



ENG 697.002W—Formal Approaches to Comics and Graphic Novels

“What Makes a Graphic Narrative *Tick*?”

Summer II 2014
Online

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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:

Required Reading List:

An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories: Vol 1, Ed. Ivan Brunetti (ISBN: 0300111703). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *AGFCTS #1***

An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories: Vol 2, Ed. Ivan Brunetti (ISBN: 0300126719). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *AGFCTS #2***

The Best American Comics 2011, Ed. Alison Bechdel (ISBN: 0547333625). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *BAC 2011***

The Best American Comics 2008, Ed. Lynda Barry (ISBN: 0618989765). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *BAC 2008***

Rosetta: A Comics Anthology Vol 1 (ISBN: 1891867229)

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, by Scott McCloud (ISBN: 006097625X)

Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods, Ed. Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan (ISBN: 0415885558). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *CAC***.

Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean, by Douglas Wolk (ISBN: 0306816164). **Abbreviated in syllabus as *RC***.

Course Description

Considering how long the graphic form of narrative has existed in human culture (what are cave paintings but pictorial storytelling?), it is amazing that it has only been within the last two decades that this mode of narrative has become an object of serious study by academics. Comic art, for lack of a better term, carried the burden of being seen only as the fascination of the immature for much of the twentieth century. At worst, it was seen as facilitating the deterioration of America's youth; it was argued that this art form *actively* worked to corrupt young boys and girls. That it was *dangerous*. Even when some critics didn't go that far, they were quick to note what they perceived as a lack of sophistication in comic art. In the popular imagination, we can easily recall a stock image of a child reading a comic book while pretending to read a huge tome of "great" literature. For many today, this perception of storytelling in visual/verbal form as child's play still doggedly persists.

Despite all of this, we are in the midst of a sea change regarding comics—a veritable golden age of comics study. More and more scholarly articles and books on the study of comics appear every day. We must ask, what has changed in all this time? In order to truly address this question, we need to attend to the formal features of graphic storytelling. At an obvious level, storytelling in comics is unique—it is neither a word-only story, nor is it a film. This course seeks to investigate these features that make comics much more complex than they appear to be. Rather than study longer, novel-length works of sequential art, we will examine a great many shorter stories in the comic art form. Doing so will enable us to investigate a wider array of structural and design features in comic art. The required readings for the course will provide an opportunity to situate this literary form with other literary traditions. We will couple these works with scholarly readings as well as our own analytical perspectives. Students with specific thematic or scholarly interests are encouraged to integrate them into the coursework whenever possible. As for assignments, you can expect to post several short responses to the readings and replies to classmates online per week; write a short analytical readings, create a short narrative in comic form; write a conference abstract (300-400 words); write a final paper (about 7 pages), and a final exam.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will become active participants in the course, not only in staying current with readings and other assignments but also in sharing their understanding of the material with their classmates.
2. Students will become active participants in producing a graphic narrative synthesizing the concepts learned in the course and then presenting their work to the class.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate their ability to synthesize ideas pertaining to the course as measured by a review of the students' critical response assignments.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of ideas pertaining to the course as measured by a review of each student's original graphic narrative.

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| COURSE REQUIREMENTS |
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Instructional / Methods / Activities / Assessments

Because your active participation in discussions is expected, attendance (or "logging in" through your computer **on a daily basis**) is vital for success in this course. Students must complete all assignments on time, stay current with the readings, and engage in daily discussions each week. *No late work will be*

accepted. Although differing views and debates among class members are encouraged, I expect all students to treat other class members with respect and courtesy. Rudeness and insulting remarks will not be tolerated. "Tone" is a slippery thing in written communication, so always err on the side of caution. Please be considerate of all other members of this class.

