ENGLISH 280: INTRODUCTION TO COMICS STUDIES
FALL 2021
PROFESSOR BEN SAUNDERS

Classroom: Chiles 128
CRN: 12342
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9am-12pm (Zoom appointments only)
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Course Description:

This class provides an introduction to the academic discipline of Comics Studies. You will be exposed to a spectrum of comic-art forms (the newspaper strip, the comic book, the graphic novel, etc.) and a variety of genres. You will also be asked to read several examples of contemporary comics scholarship.

Required Texts (in reading order):

See Canvas site under “Required Texts.”

Method of Assessment:

Grades will be based on four written assignments, worth 25%, 25%, 20% and 40% of your final grade, respectively. See Canvas Site for detailed descriptions and due dates. A measure of discretionary extra-credit (up to a third of a letter grade) may also be awarded for distinguished class participation. (Please note: This does not mean that you get points merely for talking. But students who regularly demonstrate familiarity with the readings, who advance our discussions by asking pertinent questions, and who ground their observations in specific details from the texts will be rewarded for their contributions.)

Anticipated Learning Outcomes:

You should expect to put at least 10 hours per week into this course (on top of time spent in class), with that number rising to at least 14 hours during weeks when assignments are due. Assuming you are able to devote yourself fully to the readings and assignments, by the end of the class you will have acquired a deeper knowledge of the origins and historical developments of American comics; the specific achievements of key comic strip and comic book creators; the economic and material conditions of comic book production; the range of comic forms (from newspaper strip to graphic novel). In addition, you will have gained experience and proficiency in the following activities:

- Reading both comics and academic critical texts with a view to better understanding their conventions.
- Drawing on relevant information to situate these texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- Performing formal analyses of a narrative medium that combines visual and verbal elements in a unique way.
- Writing focused analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose.
- Employing creativity and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
- Employing a diversity of primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, to generate a persuasive written argument.
Basic Course Policies:

Classroom Etiquette

1. Please do not consult your phones or otherwise attempt to multitask during our meetings.

Checking your phone during class is insulting to the instructor and potentially distracting to your classmates. It is not just lousy etiquette, in other words; it's also poor citizenship, and will be sanctioned as such. Students observed using their phones without permission during the class period will receive one verbal warning; subsequent violations of the policy will result in a lowered grade (five percentage points, or up to a third of a letter grade, for a second offense; ten percentage points for a third offense; and so on).

You don't want to be that student who failed a class because they could not resist checking their messages for eighty minutes, so please take this policy seriously: turn your phone off and put it away at the start of class.

2. Please bring a pen and paper for note-taking to every class.

You will need pen and paper because (in general), the use of electronic devices during class is forbidden. Why? Well, there is some (disputed) evidence that taking notes by hand is better for learning; there is also a lot of (undisputed) evidence that the use of laptops in class leads to so-called "multi-tasking" (that is, distracted attention) and poor academic performance (check out the articles here (Links to an external site.) and here (Links to an external site.) if you are curious for more on this topic).

The bottom line is that you will be less tempted to visit your favorite websites or respond to notifications if you use a pen and paper rather than a laptop.

Of course, if you have a documented disability that requires the use of a laptop for note-taking, then accommodations can be made; see "Academic Accommodations," below for procedures. Any such allowed devices must be placed in "Airplane" mode at the start of class, however.

3. Always Bring The Required Text To Class

Anyone can forget their book once, but students who repeatedly show up without the required text books will be sanctioned. Your grade will be lowered by five percentage points for every class after the second for which you show up without a book. That can add up fast, and seriously compromise your grade — so don't do it. After all, you can't even pretend to be interested if you don't have the book in front of you!

Am I saying that you should pretend to be interested, even if you are not? Well ... I don't want to encourage barefaced hypocrisy, but I am a great believer in the value of the edict that says "fake it till you make it!"

Late Work

Work is due by the times indicated on the assignments, without exception. Late assignments will be downgraded by a third of a letter grade for each day they are late, unless explicit permission for an emergency extension has been granted by Ash or myself.

Emergency Extensions

Extensions can be granted in the event of illness, family crisis, or similar emergencies. Please request the extension as soon as you know you require it — ideally before the deadline has passed, or, if your emergency makes this difficult, then as soon as possible afterwards. Extensions will not be offered on an open-ended basis, so if you need to ask for one, please give some consideration to how much time you will realistically need to complete the work.
We understand that life can sometimes throw us for a loop, wrecking even the most carefully laid plans — particularly during these uncertain times — and we are more than willing to offer reasonable accommodations when we can. But we can only do so if we are informed. So, above all, stay in touch.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic dishonesty will result in an automatic failing grade. In addition, all incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words or ideas without acknowledgment. All external sources (whether quoted directly or paraphrased) must be properly documented. Cutting and pasting from online sources without due acknowledgment is plagiarism; but so is rephrasing someone else’s work without acknowledging the source; it is also considered plagiarism if you ask or pay someone else to do academic work in your name. To avoid the charge of plagiarism you should always:

- Accurately quote the original author’s words when you are quoting.
- Introduce quotations with a phrase that includes the author’s name (EG “Baxter argues that…”)
- Enclose the quotation within quotation marks.
- Follow the quotation with an in-text citation or provide a footnote (using either MLA or Chicago style citation methods).
- Provide a list of references with full citation information at the end of any research paper.

Above all, remember:

- If you paraphrase someone else’s ideas or words rather than quoting directly, you still must cite the source for the idea or concept that you are paraphrasing, with an in-text citation and/or a footnote.

For further guidance, see the UO library website (under “How-To Guides” on the library homepage) for more on citation practices. If you remain uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, definitions are available in the “Student Conduct Code” section of the Student Life website (http://studentlife.uoregon.edu). You are also welcome to contact any of us if you have any questions about these definitions.

**Academic Accommodations**

If there are aspects of the course design that result in disability-related barriers to your participation, please contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu for additional resources and support. If the AEC determines that you need accommodations, please email me as soon as possible so I can meet with you via Zoom and make appropriate adjustments.

**Any Questions?**

Please let me know if you have any questions about any of these policies. That’s why I am here.
Sequence of Readings

See Canvas Site for Weekly Modules

Managing Disagreements

We won’t always agree. And that’s fine, because in college-level courses in the humanities, agreement is not the main goal. The point is to be challenged by new ideas about the complex relationships between art, language, literature, media technologies, culture, and politics — and to become more discerning with regard to what constitutes a persuasive argument.

Unfortunately, we are all capable of giving offense accidentally — sometimes due to misunderstanding, and sometimes out of lack of knowledge or experience. If the topic at hand is inherently sensitive or difficult, the risk of an inflicting an accidental hurt is more likely.

Nevertheless, in the setting of a discussion-oriented classroom we must try to assume the good faith of all participants. Remember, it is unlikely in such circumstances that anyone is deliberately trying to give offense. Moreover, our collective responsibility as a learning community is to try to help one another in the face of our misunderstandings and insufficiencies. That means being patient with one another when we express ourselves poorly or speak from ignorance — something we will all do from time to time. (And yes, that includes professors.)

Having said that: good faith discussion is impossible without basic respect for human difference and diversity. No student should ever be discriminated against on account of their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, class status, prior educational attainments, religion, or appearance; in addition, personal insults, name-calling, and mockery will not be tolerated. If you are ever subject to discriminatory language or behavior as a student, please let me know, so that we can take steps to address the problem.

Finally, though, let’s try to assume the best of one another, even — or especially — when we disagree. In the end, that’s the only way we can hope to learn from one another.

University Covid Policies

See the Welcome Module of the Canvas Site for policies and resources.