

Rationale

Science Fiction and Fantasy Studies

Undergraduate Minor and Certificate

(Minimum of 12 credits required)

Standing faculty committee for program operations:

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Why Science Fiction and Fantasy Studies at FAU?

In recent comments concerning the university's developing strategic plan for the next five years, President Hasner has stressed that "community advantages must be maximized to continue our ascent," asking units to leverage existing and local strengths while "focusing on differentiating our high-performing programs from peers—within the state system, regionally, and nationally." Always the university "Where Tomorrow Begins," Florida Atlantic University has a long history of pioneering in the study of science fiction and fantasy, a body of narratives itself notable in large part for imagining the next tomorrows. As such, continuing to build on FAU's existing and truly distinctive strengths in science fiction and fantasy studies with a program such as this one will further differentiate us from our peers, and continue to build up the appeal of our programs as a national draw.

The existing Science Fiction and Fantasy concentration for the MA degree in English – which will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2027 – was the first ever graduate program in Science Fiction and Fantasy Studies (SFFS) to exist, and remains a degree path offered by only a handful of institutions around the world. The SF/F MA concentration has made FAU a top destination for graduate study in SFFS. While other programs have launched across the U.S. since, FAU remains one of the top destinations for the study of SF/F. Even earlier, one of the largest and most prestigious international organizations for the study of SFFS, the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, was founded at FAU by the late professor Bob Collins in 1980. It is the home to not only one of the major academic conferences in the field, the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts, but also of one of the major journals in the field, *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, which also was launched at FAU. Furthermore, the SF/F minor will enable students and faculty to do research in the University Archive unit of FAU Libraries' Special Collections to study the Bob Collins papers in the Faculty Archives, which detail not only the founding of the IAFA and *JFA*, but also include correspondence with major SF/F authors. Additionally, FAU English has recently been the recipient of a major donation of rare SF/F pulp magazines from the 1920s onwards, thus spanning the so-called Golden Age of American science fiction, so future students and researchers will have the opportunity to conduct archival research using this collection as well.

This minor and certificate would serve the growing number of undergraduate students interested in SF/F across the university, and leverage the strength of our faculty in this particular area. The

Department of English alone boasts nine faculty members who publish on and teach science fiction and fantasy, including three core SF/F faculty members and six adjacent affiliated SF/F faculty. In addition, FAU retains two emeritus professors who continue to produce work on SF/F. This critical mass of 11 faculty working in SF/F is one of the most unique aspects of FAU's English Department, paralleled nowhere else in the world, and several other faculty across the College of Arts and Letters also have done work in related areas.

Past strategic plans have stressed the marketability of student degrees, and many of the alumni of the graduate SF/F concentration go on to have rewarding careers in a range of professions tied to the field, whether they are working in education, library science, publishing, or the non-profit sector. As FAU leads by taking its "quantum leap" into quantum computing and continues to distinguish itself as a hub for artificial intelligence, it is increasingly imperative to equip undergraduates across fields with similar skills at the intersection of the humanities and the sciences, and expanded capacities to understand both technological and social change.

Are there peer institutions working on similar degrees?

Within the last few years, top-ranked public universities including Texas A&M University and the Georgia Institute of Technology have begun to develop similar programs, the latter having approved its undergraduate minor in Science Fiction Studies in 2020. TAMU and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay offer a more directly comparable minor in Science Fiction and Fantasy Studies. Closer to home, Florida International University's Science & Fiction Lab currently offers a range of micro-credentials, but not yet a minor. Both TAMU and Georgia Tech fall within the category of "peer" or aspirational peer institution, in line with the ambitions of the FAU100 initiative as well as FAU's most recent strategic plan, both of which mandate that we work toward maintaining institutional inclusion in the nation's top 100 public schools and continuing to rise.

Other universities have developed similar programs at the graduate level, the most notable of which is the University of California, Riverside's Speculative Fiction and Cultures of Science program. In the UK, the University of Liverpool offers an MA in Science Fiction Studies, and the University of Glasgow offers both an MLitt and PhD in Fantasy Studies. FAU has an opportunity to join these internationally renowned universities by drawing on our historical strength in the area, and differentiate ourselves with a corresponding undergraduate minor and certificate.

Are there models for academic scholarship that stress interdisciplinarity in a way that would benefit faculty teaching in this area and thus also serve the strategic plan in terms of bolstering our research profile?

Among existing scholarly organizations, the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA) is a model for encouraging the kind of interdisciplinarity in SF/F that the minor will encourage. SF/F is uniquely positioned for interdisciplinary work that fuses literary studies with science and technology studies. As such, the IAFA annual conference and peer reviewed journal incorporate interdisciplinary scholarship that brings these genres from literary studies to the study of biological sciences, technology studies, and the study of medicine.

In more comparable models, however, the kind of interdisciplinary research and teaching that the development of the SF/F minor will allow can be seen at the Center for Science and the Imagination at Arizona State University and the CoFutures initiative at the University of Oslo. Both

of these interdisciplinary centers enable faculty working groups to not only bring interdisciplinarity into their research and teaching, but also offer opportunities for collaboration between academia and industry. In addition to creating interdisciplinary publishing opportunities in top university presses and commercial academic presses; offering conferences, programming, workshops, residencies; and providing a plethora of research and mentoring opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students and faculty, these centers have each successfully obtained several multimillion dollar grants. Adding the Science Fiction and Fantasy minor to boost the existing SF/F MA concentration will position FAU to scale up our efforts to match, offering a wealth of opportunities for FAU SF/F faculty and students to actively collaborate in different sectors including academic research and the arts. SFFS is uniquely positioned for interdisciplinarity because of SF/F's long history influencing scientific and technological advancement as well as its lasting impact on the arts—from literature and film to video games and visual and performing arts. As such, SFFS at FAU will be able to collaborate with community partners to do community-oriented service and research as well as bridge connections to industry. As an example, one of the core SF/F faculty members has collaboratively authored an edited collection, *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*, that features the work of scholars across a variety of disciplines such as literature, anthropology, biology, medicine, film, the visual arts, computer science, and more.

The SF/F faculty at FAU are consistently receiving inquiries from domestic and international students regarding such an emphasis for study at the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. level as well as postdocs and faculty interested in collaboration. Most of the faculty are already engaged in such collaboration in the form of edited collections, special issues of journals, and conference organizing, but the development of the minor will enable us to scale up this work and create more undergraduate student research opportunities.