

The Coming Years:

An Exploration of the Future

Instructor: James Rising

Description:

In this seminar, we will explore what the future might hold. We will draw upon anthropology, history, human system dynamics, fiction, and current movements to illuminate our speculations. Our fields of interest will include changes in science and technology, culture and lifestyles, and dominant paradigms and societies. Each aspect, we'll try to predict 20 years out, and then project into the future. The scope of the class will range from the effects of the internet over the next decade, to the worldwide political changes we can expect in the next century, to the feats of engineering that might emerge in the coming millennium. Class will be organized around discussion, with assignments including reading and writing of non-fiction and fiction, scenario games, simulations, and creative design.

Syllabus:

1. Feb 8: The Recent Past and the Near Future

Techniques:

2. Feb 15: Techniques in Futurology. System Dynamics and Statistical Anthropology

Reading: Excerpt from The Fifth Discipline, Peter Senge

Exercise: Experiments Forrester's 1991 World Model

3. Feb 22: Historiographic Theories: Class Struggle, Cycles, and Paradigm Shifts

Reading: Excerpts from The Fourth Turning, William Strauss, Neil Howe

Exercise: Model a cyclical system

4. Feb 29: Catastrophic Change, Monte Carlo Simulations

Reading: Excerpt from Ubiquity, Mark Buchanan

Exercise: Model a catastrophic system

Extreme Scenarios

5. Mar 7: Disasters and Climaxes: Nuclear War, Global Warming, Peak Oil, Bioterrorism, the Singularity

Reading: TBD

Exercise: Write about a new catastrophe from the hubris of the human race

6. Mar 14: World Changing and Revelations

Reading: Excerpts from Sitting in the Fire, Arnold Mindell

Exercise: Model an alternative economic system

7. Mar 21: Post-Apocalyptic Scenarios and Utopias (Communism, Anarchy)

Reading: Days of War, Nights of Love, CrimethInc.

Exercise: Describe your vision of utopia

8. Mar 28: **Spring Break**

A Look at the Future

9. Apr 4: Past Projections of the Present

Reading: Excerpt from Future Shock, Alvin Toffler

Exercise: Be Part of the Participatory Panopticon

10. Apr 11: Science and Technology: Biotech, Nanotech, Information Tech, Neuroscience

Reading: Excerpt from The Social System of Science, Norman Storer

Exercise: Work on Final Project

11. Apr 18: Society: Law, Politics, Religion, Class

Reading: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas S. Kuhn

Exercise: Work on Final Project

12. Apr 25: Lives: Entertainment, Media, Health, Fashion

Reading: Memes vs. Genes: Notes from the Culture Wars, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Exercise: Work on Final Project

13. May 2: Art and Philosophy

Reading: The Diamond Age, Neil Stevenson

Exercise: Work on Final Project

14. May 9: Final Project Presentations

Class Expectations:

Our time each week will be divided as follows:

- 2 meeting hours
- 2 hours reading
- 2 hours homework (writing fiction, creating and experimenting with simulations)

For the last five weeks of the semester, out-of-class time will be largely used for working on a final project. Each student or group of students will choose a project, which must have a simulation component, a creative component, and a research component.