

## MCS 358: Topic in Comics Studies - Comic Books

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### Course Description

This course examines comics (from comic strips and comic books to new digital platforms) both in terms of its history and formal qualities as a medium, and in regards to its evolving cultural status. Comic books have alternately been seen as mere children's entertainment and as Pulitzer prize-winning literature for adults; as a threat to the minds and morals of the nation's youth and as a way to increase literacy rates; as a 'geek' sub-culture and as source material for modern Hollywood blockbuster films. In addition to tracing various aspects of the medium's historical and theoretical aspects, we will examine comics from a variety of formal and cultural perspectives. *Note: All course readings will be in comics form.*

### Required Readings

- 1.) Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Harper, 1994
- 2.) Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*
- 3.) Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*
- 4.) Matt Fraction & David Aja, *Hawkeye: Little Hits*
- 5.) Students are required to purchase a membership to [MarvelUnlimited.com](http://MarvelUnlimited.com) for the three months in which this course meets.
- 6.) Students are also required to access various free comics through online platforms

### Recommended Readings

Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavy, *Comic Book History of Comics*

Scott McCloud, *Reinventing Comics*

### Assignments

- 1.) Professionalism: 10%
- 2.) Weekly Discussion Questions: 10%
- 3.) Short Assignment: 15%
- 4.) Midterm Exam – 20%
- 5.) Presentation: 15%
- 6.) Final Paper – 30%

## Course Objectives

Understand the formal conventions of the comics medium

Analyze comics from different theoretical perspectives

Distinguish between different genres, styles and eras of comics

## Course Schedule and Readings

### Week 1 – Introduction: Why Study Comics?

### Week 2 – Origin Story: How Comics Began

Readings: McCloud, Chapters 1 & 2

### Week 3 – A Hero Shall Rise: Birth of the Superheroes

Readings: *Superman* #1 (1939); *Detective Comics* #27 (1939); *Fantastic Four* #1; *Amazing Spider-Man* #1

\*\*Short Assignment due\*\*

### Week 4 - Medium Theory: Comics and Form

Readings: McCloud, Chapters 3, 4, 5

### Week 5 –Test Your Might! – Midterm Exam Week

Reading: *Hawkeye: Little Hits*

\*\*Midterm Exam\*\*

### Week 6 – “For Mature Readers Only”(?): Audiences and Ethics

Reading: *Authentic Police Cases* #6 (DCM); *Wanted Comics* #12 (DCM); *Weird Mysteries* #7 (DCM); *Web of Evil* #1 (DCM)

Week 7 – “This city is afraid of me. I have seen its true face”: *Watchmen*

Reading: *Watchmen*

Week 8 – Genre, History and the Personal Narrative: *Persepolis*

Reading: *Persepolis*

Week 9 - From Panels to Pixels: Digital Comics

Readings: Various Marvel Unlimited titles (TBA);

Recommended reading: Scott McCloud, *Reinventing Comics*

Week 10 – Going Public (“The truth is... I am Iron Man”): Final Presentations

\*\*Presentations\*\*

\*\*Final Paper due\*\*

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## **CLASS POLICIES**

### **NOTE TAKING**

Taking notes during the lecture/discussion periods and the weekly screening/lab sessions is a key part of succeeding in this course. You should write down more than just the key points listed in my Powerpoint slides and also add your own thoughts, questions and observations. The same is true during screenings of clips and films - you will probably not remember everything about them later unless you take notes as you watch. While taking notes in the dark while trying to watch the screen may seem difficult at first, it is a key skill for film students to learn and gets easier with practice.

### **CELLPHONES**

With the exception of scheduled breaks, the use of cellphones not permitted in class, including screenings. Please turn off your cell phones prior to the start of class unless you have the permission of the instructor. Cellphone use of any kind in class will negatively affect your Professionalism grade, even if I do not ask you directly to turn your phone.

## **PREPARATION & READING STRATEGIES**

Please complete all readings assigned for a given week prior to the start of class, so that you will already have a context for understanding the course material before we discuss it. I recommend taking notes while you read, such as key ideas and concepts, as well as making a list of questions regarding aspects of the material that are unclear to you or that you find interesting, challenging or enlightening. Note that completing the readings prior to each class is part of your professionalism grade. If it becomes clear to me during class that you haven't done the readings you will lose part of that grade.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Class attendance is required. Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are late to class your professionalism grade will be negatively affected. Attending class means arriving on time and staying until class is finished. Arriving late to class or leaving class early will negatively affect your Professionalism grade, and two such instances will count as one absence. Changes in work schedules, personal celebrations (e.g., birthdays, etc.), assignments due in other classes, car problems/transit congestion, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for being late/missing class/missing deadlines, etc. Please allow extra time in your travel schedule to accommodate things like transit delays, traffic, etc.

If you miss a class, even due to illness, I am not able to give you the lecture notes, so please make arrangements with someone in the class to get their notes from them.

You are allowed one unexcused absence in this class, and two absences total if at least one of those is excused (e.g., you have documentation about a medical illness/emergency, legal issue/civic responsibility, or due to an official DePaul function). Further absences will result in the following actions:

2 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by two letter grade (i.e., A- => B)

3 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by three letter grades (i.e., A- => B-)

***Students who miss more than three days of class will receive a zero on their Professionalism grade.***

**MAKE-UP EXAMS, TESTS, QUIZZES, ETC.**

There will be NO makeup tests, exams, presentations, quizzes or other class activities. If you miss a class activity you will receive zero marks. Exceptions may be made at the instructor's discretion for legitimate and unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family or official DePaul function. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor immediately and make arrangements to provide any required documentation (I.e. a doctor's note, death certificate, etc.). Exceptions cannot be made if the student does not submit such documentation within a reasonable time frame.

Note that alternative arrangements for scheduled final exams will NOT be made for anything other than unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family. Travel plans such as vacations, family functions, or the need to book a less expensive travel ticket are not legitimate excuses and will not be accommodated. If you are unable to write an exam during the scheduled time you should choose another course that better fits your schedule.

### **ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS/DEADLINE**

All assignments must be done individually, unless the instructor specifically states otherwise in the criteria. Collaboration on assignments is not otherwise permitted. Please see the section below on DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy for further details on your responsibilities in this regard.

Assignments must be handed in on time, at the start of the class in which they are due. Assignments handed in after the start of class will be considered late. Late penalties will be applied at the instructor's discretion to any assignments handed in late. ***You will lose one letter grade per day late on the assignment.***

***Assignments that are more than one week late will NOT be accepted and you will receive a zero.***

Please allow yourself sufficient time to complete the last-minute details and to arrive in class on time: late assignments due to computer and printing problems and transportation troubles will unfortunately not be exempt from receiving a late penalty.

All papers should be typed, double-spaced throughout the entire essay, and use a consistent style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.). Use one-inch margins and 12-point font.

***All assignments must be submitted to the appropriate D2L dropbox. Assignments will automatically be run through a plagiarism detector, and any instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to DePaul's Academic Integrity Board. Please see DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy for further details on what constitutes academic dishonesty, or ask me prior to completing your assignments.***

### **ACCOMODATION FOR DISABILITIES**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussion will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the

quarter (preferably within the first week or two of the course – note that accommodations cannot be made retroactively once assignments, exams etc. have already been completed) and be sure to contact the following office for support and additional services:

Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)

#370, Student Center, LPC, 773.325.1677

## **RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

Please respect the contributions of others in the classroom and/or online by not using insulting/inflammatory or discriminatory rhetoric. Class space (both in person and online) is intended to be a safe space for personal reflection and growth, so it is essential that the opinions of others be treated respectfully even if you do not agree with them. Students must therefore engage in respectful and professional in-class and online conduct (which also includes the use of proper grammar when replying online - I.e. please avoid excessive use of abbreviations, emoticons, etc. – full sentences should be used.)

When the instructor or another student is addressing the class, everyone else in the room is expected to listen attentively and to refrain from engaging in conversations or any other activities that constitute distractions. Students who do not abide by this guideline will lose significant professionalism marks (even if the instructor does not directly address the behaviour in class), and if the behaviour becomes extreme enough then the student may not be permitted to continue with the course.

## **E-MAIL**

I often send e-mail announcements to the class. You need to (1) make sure your preferred email address in Campus Connect is the address you check regularly so messages do not bounce back and (2) make sure my email address will pass through your spam filter. Please be aware that to avoid DePaul's spam filters, it is recommended that you send me messages using a DePaul email account, as messages sent through Hotmail, Yahoo and other such accounts regularly get quarantined.

I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, Monday to Friday. I do my best to respond to emails on the weekend, but this time is reserved first and foremost for my family, so cannot guarantee an immediate response. If you have not heard from me within this timeframe, you should assume that your email has not reached me and resend.

## **ONLINE EVALUATIONS**

One of your responsibilities in this course is to complete an online teaching evaluation for this class. This course will be available for you to review during the 9th and 10th week of the quarter. Close to that time, you will receive a notification to this effect via email.

As instructors, we really appreciate learning what we are doing well in the classroom and where we can continue to improve. Your feedback really makes a difference.

## **DEPAUL UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; collaborating with other students on an assignment requiring individual work; fabrication, falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement." If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please ask!

Violations of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Academic Integrity Board. Violation will result in severe penalty, up to and including failure of the assignment/exam or the entire course, at the instructor's discretion.

## **CITATION STYLE**

Students must cite in their papers according to the Chicago Manual of Style, which is the primary citation style in the field of media studies. The use of other citation styles are not permitted. See the following website for specific examples of how to cite your sources using Chicago Style:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

## **POLICY ON INCOMPLETE (IN) GRADES**

Undergraduate and graduate students have two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned,

remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four-week grace period before final degree certification.

### **ASSISTANCE WITH WRITING**

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism, I encourage you to consult DePaul's Center for Writing-Based Learning. The center offers both on-campus and online tutoring. See <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>