**Syllabus for IDH2930, Fall 2017**   
(Un)Common Read: *Ringworld*  **by Larry Niven –** Winner of Both the Nebula (1970) and Hugo (1971) Awards for Best Science Fiction Novel

**Credits:** 1 ; **Instructor:** Greg Stewart  
**Writing or Math Req:** None   
**Gen Ed:** None. Student assignments and expectations: meet once per week/present a topic during the second half of the course with a two page, single spaced writeup one week prior.

Larry Niven’s “Known Space” series of stories has enjoyed enormous success. In Ringworld, Louis Wu (200 year old human on boosterspice – a longevity drug) joins Nessus (a Puppeteer – an old and very cautious race of aliens) and Speaker (a Kzin warrior of a race that has attacked Earth’s worlds several times, each time ending in defeat) in 2850 AD for a voyage of exploration to a huge artifact discovered by the Puppeteer race on their headlong flight through normal space to avoid the explosion of the galactic core. Ringworld is full of adventure and surprise.

Student Assignments: At first meeting, agree at what pace we should read the book (divided into 10 weeks or, more optimally, within the first eight weeks.) Meet each week for 50 minutes to discuss, as the book is being read, what insights students are finding into issues which interest them. Two possible examples:

Teela Brown, Louis’ female companion during the first part of Ringworld, was supposedly bred for luck by the Puppeteers, who interfered in Earth’s fertility laws for this purpose. *Are* some people luckier than others?

Niven introduces a huge range of futuristic inventions (e. g. hyperdrive, General Products impervious space ship hulls, the Slaver stasis field, scrith – the enormously strong Ringworld floor material, boosterspice.) What laws of Physics get bent in the process?

After the book is at least 50% read, each student picks a topic to discuss for 15 minutes with 10 minutes of group discussion afterwards, with two topics/class. They distribute a (minimum) two page, single spaced summary of what they will say 1 week prior.

Professor Stewart, a physicist, likes to read science fiction and has read every book ever published by Niven. If pressed, he would admit that being lucky is statistically unlikely (which is not the same as impossible!)