The birth control pill, chemotherapy, heart transplants. These are visions of the future of biomedicine that, in the decades after World War II, became a reality for many. Universal health care, pesticide-free food, assisted reproduction. These visions have become a reality for some, but not others. X-ray vision, gene therapy, robotic physicians. These are visions of the future of biomedicine that are still on the horizon. Still other visions—immortality, bioprospecting, synthesizing life—hover at the border between dystopia and utopia.

The goals of this course are two-fold

The first is to ask how and why the future has mattered in the realm of biomedical science. Is there a connection between science fiction and other forms of scientific speculation? Whose ideas about the future get to count, where and why? What kinds of emotions—fear, hope, love—have animated and been attached to ideas about the future? How can thinking about futures past, including fictional ones, redirect contemporary visions of the future?

The second, and related goal is to consider how ideas about time—themselves—can be generative for historical research. Does examining conceptions of the future give us unique purchase on values and priorities of various historical moments? What happens when the future doesn’t arrive?

We will read three kinds of sources [*This syllabus is provisional and may change based on student preferences]*

Fiction
Non-fiction, including scientific articles, op-eds, and advertisements (≈10 pages per week)
Provocations, including critiques and historical takes on each week’s themes (≈50 pages per week)

With the exception of novels and films, all readings will be available on Canvas

You will participate in four ways

Attendance is mandatory, as is active participation and respectful engagement with your peers. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of self-destructive activity will not be tolerated. (20% of grade)

Each week, submit a one page (250 words, maximum) “response” to the readings. It can either provide an analysis of a text or theme or be a speculation, a fictional take on the ideas presented in the readings. (30% of grade)

Over the course of the semester you will develop your own historical inquiry into a biomedical future. This can take the form of a 15-page term paper or an equivalent piece of original research, including film, graphic novel, short story, exhibition catalog, etc. In any form, your project must incorporate historical source material. (40% of grade)
A course blog, “BiomedicalFutures,” will allow us to continue the conversation between meetings. You must make at least 5 original postings throughout the semester. (10% of grade)

Credits: Ava Kofman (TD ’14) helped to research and reflect on this syllabus. Participants in the 2015 “Histories of the Future” workshop at Princeton inspired this course. Students in the 2015 and 2016 versions of the course have contributed to its evolution.

**Required Texts (available for purchase at deep discount at most online booksellers)**

Margaret Atwood. (2003). *Oryx and Crake*. Anchor
Philip K. Dick. (2013 [1960]) *Dr. Futurity*. Mariner Books
Daniel Keyes. (1964). *Flowers for Algernon*. Millennium

**SEPTEMBER 12: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**


**UNIT ONE: ORIGIN STORIES**

**September 19. Creating Life**

*Fiction*

*Nonfiction*

*Provocation*

*Beyond*

**September 26. Breeding a Better Human?**

*Fiction*
Nonfiction

Provocation

Beyond

October 3. Sex, Gender and Reproduction

Fiction

Nonfiction

Provocation

Beyond

UNIT 2: BEING HUMAN

October 10. Intelligence and Experimental Subjects
**Meet in Medical Historical Library at 333 Cedar Street**

Fiction
Daniel Keyes. (1964) Flowers for Algernon

Nonfiction


Beyond

October 17: Cyborgs: Between Disability and Enhancement
**2 page final project proposal due in class**

Fiction

Nonfiction
Manfred Clynes. (1960). “Cyborgs and Space” Astronautics

Provocation

Beyond

October 24. Un/caring Labor: Doctors, Nurses, and Patients

Fiction
Philip K. Dick. Dr. Futurity

Nonfiction

Provocation

Beyond
The Medical Futures Lab at Rice: http://www.medicalfutureslab.org

UNIT 3: ENDS OF LIFE

October 31. Ethnobiology and Colonialism
Fiction
Hanya Yanigahara. (2013). *The People in the Trees*

Nonfiction


Provocation

Beyond
Yasmin Tayang. (2015). “Is it Possible to be a Healthy Cannibal and Avoid Prion Disease?” Inverse.com

Nov 7. (Anti-)Aging

Fiction

Nonfiction

Provocation

Beyond

Nov 14. Apocalyptic Infections
**Annotated bibliography of secondary sources due in class**

Fiction
Margaret Atwood. (2003). *Oryx and Crake*. Anchor
Nonfiction

Provocation

Beyond
Play http://pandemic2.org/

November 21: Thanksgiving Break NO CLASS

UNIT 4: LIFE AFTER DEATH

November 28: Re-Animation and Transhumanism
Draft of final project due

Fiction

Non-fiction

Provocation

Beyond

December 5: TBD

December 14: Final project due at midnight, either digitally or hardcopy