

**San José State University**  
**English & Comparative Literature**  
**ENG 281: Special Topics: *Environmental Futures***

**Course and Contact Information**

Instructor:	Daniel Lanza Rivers
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Office Hours:	Thurs: 6:45-7:30 (& by Appt.)
Class Days/Time:	Thurs: 4-6:45
Classroom:	Via Zoom

**Catalog Description:**

Significant topic or area reflecting trends and changes in the field. Provides students with an opportunity to gain specialized or advanced knowledge in a small-group setting.

**Course Description:**

Humans and their societies will need to learn to think and act differently if we hope to survive and address the global climate crisis (and at least some of the patterns that have produced it). Thinking in this direction, Anna Tsing calls us to practice an "arts of living on a damaged planet," one that moves into the epoch of global warming with an eye to minimizing the damage and fostering more just and sustainable futures. This course introduces texts that range from science fiction, to environmental writing, poetry, film, novels, critical theories, and hybrid forms in order to chart this speculative terrain. Along with examining the roles that empire, extractive industry, structural racism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism have played in fostering the conditions of environmental crisis, this course asks students to examine how these world-shaping forces might influence humanity's responses to climate change, as well as the conditions of life on a transformed world.

**Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):**

**MA in English Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

- Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
- Students will demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research.
- Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.

- Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion, b) formulate and defend original arguments, c) employ effectively the language of their discipline and d) write under time constraints.
- <https://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/mfa/learning-outcomes.php>

## MFA Creative Writing Student Learning Objectives

- Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
- Students will demonstrate high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
- Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
- Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
- Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.

## Required Texts/Readings

Philippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed: a Personal Journey Through the Science*, ISBN: 9781419712555

Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*, ISBN: 978-006212427

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, ISBN: 978-1538732199

Curtis Marez, *Farmworker Futurism*, ISBN: 978-0816697458

Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros*, ISBN: 1726882624

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, ISBN: 978-1770864863

Larissa Lai, *Saltfish Girl*, ISBN: 978-0887623820

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive*, ISBN: 978-0822370840

Craig Santos Perez, *Habitat Threshold*, ISBN: 9781632430809

## Media Texts:

Students will also be required to rent and view the following films (via iTunes, Youtube, Amazon, etc.)

*Goodbye Gauley Mountain: an eosexual love story* (2013)

*The Sleep Dealer* (2009)

*Woman at War* (2018)

## Other Readings

All other readings will be made available on the class Canvas page.

## Library Liaison

Associate Librarian Peggy Cabrera is the English department liaison at SJSU. Peggy can assist you with research questions for any of your English classes at SJSU.

## Course Requirements and Assignments

These assignments are intended to span the spectrum of engagement to include: participating actively in class discussions, reflecting on and analyzing assigned readings, mastering foundational concepts, composing an intertextual analysis essay, researching a related topic and sharing that research within a group presentation that demonstrates intellectual curiosity and rigorous engagement.

### Classroom Participation and Preparation (15%):

Students in this course are expected to arrive (log on) on time, and participate in all discussion and breakout activities *with their cameras on and microphones available*. Participation activities cannot be made up in the case of absence. All students are expected to participate in classroom discussions in a curious and respectful manner. Students who have background noise or technical difficulties on a particular day will be able to participate via chat with previous notification. Your participation grade will also include a qualitative, end of term evaluation of your professionalism during this course. Expectations for professional participation in a university-level class include: focused attention, appropriate use of technology, respectful communication, video presence (with full face showing, as if you are talking directly to others who are also present), and treating our texts and topics with the seriousness they require.

### Canvas Discussion Posts (25%):

Each week, you will be asked to submit a brief reflection and analysis paper that discusses key elements, themes, and/or insights from the week's readings. Your finished Canvas post should be 1.5-3 double-spaced pages in length, and should show that you are capable of analyzing key insights, research, and passages from the week's literary, theoretical, and/or contextual texts. These posts will be due by 4PM on the day that the corresponding reading is scheduled for discussion, and they should follow this format:

