



**ENG 689.002—Independent Study
“A Narratological Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels”**

**Spring 2014
W—4:30 pm-7:10 pm
Room: HL 304**

Instructor: (Christopher Gonzalez, PhD – Assistant Professor)
Office Location: Hall of Languages (HL) 225
Office Hours: MWF 2:00 pm-3:30 pm and by appointment
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NOTE: I reserve the right to revise the contents of this syllabus as I deem necessary.

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Textbooks Required:

Basic Elements of Narrative by David Herman (2009). ISBN: 9781405141543
The Cambridge Companion to Narrative, ed. David Herman (2007). ISBN: 9781405141543
The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, ed. H Porter Abbott. 2nd edition (2008). ISBN: 9780521715157
Introduction to Narratology, by Monica Fludernik (2009). ISBN: 9780415450300
Narrative Form by Suzanne Keen (2003). ISBN: 9780333960974
The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction. 2nd edition (2007). ISBN: 9781416532279
Never Let Me Go, by Kazuo Ishiguro (2005). ISBN: 9781400078776
Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth, by Chris Ware (2003). ISBN: 9780375714542

Course Description

ENG 689 is designed to provide graduate students with an opportunity to conduct independent study under the supervision of a faculty member. In this iteration of 689, the emphasis is on what is known broadly as “Narrative Theory,” a methodological approach to understanding literature according to various formal elements, primarily, and other ancillary components in the process of creating and reading narratives. Further, Narrative Theory is a capacious label; there are many orientations and approaches to it. Thus, the course aims to lay out the many theorists and perspectives that inform narrative theory. Indeed, storytelling—as a creative process, as an immersive experience, as a cultural artifact—helps define homo sapiens as a species. The urge to demarcate experience along coordinates of space and time is a decidedly human strategy, and it motivates our understanding of history, nation, gender, emotion,

cognition, and much more. Narratives bombard us through an ever-widening range of media—from literature, film, television, comics, in electronic ecologies and person-to-person interactions. That we have the tendency to narrate imagined and experienced worlds is unquestioned; whether we are talking about paleolithic cave paintings or internet comics, the desire to weave narratives has diminished little over the course of human history. It is how we design and deploy our narratives that have undergone such drastic alterations over the centuries.

Thus, this course is a graduate-level exploration of the expansive field of Narrative Theory, from its Aristotelian roots to recent developments in cognitive science and neuroscience. As we trace our way through the major movements of this field, we will apply our understanding of these theoretical positions to a number of exemplar texts. We will consider developments in Narrative Theory from Barthes, Chatman, Booth, Todorov, Genette, Richardson, Rimmon-Kenan, Cohn, McHale, Phelan, Herman, Prince, Warhol, Fludernik, Ryan, Palmer, Aldama, Hogan, and many others. At its core, this journey through Narrative Theory will make you more cognizant of the structural and dynamic features that undergird how narratives are created, how they are experienced, and how they persist in our changing world. This particular independent study will apply the concepts of Narrative Theory with the comics and graphic novels genre. The student should plan to engage in and at times lead productive discussions based on the theoretical and commonplace readings; develop ideas via questions posed in response to the readings; hone the skills presenting before an academic audience, continue to develop writing via short, analytical essays, and write a final seminar paper aimed at publication in a peer-reviewed journal or section of a dissertation.

Course Objectives:

- Students will further develop their ability to present scholarly research before an academic audience.
- Students will demonstrate their engagement with the scholarly community.
- Students will hone their ability to write an essay for publication.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students will further develop their ability to present scholarly research as measured by a team presentation.
- Students will hone their ability to write an essay for publication by submitting a final seminar paper for grading at the end of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments

This course consists of a series of activities and assessments to assist you in achieving the outcomes and objectives of this course and instructional units/modules. By the end of this course the class will read and discuss several book-length texts as well as secondary materials.

During the semester you will complete several major assignments designed to build on each other intellectually and conceptually. These assignments are:

Class Participation

20%

Active class participation is vital in graduate classes, but it is at times difficult to measure. You should be prepared to discuss several aspects of the readings during each class meeting. Each class meeting ought to

be viewed as a collaboration of an investigative team that is charged with examining a problem. Everyone's sustained attention and participation is key to this approach. Expect to be called on to discuss some facet of the day's readings and to elaborate on these points via discussion.

Two Position Papers

20%

As an opportunity to expand and deepen your understanding of the course material, you will write two short position papers (1,000-1,500 words) to be submitted on two different class meetings of your choice. The topics for your papers should **not** overlap from discussions we have had in class. Focus on different readings than we've discussed in class.

Team Presentation

20%

For this assignment you will team up with a partner and prepare a presentation based on one of the supplementary readings. You are encouraged to use a multimedia format to present your ideas (PowerPoint, Prezi, handout, etc.). The goal here is to introduce the rest of the class with the contents of the supplemental reading and demonstrate how it operates with our commonplace texts or the assigned short story of the day.

Discussion Questions

10%

Beginning on Week 2, you will post two substantive questions related to the readings on the discussion thread in eCollege. This will enhance how productive our conversation will be during our class meeting. You should post your questions by 5:00 pm the Tuesday before our class meeting. Your questions should seek to bring the theory in light of our commonplace readings, as well as highlight the pros and cons of the particular theoretical reading.

