

ENGL-2709H-A: Graphic Fiction 2020WI - Durham GTA Campus

Instructor:

Instructor: Brent Bellamy

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Phone Number: TBA

Office: TBA

Office Hours: WED 11:00am-11:50am, or by appointment

Meeting Times:

WED 12:00 noon – 2:50pm, OSH 115

Please consult the [Timetable](#) for updates prior to the first class.

Department:

Academic Administrative Assistant: Patricia Heffernan

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Description:

Comics are central to modern culture, and this course explores the medium as a form of contemporary literature. You will learn how cartooning, drawing, and storytelling merge in compelling ways. The texts under discussion in this course offer a unique approach to life-writing and identity-formations as graphic fictions. By reading and discussing a range of graphic fiction works, from superhero comics and memoir to historical visioning and disjointed temporalities, you will learn both how to analyze comics and how the medium of comics emerged in and remains vital to popular culture. Through the use of methods and resources in literary studies, material culture studies, rhetoric, and visual cultural studies, you will explore the aesthetic, cultural, historical, and global significance of graphic fiction.

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify and understand various genres and styles of graphic narrative;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which graphic narratives circulate;
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to graphic forms, genres, and media;
- Use literary and visual studies to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss graphic fiction on the levels of content, form, and politics.

Texts:

Scott McCloud (author, illustrator) *Understanding Comics*

Alan Moore (author) and Dave Gibbons (illustrator), *Watchmen*

Mariko Tamaki (author) Jillian Tamaki (illustrator) *Skim*

Kate Evans (author, illustrator) Paule Buhle (editor) *Red Rosa*

Patti LaBoucane-Benson (author) Kelly Mellings (Illustrator) *The Outside Circle*

Richard McGuire (author, illustrator) *Here*

Readings:

Matt Rae "Frank Miller's Batman is fascist and you really shouldn't cheer for him," available here: <https://www.ualberta.ca/newtrail/featurestories/frank-millers-batman-is-a-fascist>

Michelle Miller, "I Hate You Everything: Reading Adolescent Bad Feelings in Tamaki's *Skim*," available here: <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/esc/index.php/ESC/article/view/29426>

Nillson, Magnus "Socialist Thought and Comics Form: Narrative and Rhetorical Strategies in *Red Rosa*," available here: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/24867>

Mary Kate Dennis and Michael Minor, "Healing through Storytelling: Indigenising Social Work through Stories," available here: <https://doi-org.cat1.lib.trentu.ca/10.1093/bjsw/bcz044>

Laura Moncion, "Time Frames," Available here: <http://imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca/?p=9181>

Assessments, Assignments and Tests:

Visual Annotations (5% each, 25% total): You will be required to complete five visual-analysis assignments in class. These assignments will require you to annotate an assigned page from the text of the week. This will hone their eye for reading comic form. You will be required to note things such as panel structure, page layout, illustration style, use of word balloons, and so on. Directions will be provided.

Essay Proposal (10%): As you prepare for the essay, you will be required to write a 500-word essay proposal. This proposal will not be a binding document; instead, it offers a chance for you to put their ideas in writing and to get started on research for the final essay. These final essay proposals will be reviewed by your peers ahead of the due date so that you will have a chance to revise them before submission.

Essay (30%): You will produce a self-directed, argumentative essay on a comic, graphic novel, or webcomic. The topic of your essay will be up to you—you can write on one of the comics that we've read in class or on a comic, graphic novel, or webcomic that we have not discussed in class. You will be required to draw on critical material discovered in class or in your own research for this paper. The essay can be

submitted in traditional prose format or in comics format. A more detailed paper topic is available on Blackboard.

Self-Portraits / Participation (15%): As part of your participation grade, you will be given two minutes each meeting to draw a self-portrait in a variety of comic styles. Index cards will be provided for this activity. These cards will be held by your instructor until the end of term when they will be returned. You will be able to track your approach to portrait and self-expression as it changes throughout the course. You can expect to receive a strong participation grade if you regularly and meaningfully contribute to class discussion, show you are engaged in the course materials, you make a point of getting to know your classmates, and you set at least one appointment to speak with your course instructor outside of class time.

Take-Home Exam (20%): In order to conclude the course, you will be required to write a take-home examination. This form, style, and requirements of this exam will be collaboratively determined in the final meeting of the course. You will be given 5-10 working days to complete the take-home exam. The due date will be determined during class discussion.

Format of Written Work: Written work must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins (unless otherwise specified). I expect you to edit and proofread all written work. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments. Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page. All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

Paper Submission: All written work should be submitted on Blackboard by the due date. Late papers will be penalized half a letter grade (-5%) for each day that they are late. Remember to keep copies of all your work in case anything goes astray.

In-Class Discussion: In-class discussion will focus on course materials, lectures, and graphic fiction. You are encouraged to come to class prepared with questions and observations. I will facilitate discussion, but the onus will be on you to engage with the material covered in the lecture and read for class.

Grading:

The Visual Annotations will be graded based on your completion of the exercise and strength of your observations.

The Essay Proposals will be graded based on the development of a compelling line of inquiry, appropriate goals for the essay, and a clear set of directives for the author.

The following rubric will be used when grading Essays and Take-Home Exams. Note that it focuses on content, reasoning, organization, style, grammar, and format. Should you elect to produce an essay in comics-format, these will still be the areas that are graded.

EXTRAORDINARY (A+ range: 90%-100%) An 'A+' paper is everything that an 'A' paper is with the addition of content and reasoning that would still be excellent in an assignment two years more advanced.

