



ENG 200.01H (22566)—U.S. Popular Literature and Culture

“Understanding Comics and Graphic Narratives”

**Spring 2015
MWF 2:00-2:50p
Rm: HL 304**

Instructor: (Christopher González, PhD – Assistant Professor)

Office Location: Hall of Languages (HL) 225

Office Hours (online): TR 1:00 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:

Required Reading List:

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

The Best American Comics 2014, Ed. Scott McCloud (ISBN: 0544106008). Abbreviated in syllabus as **BAC**

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, by Scott McCloud (ISBN: 006097625X). Abbreviated in syllabus as **UC**

The Graphic Novel: An Introduction, Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (ISBN: 1107655765). Abbreviated in syllabus as **GN**.

The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images, by Neil Cohn (ISBN: 1441181458). Abbreviated in syllabus as **VLC**.

(ENG 200 catalogue description): US-Popular Lit. and Culture. Three Semester Hours. This course may cover a single popular medium, genre, author, or theme, such as science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, western, or horror, among others. This course may include popular literature in translation.

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 honors 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 sample 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 create a journal entry style reflection on the week's readings/discussions using the comic strip form; write a review of a selected graphic novel; create a short narrative in comic form; a midterm exam, 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 in the form of a weekly comic strip.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of ideas pertaining to the course as measured by a review of each student's original graphic narrative.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities / Assessments

- **Weekly Responses in Comic Strip Form:** Beginning with Week 2, all students must submit one thoughtful, substantive, critical response to a particular text or discussion from the respective week. Consider this a formal response to the week's reading, and it is substantively different than your typical

response because it is delivered in the form of a comic strip. Along with the strip, you will include a very brief rationale/context for what you tried to achieve in your strip for that week. This of this as an opportunity to engage with the course in a creative way, to implement elements of graphic storytelling into your own work, and practice for your Original Graphic Narrative.

- **Review of a Graphic Novel:** In this assignment you will select a graphic novel from a list provided to you by your professor. Your task is to read and critically review the work. You should approach the work from a critical position, highlighting both the work's strength and weaknesses. Your review should be around four pages, double-spaced.
- **Midterm Exam:** Your Midterm Exam will cover key concepts and topics covered in class and readings leading up to the exam.
- **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 a minimum of 8 pages in length. In addition to your story, you will provide a written response (one single-spaced page) that discusses the process of creating your comic and your rationale for your approach. You will want to tie your method to what we discuss and learn via our discussions and readings. Note: You do not need expensive software to complete this assignment. You will only need to print copies of your comic for the class.
- **Final Exam:** Follows the same format of the Midterm Exam. The Final Exam will not be cumulative and will cover material since the Midterm.

Grading

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

- Comic strip weekly responses: 20% of total course grade
- Review of Graphic Novel: 20% of total course grade
- Midterm Exam: 20% of total course grade
- Original Graphic Narrative: 20% of total course grade
- Final Exam: 20% of total course grade

There may be extra credit assignments as the semester progresses. 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 face to face. However, some elements such as the gradebook and dropbox are accessed online. Note: this course does not use the eCollege system. Details on how to access the gradebook and dropbox will be delivered in class. 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.

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 class equates to participation in the discussions and is important to the success of this class and to your development as student. 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 for 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.

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@tamuc.edu

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.

Spring 2015

Date	Agenda
Week 1	Wednesday 1/21: Introduction, syllabus overview Friday 1/23: UC Chapter 1 “Setting the Record Straight”; BAC “Introduction”; AGFCTS—Schulz, “Developing a Comic Strip” (pp. 37-39)
Week 2	Monday 1/26: UC Chapter 2 “The Vocabulary of Comics”; VLC (pp. 1-15)

