Through an exploration of science fiction, students will have extended opportunities to see how alternative worlds are created in fiction, and how the genre is used as a vehicle to understand humans in the past, present, and future. Science fiction is timeless and interdisciplinary, and provides powerful metaphors for life and how we live it. Our students will utilize the creative flexibility of the science fiction genres to explore dimensions of human socio-cultural and physical identities. The critical perspectives gained in this learning community will allow students to use issues from mainstream scholarship in any discipline as a lens for deconstructing popular culture in their everyday lives.

Student Population: This learning community is designed for Freshmen. It is open to students of any major.

Specific learning outcomes: On the completion of this course students will be able to meet the SLO's for GN, GSB, and GLS outlined on the syllabi for ATY 253 and 213 as well as:

1. Develop an understanding of Anthropology as a holistic discipline that incorporates biology, culture, and the environment;
2. Understand the historical and cultural context of Science Fiction as a genre and its use as cultural and biological commentary;
3. Apply anthropological concepts, theories and methods to analyze science fiction life forms, cultures and environments;
4. Draw parallels between science fiction and current world issues;
5. Demonstrate how culture, biology and environment are integrated through the creation of a fictional world.
6. Develop a sense of solidarity among participants based on common goals and personal interests;
7. Promote a lifelong interest in Anthropology as a discipline.

Embedded assessment of learning outcomes: All of the above student learning outcomes will be assessed cumulatively throughout the course using group discussions, student presentations, film and reading response journals and a culminating class project.

Additional Assessment: The Office of Learning Communities holds focus groups in the fall for current participants that will collect student perceptions of learning and their experience. Additionally, the Office of Learning Communities will participate in the Online Survey of Learning Communities through the Washington Center for the Improving the Quality of Higher Education. The Office of Learning Communities is working with Institutional Research to develop an essay prompt to ascertain the foundation of Learning Goal 5 for General Education to be administered with the Online Survey.

Academic linkages: This learning community will include 24 students, each enrolled in ATY253 and ATY253L *Introduction to Physical Anthropology* and ATY213 *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. These courses represent the diverse perspectives of Life Science and Social and Behavioral Science, and give students complementary yet distinct perspectives on what it means to be human. In these courses students will study topics including *Homo sapiens* origin and evolution, the organization of human social and cultural relations, human physical traits, how humans behave, the variations among different groups of humans, and how the evolutionary past of *Homo sapiens* has influenced its social organization and culture.

Components of the learning community to be integrated with the theme: This learning community offers opportunities for students to see how popular culture mirrors our society across time and acts as a myth for our future. The following features of the community will allow students to describe general patterns, make informed comparisons, and apply critical perspectives to new realms outside of academia, and become active lifelong learners:

1. Science fiction films. To be organized by the planning team, a series of films depicting the human condition in the past, present and imagined future will be screened. Film viewing is followed by facilitated discussions.
2. Literature. To be organized by the planning team, a series of short stories depicting futuristic or imaginary worlds alternative to our own in adaptations, natural environment, race, sex, and ethnography will be assigned as required readings. Readings will be followed by facilitated discussions.
3. Guest speakers. Experts in the field of Anthropology and Science Fiction will give presentations of general interest to the learning community.
4. Online activities. As a cumulative class project, students will work in teams to build speculative human societies through online gaming. This activity will be followed by facilitated discussions that highlight, in particular, the importance of our relation to the physical world and to one another.
5. Interactive in-class games. To be organized by the planning teams, a series of fictional role-play exercises will actively engage students in current world issues.

Integrated Learning Assignment/Culminating Project: Students will be asked to read Ursula Le Guin's *The Other Side of Darkness*, a successful attempt to create an alternative planet with a unique ecology and a unique set of human biological and physical adaptations to that environment. As an assignment that combines information from the two integrated courses, students will be asked to work in small groups to create a planet/community of their own, with plausible feedback loops between the environment, morphological and genetic adaptations, and socio-cultural practices. Students will be evaluated both on the effectiveness of their model and the effectiveness of their collaborative process.

Impact on learning across the University: This learning community will provide students with the following tools that allow active engagement in the world around them.

1. Application of research and critical perspectives to realms outside of academia: Students will be forced to view popular culture and everyday portrayals of humanity through a critical and multi-disciplinary lens. Understanding the relevance of research and theory to our everyday lives is a skill that is critical for maintaining student engagement in academic study.
2. Exploration of diversity: Students will be faced with questions such as: How important are the differences that separate us? Can we ever really understand each other? These are questions that are critical for increasing intercultural awareness and to open students to the diversity within and beyond their immediate community.
3. Ability to make informed comparisons: Students will compare and contrast across a variety of themes within science fiction

4. Awareness of biases and resolution of ethical dilemmas: Because of the very personal nature of the subjects covered in anthropological science fiction, students will be forced to confront their own assumptions and biases. Such self-awareness has been shown to have a positive effect on student learning outcomes.
5. Ability to communicate and collaborate effectively in small groups: Students will discuss readings and films in groups and will be responsible for the completion of a collaborative class project. Effective teamwork allows students to feel connected to others at the university and builds critical oral skills necessary for success across the University.

Value of this learning community: Students often spend their time at a University studying academic subjects in isolation, without connecting the patterns and themes that emerge within classrooms to their everyday lives. Finding and building from something that is already of particular interest to many students, like Science Fiction, is critical to bridging this gap. This learning community will provide students with the opportunity to make explicit connects between academic concepts and fictional worlds that students find in films, novels they read in their spare time, and video games they play online. In this sense, science fiction is a “hook” that allows us to tap into students’ interest and simultaneously discuss cultural and biological adaptations in more systematic ways. Our expectation is that participation in this learning community—and students’ rich and personal connections to the anthropological material that ensue—will bring the kind of enjoyment and satisfaction to academic study necessary to maintain student engagement over the long-term. Science fiction is simply a fun and immersive way to explore a wide range of critical anthropological issues.

Marketing: The Planning Team plans to promote this learning community when talking with prospective students at events including but not limited to Destination UNCG, SOAR and First Look. We intend to make a poster available as a marketing tool that the OLC can utilize in its outreach efforts. A key component in marketing this learning community will be pointing out to students that two of their basic GEC requirements are tackled as a result of their participation.

Budget

Planning faculty Add-Pay	\$ 7,000
Film/Speaker Series/ fieldtrips	\$ 2,500
Supplies for Facilitators	\$ 1,000
Marketing/Recruitment	\$ 500
Software	\$ 500
PALS (\$400 x2)	\$ 800
Discretionary Budget	\$ 1000
TOTAL	\$ 13,300