

**Why Star Trek?**  
**Rachel Nichols, Margaret Noble, Sani vanderSpek**  
**High Tech High Media Arts**

In 1966, television audiences were first introduced to the science fiction series *Star Trek*. Fifty years later, the series lives on. Why? What is it about this series that has made it so popular, influential, and such a cult phenomena? Some might suggest that Star Trek has reflected the historical forces and ideas of the late 20th century in ways that help general audiences better understand the issues. With that in mind, we will explore Star Trek's social commentary on subjects such as race, war, gender/sexuality, genetic engineering, the roles of technology in our culture. Did it and does it teach us about certain truths of the human experience?

**Essential Questions "Star Trek doesn't depict the future, it depicts the now." - Gene Rodenberry**

Star Trek's guiding principle, called the Prime Directive, prohibits Starfleet personnel from interfering with the internal development of alien civilizations (this included not interfering during time travel). The Prime Directive applied especially to "*civilizations which are below a certain threshold of technological, scientific and cultural development; preventing starship crews from using their superior technology to impose their own values or ideals on them.*" If we impose the Prime Directive on our world, we must ask:

- What is the appropriate role for the Prime Directive (non interference policies) today?
- When do I step in and when do I not? How do I know if I should help and if my "help" is really interference?

As follow up questions, we might wonder about other connecting topics. Such as:

- What is an "adequate" 21st century threshold for technology, science, and cultural development? In what countries do we see this? How can we define quality of life?
- How does Star Trek and science fiction illuminate human folly?
- What does it mean to be civilized?
- What does it mean to be human? What separates the human experience from other forms of life?
- What is role of technology and science in trying to "perfect" or enhance human experience?
- What is the role of space exploration today? Do we need it? Who are the explorers of today?
- Your questions, fierce wonderings, and ideas?

**Core Deliverables**

1. Project proposal-- **DUE Sept. 23, 2016**
2. Research Paper-- **DUE Oct. 13, 2016**
3. Artist Statement-- **DUE Dec. 5, 2016**
4. Book for publication-- **DUE December 14, 2016**
5. Mind Blowing Interactive Art Piece & Public Presentation -- **Multiple Benchmarks (See Course Calendar)**  
*Students will use computer programming, media design, hardware integration and performance to create a substantial, science fiction influenced **interactive art pieces that will immerse audiences through story, provocation, and/or satire.** These interactive experiences will be deeply informed by student research topics and writing.*

## **Model Examples of Interactive Experiences:**

1. Design a videogame that replicates, critiques or predicts outcomes based on the power and politics you learn from your research. **Example:** Recreate the depersonalization of military drone attacks flown remotely from smartphones in the style video game graphics.
2. Design a digitally interactive object, toy or infographic that simulates literally, ironically or satirically an experience of authoritative interference informed deeply by your research. **Example:** Present a doctor's office performance/simulated experience with an interactive tablet featuring a genetically modified baby menu.
3. Design a "chose-your-own-adventure" interactive, narrative stop-motion (picture based) informed deeply by your research. **Example:** Surveillance based planetary presentation of "alien cultures" up for consideration in joining, The United Federation of Planets (the Federation).

## **Menu of Potential Subjects for Student Exploration**

Remember, these topics are just suggestions. If you see a topic that inspires or interests you, you will need to refine the big picture question into a very specific, and manageable, research project. . Then, you will propose your own research thesis or essential question that investigates your topic and its relation to the Prime Directive.

- The good, the bad, and the ugly of technological innovations as related to computers, machinery, healthcare treatment and access to healthcare, warfare and modern life.
- What is the role of medical interference in non-necessary procedures (think cosmetic)?
- Genetic engineering and eugenics
- Business and corporate regulations, or lack thereof, as it impacts citizens.
- Science regulation of life forms and environments.
- Colonialism, imperialism: all conquering defined as "for the indigenous people" to "save" and civilize.
- Legislation designed to deny particular groups (racial, ethnic, religious) access to resources. E.g. redlining in real estate
- Laws to control reproduction, marriage, and bathroom access.
- French law surrounding the traditional Muslim female attire: burqas, hijab, niqab,
- Cultural norms around female genital mutilation or chemical castration
- Your ideas, wonderings, interests?

## **Collaborative Group Partnerships**

You will more than likely be working in groups of two for the interactive media piece created to be presented at exhibition. But, each person in your group will write your own research paper on the topic. These research papers could manifest in many ways including looking at two sides of an argument or exploring alternate examples related to your inquiry. However, you will need to align your two research papers to support one final incredible interactive media experience. So, at once, your papers must be different but supportive of a deep understanding of your topic to make a well developed media project. **You have two options for arranging a project partnership:**

1. Get started early on securing a topic you love with another person who shares your interests. As a team, consult with Margaret and Rachel for topic and partnership approval as soon as possible.
2. Participate in a moderated discussion in Margaret's class with a group of students who share their topic interests and decide together who will work with who on what topic.