

CARD 400: Cardinal Directions Senior Seminar
Fall 2021, Section 2
MWF, 12:00-1:05pm (August 25 through October 15)
Goldspohn 36

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Office: Seybert 102 (floor below advisors)
Office Hours: 9:15-10:35 MWF

Course Description

This senior seminar serves as a capstone for the General Education program at North Central and provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their liberal arts education in the context of an interdisciplinary theme or problem chosen by the instructor. For this version of the class, our focus will be on the question of utopia vs. dystopia. In both popular culture and everyday conversation, fatalism about the future is common. Where our grandparents and (to a lesser extent) our parents expected a world of endless technological advancement and abundance, we are more likely to envision a dystopian future of environmental destruction and unbridgeable inequality. In this course, we will ask whether it is still possible to imagine a more utopian future while acknowledging the very serious obstacles—political, economic, and environmental—that stand in the way of such an outcome. In doing so, we will touch on every area of the liberal arts, taking advantage of the skills and expertise every student has achieved through the course of their college education.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will

1. actively engage in collaborative problem-solving.
2. integrate approaches of more than one discipline to formulate new or tackle existing complex questions.
3. reflect on the contributions of the liberal arts curriculum to their education and future goals.
4. engage in constructive dialogue in discussing and debating issues of civic importance.

Course Readings

Our primary reading for this course will be Peter Frase, *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism* (Verso, 2016; ISBN: 917-1-78168-813-7), which is available from our online bookstore as well as many other sources. Other readings will be provided via Blackboard. We will also be watching selected television episodes, music videos, and films, which are available through a variety of streaming services and, in many cases, also on DVD.

Assignments and Grading

I believe that all education is ultimately student-driven, and that should be the case above all for a class made up of college seniors. Through the readings and assignments, I am providing a framework, but the direction of our discussions will depend on your own efforts, individually and collaboratively. Accordingly, class participation will make up a substantial portion of your final grade: 50%. In addition, a reflection paper will count for 20% of your final grade and a

group presentation will make up the remaining 30% (with 10% stemming from the quality of the presentation as a whole and 20% from each student's individual contribution).

Class participation presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. On the basis of such preparation, students should be prepared for an intensive discussion focused on the texts or other materials assigned for that day.

You must also come prepared to class, and that means having the course text in front of you, along with annotations or notes. Hard copies are strongly preferred, especially for assigned books available from the college bookstore, but if electronic copies are used, you should plan to mark them and/or take notes as you read.

My expectation for participation is that *every member of class* will be able to contribute with remarks and citations that are on-topic and reflect solid preparation for class. A student who meets that baseline will receive a grade in the **B range** for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range**. Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to draw in quieter classmates—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range**. Active participation in a smaller break-out group qualifies for a B-range grade, but you must regularly contribute to the whole-group discussion if you want an A for participation.

The baseline condition for class participation is of course attendance at our meetings. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Absences will be considered excused only for the following reasons:

- You have suffered an illness or medical emergency that prevents attendance
- The death or illness of a family member requires you to be elsewhere during class time
- You are celebrating a religious holiday and have received approval for this before missing class
- You are representing the college in an official capacity and have made me aware of your responsibilities before missing class; these absence notifications and must be accompanied by a note or email from a relevant NCC employee (e.g., coach, faculty mentor, dean, etc.)

Unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade, and more than three unexcused absences will result in automatic failure of the course.

Students requiring additional accommodations are urged to discuss this matter with the professor as early as possible in the semester and to devise a formal written plan in consultation with the relevant institutional offices. In line with the Shimer School (my home department)'s policies on attendance, accommodations will be made with the aim of allowing a student to attend at least 80% of class sessions and without placing undue burdens on either the accommodated student or the faculty member.

The **reflection paper** will consist of a mid-term paper reflecting on how the skills and knowledge you have gained in college would apply to the scenarios from Frase's *Four Futures*. This paper must be 2-3 *full* pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins, in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) format, and will count for 20% of the student's final grade. (In case of technical difficulties submitting in the required format, you may use another format for the sake of meeting the deadline, but must resubmit in the required in order to receive comments and a grade.)

Students will be required to bring a full draft of their paper in hard copy to class for peer review (see schedule below); the final draft will be due a little over a week later (under "Assignment Submission"). Final papers turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a 5% grade penalty on the assignment; papers turned in within a week of the deadline will receive a 10% grade penalty, with an additional 10% penalty for each additional week (or portion of a week) the paper is late.

The **final group presentation** will bring together groups of 3-5 students with a range of different majors, who will choose one specific topic or question related to post-scarcity and show how their majors and/or anticipated professions can address that topic or question, both individually and together. This presentation will account for 30% of the final grade, with 10% coming from an overall assessment of the group presentation as a whole and 20% coming from the individual student's own contribution. All students are expected to attend all group presentations; failure to do so will count against your participation grade.

More thorough descriptions of both assignments, including sample topics for the project, are available on Blackboard under "Syllabus."

