

**(Un)Common Read: AI, Ethics, and Personalized Learning in
Neal Stephenson's The Diamond Age**

IDH 2930 Section 3137

Class Periods: Fridays Period 8 (3:00-3:50pm)

Location: Little Hall room 117 (LIT 0117)

Academic Term: Spring 2022

Instructor:

Dr. Lisa Anthony, PhD

lanthony@cise.ufl.edu

Office Hours: TBD

COVID-19 Status Updates:

This class is scheduled to meet in-person. Due to local and national spikes in the omicron variant of covid-19 as of January 5, 2022, and in keeping with ongoing UF policy and guidance on the subject, class will be offered in a **synchronous hybrid mode**, with both in-person and Zoom options for attendance. **Masks will be expected for all in-person class attendees.** Masks will be provided for those students who do not have one. I will be **checking all students' cleared status** in ONE.UF prior to the class meeting each week. Any student not cleared for campus within the last two weeks will not be able to attend class in person. **All such required absences will be excused.**

Course Description

1 credit. Discussion oriented courses centered around a single book.

The Diamond Age by Neal Stephenson (1995) envisions a future in which the social elite can afford to provide top-notch AI-supported adaptive, personalized educational technology to their children, whereas the impoverished lower class do not have such privileges. The book centers around a young street urchin named Nell who finds one of the primers and starts using it, and how this changes her life. The tale of Nell's own learning and growth are set against a backdrop of a Victorian steampunk-informed future defined by ubiquitous nanotechnology and strict class-based roles and resource allocation. The book remains a thought-provoking exploration of educational technology, ethics in AI, human-AI interaction, personalized learning, social class, equity, and consumerism. By reading and discussing this book in this class, we will delve into these issues as they were envisioned by Stephenson, but also as they are playing out currently in our times as we deal with issues of bias in AI, technology equity, and educational / achievement gaps in our society.

Course Pre-Requisites / Co-Requisites

None.

Course Objectives

- use a thought-provoking text as a basis to question assumptions about technology, equity, and access
- develop a critical thinking lens for considering current or envisioned social norms and behaviors
- hone thoughts about and analysis of current society and futuristic vision through writing and discussion
- practice reflecting on essential topics in AI bias and equity in terms of a particular application domain (in this case, educational technology)

Materials and Supply Fees

None.

Required Textbooks and Software

- **Title:** *The Diamond Age: or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer*
- **Author:** Neal Stephenson
- **Published:** 1995 (any edition is acceptable)
- **ISBN:** 0-553-57331-4 or 0-553-38096-6

Course Schedule

A course outline and schedule will be provided on Canvas. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of all deadlines and submissions for the course. Deadlines will be posted on Canvas and announced in class.

Attendance Policy, Class Expectations, and Make-Up Policy

Being a discussion-based course intended to drive creative thinking around topics related to the targeted book, **class participation is a critical component of this course**. Therefore, attendance at all sessions will be required (either in-person or remote). One unexcused absence for any reason will be permitted, without expectation of make-up or excuses. For absences meeting the University criteria for an excused absence¹, any necessary make-ups should be arranged directly with the instructor. No late assignments will be accepted in any other case.

All class sessions will meet synchronously for both in-person and remote students. Lectures will not be recorded.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. Click here to read the university attendance policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Evaluation of Grades

1. Class Discussion and Participation

Class participation will be assessed in three ways:

- **Advance Reading & Reflection:** students must read the assigned chapter(s) each week **prior to the class meeting** and submit at least 1 question on the reading to the appropriate Canvas assignment, due the night before the class meets (e.g., 11:59pm on Thursdays).
- **Lead Class Discussions:** discussions each week will be led by 1 or 2 students (self sign-up, depending on class size). The class's questions will be made available to the discussion leader(s) by 10am on the day of the class meeting. It is also recommended that leaders prepare their own thoughts to guide discussion.
- **In-Class Participation:** all students are expected to attend class and participate in discussion (see Attendance policy for relevant caveats). For those students attending remotely, please turn on your camera to enable the experience of an in-person class as much as possible.

Final Assignment

The final assignment in this course will be a 1000-word reflection on **how the topics of the book connect to current society**. Though the book is science fiction, written in our past, and set in our future, many of the issues relevant to the book's society are highly relevant today, including issues of bias in AI, technology equity, and educational / achievement gaps in our society. Ideally, you will connect to at least one newspaper article or high-profile opinion column (e.g., New York Times editorials are acceptable, my aunt's personal blog is not), that describes current issues that you see as relevant to The Diamond Age. Cite all sources (not included in word count).

Grading Policy:

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| • Class Discussion and Participation | 75% |
| ○ Advance Reading & Reflection | 25% |
| ○ Lead Class Discussions | 25% |
| ○ In-Class Participation | 25% |
| • Final Assignment | 25% |
| TOTAL: | 100% |

Grading Policy

Final letter grades in this course will be assigned as follows: A (100–92), A- (<92–90), B+ (<90–88), B (<88–82), B- (<82–80), C+ (<80–78), C (<78–72), C- (<72–70), D+ (<70–68), D (<68–62), D- (<62–60), E (<60). All final grades will be rounded up to the nearest whole number.

¹ Excused absences must be consistent with university policies and require appropriate documentation, ideally in advance of the absence. Additional information can be found here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

More information on UF grading policy may be found at:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Commitment to a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

The Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering values broad diversity within our community and is committed to individual and group empowerment, inclusion, and the elimination of discrimination. It is expected that every

person in this class will treat one another with dignity and respect regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture.

If you feel like your performance in class is being impacted by discrimination or harassment of any kind, please contact your instructor or any of the following:

- Your academic advisor or Graduate Program Coordinator
- Jennifer Nappo, Director of Human Resources, 352-392-0904, jpennacc@ufl.edu
- Curtis Taylor, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, 352-392-2177, taylor@eng.ufl.edu
- Toshikazu Nishida, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, 352-392-0943, nishida@eng.ufl.edu

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see: <https://registrar.ufl.edu/ferpa.html>

COVID-19 Policies:

- You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated.
- If you are sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email covid@shcc.ufl.edu) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus.
- If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect, you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.
- UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the [UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website](#) for more information.
- Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care:

Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, Assault, or Violence

If you or a friend has been subjected to sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or violence contact the [Office of Title IX Compliance](#), located at Yon Hall Room 427, 1908 Stadium Road, (352) 273-1094, title-ix@ufl.edu

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/>.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu.
<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling; <https://career.ufl.edu>.

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
<https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

Student Complaints Campus: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>; <https://care.dso.ufl.edu>.

On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.