- **Participation:** You are expected to participate in the discussion section for each week in two ways. 1) You will directly address the topics I have established. 2) You will engage the comments of your fellow students by directly replying to them. You should make the effort to respond to your classmates' comments in a substantive way. Unfortunately, this is the only way I can objectively measure the level of your engagement in an online class. Therefore, err on the side of caution and try to respond to several comments per topic thread. Course participation accounts for 25% of the final course grade. To receive full participation credit students must log in consistently throughout the semester, participate on topics several times during each week's discussions by providing substantive comments, and stay current with all readings and assignments.

- **Weekly Responses:** Beginning with Week 1, all students must post to the discussion site by Friday at noon of each week one thoughtful, substantive, critical response to a particular text or group of texts from the respective week's reading selections. Consider this a formal response to the week's reading, and it is substantively different than your relatively brief responses to my discussion topics. Responses should be about 750-1,000 words (about 3-4 double-spaced pages). You may explicate a work or take a *slightly* less formal critical approach. For one critical response you may opt to analyze one of the stories or several within a collection, focusing on shared themes, images, and other elements. Students will write a total of three (3) critical responses and will submit them before noon on Friday for a given week. (30% of course grade; 10% each)

- **Abstract:** You will write an abstract of your final paper for approval. Abstracts will be 300-400 words in length and will describe the theoretical issue to be examined, the film (or aspect of film) to be discussed, and a bibliography of pertinent works (between 6-8). Your paper must have a title, and it is best to have a conference in mind where you might submit this abstract for consideration.

- **Conference Paper:** You will submit a well-organized, persuasively-argued, well-argued conference paper approximately 8 pages in length. Your final paper must unite a theoretical position with one of our commonplace texts. This paper may grow out of one of your weekly responses.

- **Original Graphic Narrative:** As the assignment title indicates, you will create an original graphic narrative. You may create your narrative either as fiction or non-fiction, biographical or autobiographical, or any other mode of storytelling you like. Your only limitations are that it must be 2-4 pages in length. In addition to your story, you will provide a written response that discusses the process of creating your comic. You will want to tie your method to what we discuss and learn via our discussions and readings.

Grading

Assignment and course grades will be determined by the student's performance on the following assignments:

- Abstract: 5% of total course grade
- Conference Paper: 20% of total course grade
- Critical responses (3 total): 30% of total course grade (10% each)
- Participation: 25% of total course grade
- Original Graphic Narrative: 20% of total course grade

There will be no extra credit assignments. As a rule, I do not accept late work, though I am flexible with deadlines if notified before the arrival of a deadline.

Scale used to compute final letter grades:

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

Technology

This course is conducted entirely online. All aspects of the course (e.g., grades, discussions, dropbox, virtual office) are accessed via eCollege, the Learning Management System used by TAMUC. The majority 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.

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| COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES |
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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 online 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

Because your active participation in discussions is expected, attendance (or "logging in" through your computer on a daily basis) is vital for success in this course. Students must complete all assignments on time, stay current with the readings, and engage in daily discussions each week.

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.

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

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.

NOTE: We will refer to Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* throughout the course. If you have not already done so, please read this book as soon as you can.

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July 7-11:

- Course Overview
- Introductions
- Selections from *BAC 2008*
- "Introduction," Ch 1 (CAC)
- "Introduction," Ch 1 (RC)

Response #1 due by Friday, 7/11 before midnight

July 14-18:

- Selections from *AGFACTS #1*
- Ch 2-4 (CAC)
- Ch 5, 2, & 22 (RC)

Response #2 due by Friday, 7/18 before midnight

Abstract due this week

July 21-25:

- Selections from *BAC 2011*
- Ch 5-8 (CAC)
- Ch 3, & 4 (RC)

Response #3 due by Friday, 7/25 before midnight

July 28-August 1:

- Selections from *AGFACTS #2*
- Ch 9, 13-14 (CAC)
- Ch 6, 8, & 23 (RC)

Conference Paper due by Friday, 8/1 before midnight

August 4-8:

- Selections from *Rosetta, Vol. 1*
- Ch 16-19 (CAC)
- Ch 9, 10, & 11 (RC)

Original Graphic Narrative due by Wednesday, 8/6 before midnight