	<p>Wednesday 1/28: <i>BAC</i>—Hernandez, “Crime Raiders International Mobsters and Executioners”; Katchor, “Picnic Now!, Sickroom Reading, and The Hand Laundry”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Newgarden, “Love’s Savage Fury” (pp. 14-17); Comic Strip Response 1</p> <p>Friday 1/30: <i>BAC</i> Burns, “The Hive”; Hernandez, “All the Marbles”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Kaz, “Underworld” (pp.18-23)</p>
Week 3	<p>Monday 2/2: <i>UC</i> Chapter 3 “Blood in the Gutter”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 17-34)</p> <p>Wednesday 2/4: <i>BAC</i> Tomine, “Translated, from the Japanese”; Crumb and Kominsky-Crumb, “High Road to the Shmuck Seat”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Millionaire, “Maakies” (pp. 24-26); Comic Strip Response 2</p> <p>Friday 2/6: <i>BAC</i> Katchor, “A 21st Century Still Life”; Telgemeier, “Drama”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Griffith, “Griffith Observatory”, “Zippy” (pp. 27-29)</p>
Week 4	<p>Monday 2/9: <i>UC</i> Chapter 4 “Time Frames”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 34-49)</p> <p>Wednesday 2/11: <i>BAC</i> Britt and Arsenault, “Jane, the Fox, and Me”; Katin, “Letting It Go”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Spiegelman, “Abstract Thought Is a Warm Puppy”; Ware, “Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy...”; Seth, “Good Grief!”; Sikoryak, “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown”; (pp. 32-36, 40-41); Comic Strip Response 3</p> <p>Friday 2/13: <i>BAC</i> Hart, “RL”; Sharp, “Mom”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Barry, “Smell” (pp. 49-51)</p>
Week 5	<p>Monday 2/16: <i>UC</i> Chapter 5 “Living in Line”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 51-63)</p> <p>Wednesday 2/18: <i>BAC</i> Bunjevac, “August 1977”; Siegel, “The Mermaid in the Hudson”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Woodring, “Frank’s Fish” (pp. 77-79); Comic Strip Response 4</p> <p>Friday 2/20: <i>BAC</i> Vaughan and Staples, “Saga Chapter 7”; Graham, “Multiple Warheads: Alphabet to Infinity #1”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—McGuire, “Here” (pp. 88-93); Review of Graphic Novel Due</p>
Week 6	<p>Monday 2/23: <i>UC</i> Chapter 6 “Show and Tell”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 65-69)</p> <p>Wednesday 2/25: <i>BAC</i> May, “Dimensions”; Ware, “Building Stories”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Burns, “excerpt from Curse of the Moleman” (pp. 118-125); Comic Strip Response 5</p> <p>Friday 2/27: <i>BAC</i> Lewis, Aydin, and Powell, “March: Book One”; Young and Lasky, “The Program is Morally Good”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Keitch, “Young Ledicker” (pp. 126-135)</p>
Week 7	<p>Monday 3/2: <i>UC</i> Chapter 7 “The Six Steps”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 70-77)</p> <p>Wednesday 3/4 <i>BAC</i> Piskor, “Hip Hop Family Tree”; Brosh, “Depression Part Two”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Spiegelman, “excerpt from MAUS” (pp. 149-161); Midterm Exam</p> <p>Friday 3/6: <i>BAC</i> DeForge, “Canadian Royalty”; Ellsworth, “The Understanding Monster—Book One”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Lutes, “excerpt from</p>

