Generations of science fiction writers have envisioned futures marked by space travel, robots, and galactic empires. While the most familiar futures imagined in literature have been produced by white authors, there has long been an unacknowledged tradition of SF written by people of color.

The University of California, Riverside will expand that universe with a yearlong exploration of ethnic futurisms that have been largely overlooked or marginalized until recently, a program of events funded by a prestigious $175,000 Sawyer Seminar grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

“Alternative Futurisms,” which launched in September 2015, brings together African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American scholars, artists and writers to examine the colonial roots and legacies of science fiction and the power of speculative fiction as a tool for social change. One of the featured writers is UCR Associate Professor of Creative Writing Nalo Hopkinson, the December speaker at Affiliates.

“It’s a tribute to Nalo’s gifts as a novelist, and to her ability to bridge important gaps not only between genres but between cultures,” said Andrew Winer, chair of the UCR Department of Creative Writings. “I also see it as a recognition that Nalo Hopkinson’s time has come - or, rather, the world has come to her, as it no doubt will continue to do. She’s offering it - the world - something it’s never quite seen before, and this is what the best writing does, of course.”

Nalo Hopkinson, associate professor of creative writing at UCR, has won the Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy for her 2013 novel “Sister Mine.” Born in Jamaica, Hopkinson often draws upon Caribbean history, language and storytelling traditions in her work. She received an M.A. in writing popular fiction from Seton Hill University. Her teaching specialty is creative writing, with a focus on the literatures of the fantastic such as science fiction, fantasy and magical realism. She is a recipient of the John W. Campbell Award, the World Fantasy Award, the Gaylactic Spectrum Award, and a two-time recipient of the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic.