

MCOM 419: Popular Culture and Mass Communication

Spring 2016

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9-10:15 a.m., UC323.

Professor Drew Morton

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 10-12 p.m., UC228

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course focuses on the theories of media studies that have broadened the scope of the field in the past thirty years. Topics and authors include: comics studies (Scott McCloud), fan culture (Henry Jenkins), gender (Lynn Spigel), new media (Lev Manovich), race (Aniko Bodrogkozy, Herman Gray), and television (John Caldwell, Raymond Williams).

Before the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Exhibit an understanding of the cultural developments that have driven the evolution of American comics (mastery will be assessed by the objective midterm and short response papers).
2. Exhibit an understanding of the industrial structures that have defined the history of American comics (mastery will be assessed by the objective midterm).
3. Exhibit an understanding of the terminology and theories that help us analyze American comics as a cultural artifact and as a work of art (mastery will be assessed by classroom participation and short response papers).

REQUIRED TEXTS/MATERIALS:

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (William Morrow, 1994).

Moore, Alan. *Watchmen* (DC Comics, 2014).

Sabin, Roger. *Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (Phaidon, 2001).

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I and II: A Survivor's Tale* (Pantheon, 1986 and 1992).

Additional readings will be distributed via photocopy, PDF, or e-mail.

Students will also need to have Netflix, Hulu, and/or Amazon to stream certain video titles on their own.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

MODULE ONE: THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN COMIC BOOK (WEEKS 1-7)

Week One (January 17-23): Introduction and the Origins of the Comic Book

Day One: Introductions

In-Class Screening: *Comic Book Confidential* (Ron Mann, 1988, 90 minutes).

Day Two: The Sunday Supplement

Reading: Sabin, pgs. 6-25.

Week Two (January 24-30): The Golden Age

Day One: Comical Comics

Reading: Sabin, pgs. 26-43.

Day Two: Superheroes

Reading: Sabin, pgs. 44-79.

Will Eisner, Excerpts from *The Spirit* (PDF or CBR).

Bob Kane and Bill Finger, Excerpts from *Batman* (PDF or CBR).

Week Three (January 31-February 6): The Comics Code and the Silver Age

Day One: EC Comics, Fredric Wertham, and the Comics Code

Reading: Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (PDF), Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (PDF), and Amy Kiste Nyberg, "William Gaines and the Battle Over EC Comics" (PDF).

Day Two: *Mad* and the Return of the Superhero

Reading: *Masters of American Comics* essays on Harvey Kurtzman and Jack Kirby (PDF), Stan Lee and Gil Kane, *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98.

Students must pick an alternative comic book or graphic novel to present to the class in week seven. See attached list.

Week Four (February 7-13): R. Crumb and the Underground Comix Movement

Day One: Crumb

Reading: Sabin, pgs. 92-129 and *Masters of American Comics* (PDF).

Day Two: *Crumb*

In-Class Screening: *Crumb* (Terry Zwigoff, 1995, 120 minutes).

Week Five (February 14-20): Autobiography, Non-Fiction, and *Maus*

Day One: *Maus I*

Day Two: *Maus II*

Week Six (February 21-27): The Deconstruction of the Superhero

Day One: *Watchmen*

Reading: *Watchmen*, #1-6.

Day Two: *Watchmen*

Reading: *Watchmen*, #7-12.

Week Seven (February 28-March 5): Graphic Novels, New Storytellers, and

Presentations

Day One: Chris Ware

Reading: *Masters of American Comics* (PDF).

Day Two: Student Presentations of Chosen Comic Books

MODULE TWO: THE FORM OF THE AMERICAN COMIC BOOK (WEEKS 8-10)

Week Eight (March 6-12): Midterm and Closure

Day One: Midterm Exam

Day Two: Closure

Reading: McCloud, pgs. 2-93.

SPRING BREAK FROM MARCH 14-18 - PAPER #1 (HISTORY) DUE VIA E-MAIL ON MARCH 18TH AT 5 P.M. VIA E-MAIL

Week Nine (March 20-26): Time and Space, Text and Image

Day One: Time and Space

Reading: McCloud, pgs. 94-137.

Day Two: Text and Image

McCloud, pgs. 138-215.

Week Ten (March 27-April 2): Catching Up and Cancelled Class

Day One: Catching Up

Reading: Thierry Groensteen, "The Impossible Definition" (PDF).

Day Two: No Class Due to Conference Travel

A short proposal for your final project - a five page comic on the subject of your choosing - due at 5 p.m. on April 2nd via e-mail.

MODULE THREE: COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS: FILM VS. COMICS (WEEKS 11-15)

Week Eleven (April 3-9): Sketching Under the Influence

Day One: Film vs. Comics

Reading: Francis Lacassin, "The Comic Strip and Film Language" (PDF) and Pascal Lefèvre, "Incompatible Visual Ontologies?: The Problematic Adaptation of Drawn Images" (PDF).

PAPER #2 (FORM) DUE.

Day Two: Film vs. Comics

Reading: Drew Morton, "Sketching Under the Influence?: Windsor McCay and the Question of Aesthetic Convergence Between Comic Strips and Film" (PDF).

In-Class Screening: Winsor McCay shorts.

Week Twelve (April 10-16): The Rise and Fall of the Superhero Blockbuster

Day One: The Superhero Blockbuster Born

Reading: Drew Morton, *Panel to the Frame* (PDF).

Outside of Class Screenings: *Superman* (1978, Richard Donner, 143 minutes) and *Batman* (1989, Tim Burton, 126 minutes).

Day Two: The Superhero Blockbuster Defeated

Reading: Drew Morton, *Panel to the Frame* (PDF).

Outside of Class Screening: *Batman and Robin* (1997, Joel Schumacher, 125 minutes).

Week Thirteen (April 17-23): The New Comic Book Film

Day One: *American Splendor*

Reading: Craig Hight, "American Splendor: Translating Autobiography into Drama-Documentary" (PDF).

Outside of Class Screening: *American Splendor* (2003, Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, 101 minutes).

Day Two: *Sin City*

Reading: Drew Morton, *Panel to the Frame* (PDF) and Frank Miller, *Sin City* (PDF).

Outside of Class Screening: *Sin City* (2005, Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller, and Quentin Tarantino, 125 minutes).

Week Fourteen (April 24-30): The Return of the Superhero

Day One: *Batman 2.0*

Reading: Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (PDF).

Outside of Class Screening: *The Dark Knight* (2008, Christopher Nolan, 152 minutes).

Day Two: *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*

Reading: Drew Morton, *Panel to the Frame* (PDF) and Bryan Lee O'Malley, *Scott Pilgrim* (PDF).

Outside of Class Screening: *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010, Edgar Wright, 112 minutes).

Week Fifteen (May 1-7): Student Presentations

Day One: Student Presentations of Creative Work

PAPER #3 DUE

Day Two: Student Presentations of Creative Work

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Attendance/Participation/Homework/Quizzes: 10%

Midterm Exam: 30%

Student Presentations on Alternate Comic: 10%

Three response papers (three pages each): 30%
Final Project: 20%

COURSE POLICIES:

Be sure to complete your reading and assignments on the date they are scheduled on the syllabus.

Late assignments are not accepted.

In accordance with the University's academic integrity policy (see below), students who violate the policy will earn an automatic F for the course.

Cell phones are to be set on vibrate and not to be used during class.

Be sure to bring *all* your course materials to class each day we meet. Finally, please allow a 24-48 hour turn-around time for any e-mails. Due to this policy, be sure not to leave any major concerns/questions about assignments for the last minute!

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus.

TAMUT POLICIES:

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations through the A&M-Texarkana Disability Services Office by calling 903-223-3062.

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is expected of students enrolled in this course. Cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of research data, plagiarism, and undocumented use of materials from any source constitute academic dishonesty and may be grounds for a grade of 'F' in the course and/or disciplinary actions. For additional information, see the university catalog.

A&M-Texarkana Email Address: Upon application to Texas A&M University-Texarkana an individual will be assigned an A&M-Texarkana email account. This email account will be used to deliver official university correspondence. Each individual is responsible for information sent and received via the university email account and is expected to check the official A&M-Texarkana email account on a frequent and consistent basis. Faculty and students are required to utilize the university email account when communicating about coursework.

Drop Policy: Beginning with the first class day of the semester, faculty should report to the Registrar's Office via the preliminary class roster and/or email communication, by a date established by the Registrar's Office, any student who is not attending their class or who has not logged into Blackboard for an online class.

Faculty members shall automatically initiate an administrative drop for any student who has not been in attendance (face to face class) or has not reported in (web or web enhanced class) by the due date of the preliminary class roster as established by the Registrar's Office. The Registrar's Office will notify students by certified mail and/or email that the instructor has initiated the drop process and will instruct them to contact the instructor immediately. If the instructor does not rescind the request in writing within seven (7) days of documentable receipt of the notification, the Registrar's Office will drop the student from the class. Faculty who fail to submit an administrative drop by the established deadline, must record the grade earned by the student at the end of the semester. Faculty submitting a grade of F for a student will be required to enter the last date of attendance during the grading cycle.

Subsequent to the census date final roster, all drops during the semester must be student initiated.