

Fall 2021

## STS 325-001: Cyborg Society

Charles Brooks

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New Jersey Institute of Technology  
 STS 325-001 Cyborg Society  
 Face-to-Face  
 Tuesday/Thursday 10:00  
 FMH 203

Charles R. Brooks, Ph.D.  
[brooks@njit.edu](mailto:brooks@njit.edu)  
 Cullimore 427  
 973-596-2875

**STS 325-001 (Special Topics)  
 Cyborg Society  
 Fall 2021**

**Course Description**

A cyborg, short for cybernetic organism, is traditionally defined as a system with both organic and inorganic parts. In the narrowest sense of the word, cyborgs are people with machine body parts. These cyborg parts may be restorative technologies that help a body function where the organic system has failed, like pacemakers and bionic limbs, or other enhanced technologies that improve the human body beyond its natural state. In the broadest sense, any system of human interactions with technology could qualify as cyborgian. That's the perspective for this course. In other words, we are all cyborgs. When we look at ourselves as cyborgs, it forces us to reevaluate the boundaries of the self that we are accustomed to. This includes the boundaries between humans and machines, but goes far beyond that. This course will consider such topics as the cyborg's impact on gender, sexuality, sex, the environment, race and ethnicity, space travel, the prescience of science fiction, and much more.

The course itself is a cybernetic exercise in the sense that it will evolve with feedback resulting from interactions with readings, videos, movies and other resources, as well as interactions among participants. In the cyborg world, nothing is static. We, the cyborgs, react to information from all sources and continually are recreated.

This is an in-person class which meets Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:00 AM in Faculty Memorial Hall.

**Student Learning Objectives**

1. Students will be able to define and discuss the concept of cyborg.
2. Students will be able to explain the process of cybernetics.
3. Students will be able to discuss cyborgs and politics.
4. Students will be able to discuss cyborgs and sex and gender.
5. Students will be able to discuss cyborgs and space.
6. Students will be able to discuss cyborgs and war.
7. Students will be able to discuss cyborgs and science fiction.
8. Students will be able to discuss the cyborg future.

**Required Text**

Gray, Chris H. *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*. Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-91979-7

**Optional Texts (Some course assignments drawn from Fair Use of the these texts)**

Gray, Chris H., et al. *The Cyborg Handbook*. Routledge, 1995. ISBN 0-415-90849-3.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. ISBN 0-226-03905-6

Bateson, Gregory. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. Hampton Press..2002. ISBN1-57273-4345

Gray, Chris H., et al. *Modified: Living as a Cyborg*. Routledge, 2021. ISBN 978-0-8513-6401-6

Brooks, Charles R. *The Hare Krishnas in India*. Princeton University Press. 1989. ISBN 1-691-00031-X  
 (Princeton Legacy Library Series on Demand)

## **Grading**

### **The Process**

Grading will be determined by a cybernetic process. This means that the instructor will decide on the grading system based on a feedback loop with students in the class. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, review and analysis of readings, review and analysis of films, research essays on cyborg society, quizzes, exams. The precise grading system will be formalized during the second week of class.

### **The Results from the Spring 2021 Semester**

- **Class Engagement: 20%**
- **Assignment 1: 25%** Write an Essay of three to five pages, double spaced, on one of the following topics:
  1. What is Cybernetics
  2. Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto"
  3. Cyborgs and Politics
- **Assignment 2: 25%** Write an Essay of three to five pages, double spaced, on one of the following topics:
  1. Cyborgs in Space
  2. Cyborgs and War
  3. Cyborgs and Sex and Gender
  4. Other as approved by instructor.

### **Thanksgiving Recess November 25-28. No Class Thursday 11/25**

- **Final Assignment:** The specifics of the final project are open-ended, but must be approved by your instructor. It is worth 30% of your final grade. This assignment should be a written report of about seven double-spaced pages and incorporate multiple issues covered in the course. Projects other than essays, such as review of a cyborg-related movie, will be considered on an individual basis.
- **Extra Credit:** Write a short first-person essay on how being a cyborg has affected your life in the past and what you think the cybernetic future holds for you personally.

## **NJIT Policy on Academic Integrity**

All students must abide by the university's policy on academic integrity. Please review:

*Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:*

<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>

*Please note that it is the instructor's professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu).*

**Assignment Details (text readings, links, videos, etc.) are posted on the course Canvas Website)**

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Module 1

**What is a Cyborg?**

**Norbert Wiener and the Beginning of Cybernetics**

**Gregory Bateson and Cybernetic Thought**

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Module 2

**Modern Humans as Cyborgs**

**Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto—The Defining Essay**

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Module 3

**Cyborgs and Politics**

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Module 4

**Cyborgs, Sex, Gender, and the Family**

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Module 5

**Cyborgs in Space and War**

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Module 6

**Cyborgs in Science Fiction**

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Module 7

**The Cyborg Future**

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**General Guideline for Assignments**

These assignments should focus on one or more of the major readings and other resources in the appropriate module. These are written reports that should reflect on 1) what you have taken away from the module topics, 2) documentation of your thought processes as you interacted with the material, 3) how the material challenged your pre-assumptions, and 4) whether any new assumptions emerged.

These reports should be in an essay format. They should be at least three double-spaced pages with appropriate citations and documentation.

**For the Final Project**

The specifics of the final project are open-ended, but must be approved by your instructor. This assignment should be a written report of at least seven double-spaced pages and incorporate multiple issues covered in the course. Projects of a different nature will be considered on an individual basis.

**Rubric for Assessing Course Written Assignments**

1. The topic is appropriate for the assignment. 20%
2. The thesis of the report is clearly stated. 15%
3. The report is logically organized. 15%
4. Citations and Documentation follow MLA format including a Works Cited Page. 15%
5. Sentence structure, paragraphing, and grammar follow standards of written American English. 15%
6. The work is clearly your own. 20%