**Minority Report Essay questions**

Directions: Choose one topic and respond to *all* questions in a carefully reasoned, typed essay. Pay attention to both the logical expression of ideas and to conventions of written language.

For *all* topics, answer the following: What [if any] utopic kernel, that is, vision of human possibility, lies at the heart of the stories we have read in this quarter so far?

Due ________________________

1. **Fearful Americans**

"The most fearful people in the world are Americans, because they have so much to lose. And never has there been a people with so much who are still afraid of not having enough," Richard Rohr writes in *Job and The Mystery of Suffering*. What role has fear played in the life and work of John Anderton? How well does he deal with this dark companion? Cite scenes in the film where he deals with different kinds of fear. What fears bother you the most? What resources, spiritual or otherwise, have you found to be most helpful when you are overcome by this emotion?

2. **Fear Amplified**

"With terrorism, fear becomes amplified a thousandfold . . . The measures taken to defend against this form of fear also contribute to the dehumanizing process. We are subjected to guards at the airport, the courthouse, schools, sports events. Video cameras watch us at the bank, the store, the parking lot. There to protect us, they nevertheless turn us into objects and cause a contraction of the soul. They make us all more mean-spirited, paranoid, mistrustful," Robert Sardello observes in *Fleeing the Soul from Fear*. How do you respond to the scene in the film where agents from the Pre-Crime unit enter a housing complex in pursuit of John Anderton. They release a squad of robotic spiders to get the eyeball prints of everyone in the building. If you were in one of the many situations depicted, how do you think you would feel? How does the response of the people in the apartment building illuminate the society of *Minority Report*? Many Americans say they do not mind the inconveniences caused by heightened security at airports, public buildings, and other places today because they believe it offers them protection from terrorist attacks. Share your responses to Sardello's belief that the technological incursions are dehumanizing and actually serve to build walls of distrust between people.

3. **Privacy**

"Privacy is many things to many people: a stolen moment in the midst of a harrowing day, an hour-long meditation, a home at the end of a long winding road. Sociologists talk about it in terms of how close we let others come; psychologists see it as necessary for emotional recharging; lawyers argue it as our right to be let alone. But there is no debate that we need personal privacy. All of us." June and William Noble write in *The Private Me*. The citizens of Washington D.C. are willing to put up with certain intrusions on their privacy for the promise of a city with no murders. Which of the many violations of privacy depicted in the film are most bothersome to you? Which don’t concern you? Explain your choices. "In 2003, Congress voted to shut down a controversial program called Total Information Awareness (TIA)...primarily because of privacy concerns...." "...The National Journal reported Thursday that TIA ‘was stopped in name only’ and has been continued within the National Security Agency (NSA), the intelligence agency now sifting off charges that it has violated the privacy of US citizens in the domestic wiretapping scandal.”

http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0224/dailyUpdate.html To what extent do ideas from *Minority Report* resonate in our world today, especially in light of shadowy government programs such as Total Information Awareness or the Domestic Surveillance Program?
4. Free Will

At a Gonzaga University commencement speech, Lou Holtz said: "The greatest power God gave us is the power to choose. We have the opportunity to choose whether we're going to act or procrastinate, believe or doubt, pray or curse, help or harm." The "repeated use of eye imagery throughout Minority Report leads to the film's... most philosophical level: the age-old argument about whether human being possess free will or whether their actions are predestined by some higher power. Such debates are as ancient as Oedipus Rex (the drug dealer with empty eye sockets seems an modern counterpart of Tiresius, Sophocles' blind prophet) and as modern as the controversies swirling around the Human Genome Project. They are found in virtually every religious conceptualisation, play a significant part in great and small literary works, and rest at the heart of endless philosophical speculations. Spielberg gives voice to this debate via an extended dialogue between two of his central characters, Anderton and Justice Department Agent Danny Witwer, the man sent to investigate the Unit and, if it goes national, to replace Anderton. Initially, Anderton defends the fundamental philosophy of stopping crime before it happens, while Witwer asserts that "It's not the future if you stop it," Freidman. Discuss your reactions to this dialogue and the scene where John Anderton stands before the man he is destined to kill, according to the vision of the Pre-Cogs. Does knowing the future automatically change it? What new insights does this film give you into the formidable idea and ideal of free will?

5. Technology

"Minority Report offers a sobering scenario of how dangerous it is to exchange individual freedoms for governmental assurances. A dire warning lies at the heart of the film: because human beings create and control the necessary machines, as well as the system that employs them, no safeguards can infallibly shield citizens from violence. Even more importantly, all mechanisms, however sophisticated and refined, remain open to human interpretation and, by virtue of that fact, such devices are inherently susceptible to corruption and misuse. The cynical Witwer (Colin Farrell), though he misjudges his true enemy, understands this: "The flaw is always human," he tells Anderton," says Friedman in Minority Report: A Dystopic Vision.

How do the Pre Cogs ("don't think of them as human"), functioning as "pattern recognition filters," prove to be ambiguous? After all, their visions are "rearranged into a seemingly logical narrative that demonstrates cause and effect." From this narrative, the government takes action. Yet, these narratives are proven to be open to interpretation — "we see what we have been trained to see" and sometimes what we want to see. Explore the ways in which Minority Report attempts to explore "the potentially disastrous uses of modern technology, particularly how digital manipulation can destabilize visual images permitting their abuse for ideological reasons." (Lester Friedman) Cite examples from the film to support your ideas.

How does technology illuminate the power relationships in Minority Report? How are they made to appear as if they are normal or good? How does the technology of advertising play into those relationships?