- 1) **Creative Text:** Please spend 1-2 paragraphs answering the following cluster of questions: What stands out to you about the world that is represented in this week's creative text/s? Does this creative work focus any particular social, cultural, ecological, or political aspects of environmental change/crisis (and/or its root causes or eventual effects)? What might this work's author be trying to convey about these social/cultural factors? Are there any characters, themes, plot points, or elements of setting that capture the nuances of this rendering, or help us think about it in a deeper way?
- 2) **Supplemental Text:**
  - a. Please identify a key/structuring argument that arises in this week's supplemental text and select 2-3 quotes that capture this argument and its nuances.
  - b. Then spend 1 paragraph analyzing your quote and discussing how the author develops their argument. Are there particular archives, case studies, scholars, or evidence they use to support and expand their thinking? Does this author make any compelling arguments about life on an environmentally changed/changing world?
- 3) **Connections:** Please spend 1-2 paragraphs discuss another aspect of this week's readings that connects to other texts from this course. *If there are a fictional and a theoretical/contextual text assigned on the same day*, please spend these 1-2 paragraphs discussing any connections you can draw among the two

texts, as well as what insights they might offer to our thinking about environmental pasts/presents/and futures.

### **Connections Essay (10%)**

This short “open prompt” essay (3-4p, double-space), asks you to reflect on a theme, aesthetic approach, pattern, resonance, or question that arises across 3 or more of class texts (including one nonfiction or scholarly text, one fiction text, and one text of any category). This short essay should develop an interpretive argument that is specific to your knowledge of and perspective on our texts and themes. It should articulate a clear and cohesive argument, and it should develop and interpretation that is composed of close analysis of quoted material and theoretical or analytical reflection on patterns or contexts from the course.

### **Classroom Facilitation (10%):**

Each student will sign up to lead class discussion for one day of the term. Students will select their date at the beginning of the term, and they will be in charge of developing a brief presentation on the text (and its contexts) on the given class day. Along with identifying key passages and/or questions about the text, the student can bring in media, current events, author biography, discussion activities, and/or environmental or cultural contexts that enrich class discussions of this text. The presentation material should be between 5-10 minutes (including media), and students should submit a short overview of their presentation at least 24 hours before the class they are scheduled to facilitate.

### **Environmental Futures Final: Mapping New Worlds (40%)**

This final project will offer two options for completion. The first is a traditional research and analysis paper, which should incorporate at least 1 text from the course and references to at least 4 analytical, theoretical, and/or contextual readings. At least 2 of these supplementary texts must be integrated into your paper in a sustained or meaningful way. The second option is a creative writing project. This project must incorporate at least 1 class text and at least 2 pieces of contextual or theoretical research. Finished creative projects should be accompanied by a 400-600 word artist’s statement that illustrates connections among the project and its research material, as well as some process-reflections on the work of developing and revising/refining the creative project. Students pursuing either option will be required to submit a research summary and project outline on Week 14 (4/28). More details on this project will be distributed during the semester

### **University Time Requirement**

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on. Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

### **Late Work & Makeup Work:**

Every student is allowed one two-day extension once per semester on written work, but the student must give 24 hours’ notice that they are using their extension. All late work (including late makeup work) will have its

final grade reduced by 10% for each day it is late. *No assignments will be accepted more than a week out from their adjusted due date.*

## **E-Mail Communication:**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (known as FERPA) requires careful protection of your rights and academic record. To protect your right to privacy, all of our communication will happen using our SJSU e-mail accounts. Please be sure to check your SJSU e-mail account regularly for updates about readings and changes to the course schedule.

## **English Department Grading Standards:**

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi:

- In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.
- The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

In written assignments for English 30, this scale is based on the following criteria:

- A [90-92=A-, 93-96=A, 97-100=A+] = Excellent: The "A" essay is articulate and well developed with fluid transitions and a clear and persuasive use of evidence, which is drawn from the literary text itself, lecture materials (when appropriate), and research materials. An "A" essay contains a fresh insight that teaches the reader something new about the subject matter.
- B [80-82=B-, 83-86=B, 87-89=B+] Above average: The "B" essay demonstrates a good understanding of its subject, a clear and persuasive use of evidence, a certain level of ease of expression, and solid organization. However, it usually lacks the level of originality and creativity that characterizes the insight found in an "A" essay.
- C [70-72=C-, 73-76=C, 77-79=C+] = Average: The "C" essay makes a good attempt at all the assignment's requirements. It has a reasonable understanding of its subject matter but its ideas are frequently simplistic or over-generalized. The writing style is also more bland and repetitive than the style shown by "A" and "B" essays and it often contains flaws in grammar, punctuation, spelling and/or word choice. It may also use textual evidence out of context.
- D [60-62=D-, 63-66=D, 67-69=D+] = Below average: The "D" essay is poorly organized and generally unclear. It has inappropriate or inadequate examples, is noticeably superficial or simplistic, and/or contains some serious mechanical and grammatical problems. A "D" essay may also reveal some misunderstanding of the assignment requirements.
- F = Failure: An "F" essay has not addressed the requirements of the assignment and is unacceptable work in terms of both form and content.