My expectations for both the essay and the presentation are substantially the same: they should be cohesive and well-organized, with a clear overarching focus or thesis statement, and ample supporting evidence (in the form of appropriate citations). A general rubric follows:

A: The paper or presentation demonstrates excellent competence in all areas: imaginative choice of material; excellent thesis clearly stated and supported with persuasive evidence and reasoning; well-organized ideas that unify the paper; good transitions between ideas and between paragraphs; clear and logical development of discussion; the paper is virtually free of errors in usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

B: The paper or presentation demonstrates above-average competence in all areas: appropriate choice of material; good thesis clearly stated and supported with good evidence and reasons; overall unity but some disjointed paragraphs and vague transitions; ideas sometimes out of sequence, and discussion occasionally hard to follow; clear and readable language that may at

times be too general, vague, or inappropriate. It is comparatively free of errors in the use of English.

C: The paper or presentation demonstrates average competence in all areas: predictable, overly general, trite or obvious thesis supported with some irrelevant material; basic organization showing that the paper follows a logical plan; some paragraphs may be disunited or misplaced, containing abrupt shifts in ideas; wander off topic at times, becoming difficult to follow; sentences sometimes awkwardly constructed with wordy, imprecise, or trite language; mechanical errors that are distracting.

D: The paper or presentation demonstrates below-average competence in all areas: vague or carelessly thought-out thesis supported with inappropriate material; lack of overall unity, poor organization and development of ideas with some illogical transitions and weak conclusions; confusing sentences or passages whose meaning is unclear; poorly chosen language with numerous mechanical errors.

F: The F paper or presentation usually indicates failure to state and develop a main idea. It may also contain serious errors in logic, grammar, spelling, punctuation, documentation, and sentence structure.

Note on Institutional Policies

Please note that the college-wide policy on plagiarism holds for this class and that student assignments may be run through plagiarism-detection software at the professor's discretion. Plagiarism is a very serious academic and ethical offense that can lead to failure of the assignment or course—or, after multiple instances, expulsion from college. Please consult the Student Handbook for more details of the plagiarism policy. All other institutional policies apply equally, including those related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities or differences and Title IX protections. More details on those policies are available in the Student Handbook, and students are encouraged to approach the professor with any questions or concerns they may have.

Class Schedule and Readings

*This calendar provides the schedule for assignments and readings for our time together this semester. Students should be aware that the schedule may change. All students will be alerted as soon as possible via email and Blackboard announcement. **Failure to check email regularly is no excuse for missing these updates.***

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| Wednesday | August 25 | Course introduction and syllabus |
| Friday | August 27 | Frase, <i>Four Futures</i> , Introduction |
| Monday | August 30 | Frase, <i>Four Futures</i> , ch. 1: Communism |
| Wednesday | September 1 | Weeks, "The Work Ethic, Gender and a 'Postwork' Future" |
| Friday | September 3 | Frase, <i>Four Futures</i> , ch. 2: Rentism |
| Monday | September 6 | NO CLASS—Labor Day |
| Wednesday | September 8 | Graeber, "Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit" |
| Friday | September 10 | Frase, <i>Four Futures</i> , ch. 3: Socialism |

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| Monday | September 13 | Phillips and Roworski, <i>People's Republic of Walmart</i> , ch. 2, "Could Walmart be a Secret Socialist Plot?" |
| Wednesday | September 15 | Phillips and Roworski, <i>People's Republic of Walmart</i> , ch. 4, "Mapping the Amazon" |
| Friday | September 17 | Frase, <i>Four Futures</i> , ch. 4: Exterminism, and Conclusion |
| Monday | September 20 | Peer review session—bring full draft of paper to class |
| Wednesday | September 22 | Shiva, "Earth Democracy"; Battistoni, "Alive in the Sunshine" |
| Friday | September 24 | Kim Stanley Robinson, "The King of Climate Fiction Makes the Left's Case for Geoengineering" (interview); "We Made This Heat, Now We Cool It"; "The City as Survival Mechanism"; "Odd Couples, Carbon Coins, and Narrative Scopes" (interview—read only up to question that begins, "I'm glad you mentioned <i>Red Moon</i> ...") |
| Monday | September 27 | Final papers due on Blackboard by class time—no new reading, but we will be discussing the group presentation and selecting groups in class |
| Wednesday | September 29 | Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society"; Mann, "The Pristine Myth"; Kallis, "The Degrowth Alternative" |
| Friday | October 1 | Powers, <i>The Overstory</i> (selection); Chiang, "The Great Silence" |
| Monday | October 4 | Bould, "The Ships Landed Long Ago" (through last full paragraph on pg. 182); <i>Star Trek</i> , "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" (TV episode); Janelle Monae, "Many Moons" (music video) |
| Wednesday | October 6 | Janelle Monae, <i>Dirty Computer</i> (music video) |
| Friday | October 8 | Octavia Butler, "The Book of Martha"; Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet" |
| Monday | October 11 | Group Presentations |
| Wednesday | October 13 | Group Presentations |
| Friday | October 15 | NO CLASS—Report on Individual Contribution due by class time |