**GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name (First, Last), Preferred Name**

Charles Butt (Charlie)

**Program/Major**

MA in Liberal Arts, concentrating in Film Studies

**Graduation Term and Year**

Spring 2025

**Hometown (Town, State, Country)**

Homosassa, FL, United States

**Are you a scholarship recipient?**

I received the Humanities Legacy Scholarship in Summer 2024, and while I was earning my undergraduate degree, I continually received the USF Scholars award and Bright Futures scholarship.

**Provide a synopsis of your thesis (3-8 sentences)**

My thesis investigates how dystopian films are able portray uncomfortable worlds in pleasurable ways, but with a particular focus on the 2017 film *Blade Runner 2049*. I argue that the worldbuilding of dystopian sci-fi cinema is Romanticized – that is, these films can be recognized as drawing upon the literary tropes, methods, and aesthetics of Romanticism in their use of beautiful, grandiose, sublime, and repellant environments, visuals, and sounds. Although other scholars talk about the Romantic attributes of films in general, very few seem to go as far as specifically connecting dystopian sci-fi spectacles to this aesthetic history, so I’m shaping my argument as a useful addition to an existing conversation about Romanticism in cinema.

**What led you to your research? What does your research cover?**

I’ve always had a deep interest in science fiction and dystopian stories. I think this interest originated in primary school with the *Goosebumps* book series; R.L. Stine’s weird worlds and hypothetical horror scenarios were my go-to’s in the library. In middle school, YA sci-fi was my next obsession: the *Hunger Games*, *Maze Runner*, and *Divergent* series (along with a ton of other post-apocalyptic books and films) also compounded my interest in the genre. Throughout high school and college, dystopian films and English literature were my next areas of interest. I really wanted to expand on my affections and get to a possible root on why we’re curious about these awful worlds and situations, and over the summer, I formed a strange connection when I recognized how the imagery of 19th century poetry matched that of the spectacles visible in sci-fi dystopian films like *Blade Runner 2049*. Monolithic architecture and vast, abandoned cityscapes ran adjacent to the Romantics’ infatuation with the overwhelming power of natural forces like mountains, oceans, caves, and more. Writing about this topic for my thesis allowed me to combine my background in English with my current focus on film studies, and I’m really glad the program is flexible and that it supports the direction my project has taken.

**Things that help to keep you motivated during Master’s program.**

The department faculty, my peers, and my close family and friends are a massive help in keeping me on track and giving reassurance throughout my degree. I’m also motivated by my goal of being able to teach in higher academia after graduate school which keeps me focused when I feel the future getting too foggy.

**What do you do outside of the Academic world? Any Hobbies? Activities?**

Outside of academia, I spend time exploring in and around the Orlando and Tampa areas to various parks, shops, and tourist destinations with friends, family, or my partner. As a de-stressor when I need personal time, I like playing colony or city-builder simulation video games. I also make amateur music and play keyboard and alto saxophone.

**Do you have any advice for future applicants or possible readers of your thesis?**For new applicants, I advise to  
For possible readers of my thesis, I hope it all makes sense!

**Why did you decide to pursue a graduate degree? Why your particular program?**

I decided to pursue a graduate degree after shifting away from teaching middle school English. I enjoyed instruction, but I struggled with classroom management for that age group and I wanted to be more challenged by the content I was working with. I also wanted to involve myself with not only more advanced courses and concepts, but also with campus organizations, activities, events, and conferences to help develop my abilities in instruction, communication, and writing on a higher level.

**Looking back on your time at USF in the Humanities & Cultural Studies Department, what are you most proud of and why?**

I am most proud of putting myself outside my comfort zone and taking advantage of opportunities I hadn’t during my time as an undergraduate. In my time so far, some of my proudest achievements independent from my thesis research were voluntarily leading extra-credit poetry workshops for a HUM1020 course, helping my peers establish a student organization, and leading and maintaining an academic student journal.

**What do you consider to be the strengths of your academic program?**

I believe that the program’s strengths are its diversity of courses. For instance, for the spring of 2024, I was simultaneously able to take a literary-focused course on utopia and science fiction, a philosophical course on Plato’s *Symposium*, and a graduate seminar specifically for learning about specific key theories and methodologies of film studies, all of which had influences on my eventual thesis project.

**Is there anything you feel is important to know about you that we haven’t asked about?**

I am grateful for my time in this program as a whole, and I’m honored to be spotlit here. In the future, I hope to find additional graduate programs that match my research interests in cinematic sci-fi environments, and I also plan on seeking more opportunities to practice and demonstrate my abilities in writing, instruction, and speaking.

**Tell us something you have learned/discovered during your program that surprised you?**

I was surprised at how inclusive the department is in regard to involving its graduate students in many different kinds of events and presentations of which I had assumed were only reserved for faculty. One of the most surprising (and frankly, really cool) things in my program so far was being able to watch and participate in the interview process of a new department faculty member.