## **University Policies**

Per [University Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>), which is hosted by the Office of Undergraduate Education. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

## Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to change with fair notice (as emailed from the instructor and announced in class at least one week ahead).

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
<b>UNIT 1: Thinking Environmental Futures on a Changing Planet</b>		
1	Wed 1/27	<b>Reading Due:</b> Syllabus & Philippe Squarzoni, <i>Climate Changed</i> to p. 136 (No Reading Response Due)  <b>In-Class Activity:</b> Select facilitation days, review syllabus, discuss Squarzoni  <b>Watch:</b> <i>Disobedience</i> , Link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNSrjpWyOi8&amp;t=1s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNSrjpWyOi8&amp;t=1s</a>
2	Wed 2/3	<b>Reading Due:</b> Philippe Squarzoni, <i>Climate Changed</i> (finish) & Farhara Sultana, “Critical Climate Justice”  <b>In-Class Activity:</b> Watch, <i>Goodbye Gauley Mountain</i>
3	Wed 2/10	<b>Reading Due:</b> Barbara Kingsolver, <i>Flight Behavior</i> (to p. 214), & Nicole Seymour, “Gas-Guzzling, Beer-Chugging Tree Huggers: Toward Trashy Environmentalisms” from <i>Bad Environmentalism</i> (189-196 & 207-224, 26p)
4	Wed 2/17	<b>Reading Due:</b> Barbara Kingsolver, <i>Flight Behavior</i> (finish)
		<b>UNIT 2: NORTH AMERICAN FUTURES</b>
5	Wed 2/24	<b>Reading Due:</b> Octavia Butler, <i>Parable of the Talents</i> (through Ch. 13) & Macarena Gómez-Barris, “The Colonial Anthropocene,” from Antipode (2019) Link: <a href="https://antipodeonline.org/2019/03/19/the-colonial-anthropocene/">https://antipodeonline.org/2019/03/19/the-colonial-anthropocene/</a>
6	Wed 3/3	<b>Reading Due:</b> Octavia Butler, <i>Parable of the Talents</i> (finish), & Sami Schalk, “The Future of Bodyminds, Bodyminds of the Future” from <i>Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction</i>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
7	Wed 3/10	<b>Reading Due:</b> Curtis Marez, <i>Farmworker Futurisms: Speculative Technologies of Resistance</i> (Intro & Ch. 1-2) <b>In-Class Activity:</b> Watch <i>The Sleep Dealer</i>
8	Wed 3/17	<b>Reading Due:</b> Rosaura Sánchez & Beatrice Pita, <i>Lunar Braceros 2125-2148</i> & Marez, <i>Farmworker Futurism</i> (Ch 3 to p. 142)
9	Wed 3/24	<b>Reading Due:</b> Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” “Windigo Footprints,” “The Sacred & the Superfund,” “Shkitagen: People of the Seventh Fire,” & “Defeating Windigo” ((70p); and Hamilton, Subramaniam, & Willey, “What Indians and Indians Can Teach Us About Colonization,” (12) from <i>Feminist Studies</i> (2017))  <b>Assignment Due:</b> Connections Essay due by 4PM
		<b>Spring Break: No Class on Wed 3/31</b>
		<b>UNIT 3: PLANETARY FUTURES</b>
10	Wed 4/7	<b>Reading Due:</b> Cherie Dimaline, <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> & Lindsay Nixon, “Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism” (8p)
11	Wed 4/14	<b>Reading Due:</b> Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>M Archive</i>  <b>In-Class Activity:</b> Discuss Final Assignment
12	Wed 4/21	<b>Reading Due:</b> Larissa Lai, <i>Saltfish Girl</i>
13	Wed 4/28	<b>Reading Due:</b> Craig Santos Perez, <i>Habitat Threshold</i>  <b>Assignment Due:</b> Final Project Prospectus and Research Summary
14	Wed 5/5	<b>Reading Due:</b> Hayao Miyazaki, <i>Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind</i> (selections) & Donna Haraway, <i>Staying With the Trouble</i> (selections)
16	Wed 5/12	<b>In-Class Activity:</b> Semester Overview & Project Sharing Session <b>In-Class Viewing:</b> Film TBD
17		<b>Finals Period:</b> Mapping New Worlds Project Due by 11:59PM, Mon 5/23