Final Seminar Paper

30%

At the culmination of the course, you will submit a well-organized, persuasively-argued, well-researched seminar paper approximately 15 pages in length. Your final paper must unite a theoretical position with one of our commonplace texts, either Ishiguro or Ware, or a primary text of my approval.

Class Participation	20%
Two Position Papers	20%
Team Presentation	20%
Weekly Discussion Questions	10%
Final Seminar Paper	30%
Total:	100%

Scale used to compute final letter grades:

Percentage

- A: 100-90
- B: 89-80
- C: 79-70
- D: 69-60
- F: 59-0

Technology

This course is conducted face to face (f2f). However, some aspects of the course (e.g., grades, dropbox) are accessed via eCollege, the Learning Management System used by TAMUC. Many of your assignments will be submitted through eCollege, so it is essential to your success that you be able to access eCollege in a relatively convenient manner. Because the university provides students access to computers and other technologies, please make use of these items if you do not have a computer of your own. If you have technical questions, please contact Technology Services at 902-468-6000 or at helpdesk@tamuc.edu. Do not allow a technological problem or question keep you from a successful outcome in this course. Technology is designed to facilitate your learning experience in this class, not to hinder it.

There will be no extra credit assignments. As a rule, I do not accept late work.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

Academic Honesty Policy

Texas A&M University-Commerce and the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate **plagiarism** and other forms of **academic dishonesty**. Conduct that violates generally-accepted standards of academic honesty is defined as academic dishonesty. “Academic dishonesty” includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another person and passing them off as one’s own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension and expulsion (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1, 2, 3]). Cheating, including plagiarizing papers in whole or part, will result in a grade of zero (0) on the assignment for the first offense and failure of the course for any subsequent offenses.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in this graduate class equates to participation in the discussions and is important to the success of this class and to your development as a writer/scholar. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you notify me of potential conflicts with course expectations. The expectation is that you will do more than simply show up to class. Your active participation, in the form of discussion responses and questions, is vital for success in this course. Deadline extensions and other allowances can often be accommodated before they are required, but this requires advance notice. Related to this, SEE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignment Policy

Student work must be completed and submitted on time. All assignments should be turned in during the class period when they are due. Students who know they will miss class when an assignment is due must contact the instructor as soon as possible in advance of class to arrange for submission of the assignment.

All papers should conform to the MLA style guidelines, with the exception of your weekly responses.

Late Work

I will not accept any assignment after its due date. Assignments submitted after the due date may receive a score of zero (0).

Drop a Course

A student may drop a course by logging into his/her myLEO account and clicking on the hyperlink labeled "Drop a class" from among the choices found under the myLeo section of the Web page.

Incompletes

Incompletes (grade of "X") are granted only under rare and extraordinary circumstances.

Administrative Withdrawal

I reserve the right to drop a student from the course administratively for excessive absences or violations of student conduct codes.

University Specific Procedures:

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. It is next to impossible to explore ideas in a classroom setting if students and instructors do not feel safe or otherwise supported. I will not tolerate discrimination in all its forms. Likewise, rudeness has no place in any classroom, and I will ensure that my classroom remains a rudeness-free environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

Responsibility

You are responsible for understanding all of the material contained in this syllabus, as well as any announced changes to this syllabus. You are also responsible for understanding instructions and directives related to assignments, exams, and grades. This means visiting your professor during office hours if instructions and/or directives remain unclear. Unless you state otherwise, I will assume that you have understood what is expected of you in this class.

The following course schedule is subject to revisions and other modifications as the instructor deems necessary for the course. Any changes to the course schedule will be announced on the course website in advance of the week in which the change will occur.

Spring 2014

Date	Agenda
Week 1 Jan 15	Introduction, syllabus overview, discussion and overview of narrative theory
Week 2 Jan 22	Keen, Ch 1-4 Abbott, Ch 1-5 Herman, "Introduction"
Week 3 Jan 29	Keen, Ch 5-8 Abbott, Ch 6-10 Ryan, "Towards a Definition of Narrative"
Week 4 Feb 5	Keen, Ch 9-11 Abbott, Ch 11-13 Abbott, "Studying Narrative Fiction"
Week 5 Feb 12	Bridgeman, "Time and Space" Margolin, "Character" <i>Basic Elements</i> , Ch 1-2
Week 6 Feb 19	Thomas, "Dialogue" Jahn, "Focalization" <i>Basic Elements</i> , Ch 3-4
Week 7 Feb 26	Pyrhönen, "Genre" Richardson, "Drama and Narrative"
Week 8 Mar 5	Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative" Montfort, "Narrative and Digital Media"
Week 9 Mar 19	Page, "Gender" Phelan, "Rhetoric/Ethics"
Week 10 Mar 26	Herman & Vervaeck, "Ideology" Toolan, "Language"
Week 11 Apr 2	Herman, "Cognition, Emotion, and Consciousness" Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity"
Week 12 Apr 9	<i>Basic Elements</i> , Ch 5 Fludernik, Ch 1-3
Week 13 Apr 16	Fludernik, Ch 4-7
Week 14 Apr 23	Fludernik, Ch 8-12
Week 15 Apr 30	Course Wrap-Up
	Final Papers due at Midnight, May 7, 2014