COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE: Eng 670: Superheroes — History/Form/Theory
INSTRUCTOR(S) OF RECORD: Professor Saunders

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION:
Office: 366 PLC
Hours: Monday, 9.30 am - 12.30 pm*
Phone: 346 0062
E-mail: ben@uoregon.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We will map the path of the American comic book superhero from the first appearance of Superman in 1938 to the present day, considering the ways in which that journey reflects larger processes of social change. We will also attempt to analyze superhero comics as significant aesthetic achievements in themselves — expressions of a misunderstood and under-appreciated art form, as uniquely American as Jazz. Together we will try to formulate an appropriate critical vocabulary to discuss this remarkable artistic legacy.

We will also explore the intersections between superhero comics and a range of theoretical issues, including: the methodology of cultural studies; representations of popular nationalism; conceptions of the body; post-humanism; and queer desire.

Ultimately, we will make an effort to understand better the extraordinary imaginative appeal of the costumed crime-fighter — an appeal that can apparently overlap significant distinctions of age, gender, nation, and culture, and which no amount of silliness or cynicism seems quite able to dispel.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT:

Grades will be based upon:

- **ONE** formal presentation (fifteen-twenty minutes in length) on a primary text that we are reading this term. All theoretical approaches welcome. Texts will be assigned by me.
- **ONE** research paper (12-14 pages, exclusive of bibliography), due on Monday of Week XI.

Final grades will breakdown as follows:

Presentation: 30%
Final Paper/Project: 50%
Class Participation: 20%

SEQUENCE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

WEEK ONE
March 29th

Lectures: “Origin Stories,” and “What Superman Started.”

Texts: Superman Chronicles, Volume One.

WEEK TWO
April 5th

Lectures: “Superman: Truth, Justice, and All That Stuff,” and “Batman’s Shadows.”

Texts: Michael Kammen, American Culture, American Tastes, Chapters 1, 4, and 7.
Bart Beatty, Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture, Chapters 2 and 4.
Ian Gordon, Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, Chapters 1 and 6.
Gerard Jones, Men Of Tomorrow, Chapters 2 and 7.
David Hajdu, The Ten Cent Plague, excerpt.

WEEK THREE
April 12th

Presentations: Robert Dobler and William Driscoll.

“Whatever Happened To The Man of Tomorrow?” and “The Killing Joke.”
Batman: Year One.
Batman: The Dark Knight Returns.

Will Brooker, Batman Unmasked, Chapters 2 and 3.
Geoff Klock, How To Read Superhero Comics and Why, excerpts.
Douglas Wolk, Reading Comics, Chapter 4.

WEEK FOUR
April 19th

Lecture: “Wonder Woman In Bondage.”

Presentations: Dara Goldhagen and Diana Martinez.
Texts:  
*Wonder Woman: Down To Earth.*  
*Wonder Woman: The Circle.*

Clare Pitkethly, “Recruiting an Amazon.”  
Iris Marion Young, “Lived Body vs Gender” and “Throwing Like A Girl.”  
Barbara Creed, “Lesbian Bodies.”  
Judith Halberstam, “Female Masculinity.”

**WEEK FIVE**  
April 26th

Presentations: Jacob Meindersee and Mitchell Meler.

Texts:  
*Fantastic Four Essentials, Volume Three.*

Moira Gatens, “Power, Bodies, and Difference.”  

**WEEK SIX**  
May 3rd

Lecture:  
“On Steve Ditko.”

Presentations: Katie Myers and Josh Plencner.

Texts:  
*The Amazing Spider-Man, Marvel Masterworks Volume One.*

Donald Palumbo, “Spider-Man Is An Existentialist Superhero.”  
Matthew Pustz, “Spider-Man: Class Straddler as Superhero.”  
Andrew Hultkrans, “Steve Ditko’s Hands.”  
Charles Hatfield, “An Art of Tensions.”

**WEEK SEVEN**  
May 10th

Presentations: Sarah Todd and Samuel Van Nest.

Texts:  
*Watchmen.*

WEEK EIGHT
May 17th

Presentations: Veronica Vold and Thomas Walker.

Texts:  
Iron Man: Extremis.  
Iron Man: The Five Nightmares.

Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto.”  
Thurtle and Mitchell, “Data Made Flesh.”  
Bruce Clark, Posthuman Metamorphosis, excerpts.

WEEK NINE
May 24th

Texts:  
Alias Volume One.  
Alias Volume Four.

Readings in Genre Theory, TBA.

WEEK TEN
May 31st

Texts:  
Runaways Volumes One and Two.
*Please note: on occasion I am forced to cancel my office hours for departmental/committee meetings, graduate student examinations, and other significant administrative duties. (Thus, for example, on Monday, April 4th, I am participating in a dissertation defense for a PhD student in the Drama program.) I will always endeavor to inform you all in advance of any such cancellations, and try to reschedule my hours; but it may not always be possible to do so. Your patience and understanding is appreciated.