	<i>Berlin</i> " (pp. 162-165)
Week 8	<p>Monday 3/9: <i>UC</i> Chapter 8 “A Word About Color”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 78-89)</p> <p>Wednesday 3/11: <i>BAC</i> Regé, Jr., “Is There Silence?, The Implications of Making Something from Nothing via the Spiritual Realm, and This Is Magic—This Is Alchemy”; C.F., “Face It”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Tomine, “excerpt from <i>Hawaiian Getaway</i>” (pp. 176-183); Comic Strip Response 6</p> <p>Friday 3/13: <i>BAC</i> Cayro, “Bittersweet Romance”; Onsmith, “Whistle While You Work...or Think of Death”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Hernandez, “A Little Story” (pp. 184-189)</p>
Week 9	<p>Monday 3/23: <i>UC</i> Chapter 9 “Putting It All Together”; <i>VLC</i> (pp. 91-106)</p> <p>Wednesday 3/25: <i>BAC</i> Jablonski, “Schweinhund and Howdy, His Nephew Dee Dee and a Friend of Howdy’s Nephew”; Westvind, “Hyperspeed to Nowhere, Return to Entropy”; “Duncanson, “Untitled Selections”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Hernandez, “Flies on the Ceiling” (pp. 190-204)</p> <p>Friday 3/27: <i>BAC</i> Koch, “Blue Period”; Curry, “Ambient Air (Part II)”; <i>AGFCTS</i>—Gloeckner, “Fun Things to Do with Little Girls” (pp. 215-217)</p>
Week 10	<p>Monday 3/30: <i>GN</i> Chapter 1 and 2</p> <p>Wednesday 4/1: <i>BAC</i> Thompson, “Cul de Sac, September 17-23, 2012”; Alden, “Hawaii 1997”; Comic Strip Response 7</p> <p>Friday 4/3: <i>AGFCTS</i>—Drechsler, “Visitors in the Night” (pp. 218-223); Matt, “excerpt from <i>The Poor Bastard</i>” (pp. 233-241); Seth, “excerpt from <i>It’s a Good Life If You Don’t Weaken</i>” (pp. 242-255)</p>
Week 11	<p>Monday 4/6: <i>VLC</i> (pp. 107-135); <i>GN</i> Chapter 3 and 4</p> <p>Wednesday 4/8: <i>AGFCTS</i>—Bennett, “Torrential” (pp. 274-275); Bell, “Cecil and Jordan in New York” (pp. 279-82); Huizenga, “excerpt from <i>The Sunset</i>” (pp. 283-285); Comic Strip Response 8</p> <p>Friday 4/10: <i>GN</i> Chapter 5</p>
Week 12	<p>Monday 4/13: <i>GN</i> Chapter 6; Critical Analysis Essay Due</p> <p>Wednesday 4/15: <i>AGFCTS</i>—Weinstein, “The Tub”; Tyler, “Gone”; Crumb, “A Short History of America” (pp. 289-302); Comic Strip Response 9</p> <p>Friday 4/17: <i>AGFCTS</i>—Crumb, “Jelly Roll Morton’s Voodoo Curse” (pp. 311-316); Pekar and Crumb, “Lunch with Carmella” (pp. 322-325); Pekar and Crumb, “Hypothetical Quandary” (pp. 326-328)</p>
Week 13	<p>Monday 4/20: <i>GN</i> Chapter 7</p> <p>Wednesday 4/22: <i>VLC</i> (pp. 137-151); <i>AGFCTS</i>—Sacco, “excerpt from Šoba” (pp. 329-336); Collier, “The Ethel Catherwood Story” (pp. 337-350); Comic Strip Response 10</p> <p>Friday 4/24: <i>AGFCTS</i>—Ware, “Scott Joplin”; “excerpt from <i>Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth</i>”; “Thrilling Adventure Stories”; “excerpt from <i>Building Stories</i>”; “An Idea” (pp. 351-374)</p>

Week 14	<p>Monday 4/27: <i>GN</i> Chapter 8 and 9</p> <p>Wednesday 4/29: <i>VLC</i> (pp. 153-171); <i>AGFCTS</i>—Clowes, “Gynecology” (375-397); Seth, “190 Dublin Street” (p. 398)</p> <p>Friday 5/1: Original Comic Due</p>
Week 15	<p>Monday 5/4: Discuss original comics</p> <p>Wednesday 5/6: Discuss original comics</p> <p>Friday 5/8: Course Wrap-Up</p>
	Final Exam: May 15, 2014