EXCELLENT (A range: 80% - 89%) The essay is interesting, well-supported and original. It is logically argued, showing an awareness of other possible perspectives. Supporting evidence is well chosen. The organization is clear and effective. The reader is never in doubt as to where the essay is heading and the argument seems to flow naturally. Paragraphs are unified and well organized and clearly related to what precedes and follows them. Sentences are clear and varied in structure. Words are used correctly, precisely and imaginatively. There are no errors in spelling, punctuation or grammar and no errors in format (title page, footnotes and quotations, margins, page numbering, works cited).

VERY GOOD (B+: 77% - 79%) The essay may be generally free of errors but somewhat lacking in originality or style; or it may be original and stylish but sloppy; or it may be something in between.

GOOD (B-/B: 70% - 76%) A solid paper. The ideas make good sense but are somewhat lacking in originality or are not well supported. The essay is logically argued but without much awareness of alternatives. Logical connections could be better developed. The organization is clear and effective. However, development is somewhat mechanical. Paragraphs are unified and well organized and clearly related to what precedes and follows them. Sentences are clear and varied in structure. Words are used correctly but not particularly imaginatively. There are a few minor errors in spelling, punctuation or grammar and few errors in format.

FAIR/SATISFACTORY (C range: 60% - 69%) An acceptable paper. The ideas generally make sense but are lacking in originality. The writer avoids making inaccurate points but the points made are mostly obvious. The argument is logical for the most part, but may break down at crucial points. Supporting evidence is usually adequate, but does not show a thorough knowledge or understanding of the primary sources. Organization is evident in most parts of the essay. The main idea is clear from the outset, yet its development is not particularly effective. Paragraphs are generally coherent, but individual paragraphs may be either loosely organized or loosely connected to each other. Sentence structure is usually clear, with some attempt at variation. Transitions between sentences are sometimes missing or are obvious or repetitious. Words are used correctly in most cases, but often imprecisely. There are a few major errors in grammar, and some minor errors. It is generally correct in terms of format, but there is some evidence of carelessness.

MARGINAL (D range: 50% -59%) The essay satisfies the minimal requirements of the assignment. The essay either lacks a clear and adequate central idea, or has a potentially good idea which has not been sufficiently developed. If there are interesting points they are lost in irrelevant detail. There is some attempt at logical thinking, but it is inconsistent. Supporting evidence is insufficient or erratically chosen. There are serious problems with paragraphing and paragraph development. Sentence structure is often awkward. Words are often imprecise and sometimes incorrect. There are several errors in grammar, both major and minor and several errors in format.

FAILURE/UNSATISFACTORY (F range: 49% or below) On the evidence of this work, the student is not capable of writing to a university standard. The essay lacks clear ideas. It is inconsistent. Supporting evidence is missing or irrelevant. The essay is poorly organized or lacking entirely in organization. There is no clearly stated argument. There are serious problems with paragraph organization and sentence structure. Logical links between sentences and between paragraphs are missing and words are often used incorrectly. There are many errors in grammar, both major and minor, and many errors in format.

Grade Total by Withdrawal Date:

25% by 6 March 2020

Schedule:

January 8th - Bubble, Frame, Gutter: Introduction to Graphic Fiction

January 15th - Comics as Genre

Reading: *Watchmen*, Chapters I-VI, *Understanding Comics*, "1 Setting the Record Straight"

Assignment: in-class visual analysis

January 22nd - Comics and Politics

Reading: *Watchmen*, Chapter VII-XII, *Understanding Comics*, "2 The Vocabulary of Comics," and Matt Rae "Frank Miller's Batman is fascist and you really shouldn't cheer for him"

January 29th - The Art of Fiction and Truth

Reading: *Skim*, *Understanding Comics*, "3 Blood in the Gutter"

Assignment: in-class visual analysis

February 5th - Life Writing and Processing Complex Feelings

Reading: *Skim, Understanding Comics*, "4 Time Frames," Michelle Miller, "I Hate You + Everything"

Writing Workshop conducting academic research

February 12th - Kate Evans' Pedagogical Mode

Reading: *Red Rosa, Understanding Comics*, "5 Living in Line"

Assignment: in-class visual analysis

Writing Workshop: writing an essay proposal

February 19th - Reading Week

February 26th - Imagining Political History through Graphic Narrative

Reading: *Red Rosa*, Nillson "Socialist Thought and Comics Form"

Assignment: in-class essay-proposal-peer-review workshop

March 4th - Addressing Settler-Colonialism in Comics

Reading: *The Outside Circle, Understanding Comics*, "6 Show and Tell"

Assignment: in-class visual analysis, revised essay proposals due

March 11th - Healing Intergenerational Trauma

Reading: *The Outside Circle, Understanding Comics*, "7 The Six Steps," Dennis and Minor, "Healing through Storytelling"

Writing Workshop: how to write a paragraph

March 18th - Entropy and Representing Time

Reading: *Here, Understanding Comics*, "8 A Word about Color"

Assignment: in-class visual analysis

March 25th - Meaning and Significance of Climate Crisis

Reading: *Here, Understanding Comics*, "9 Putting it all Together," Moncion, "Time Frames"

April 1st - Course Wrap and Exam Design

Readings: n/a

Assignment: essays due

Writing Workshop: composing fair exam questions

Course Guidelines:

Email: Students in this class are required to check their official university email account at least once a day, in case there are any announcements. Course instructors and workshop leaders will endeavor to respond to emails within 48 hours.

Academic Skills Centre: Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Academic Skills Centre at any stage of the course or writing process. Please visit their website: <http://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/>.

Flexibility: If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the syllabus after notice, discussion, and online vote has taken place.

Accommodations: If you who believe you will require accommodations in this course you should contact Student Accessibility Services in Suite 132, Blackburn Hall, or by visiting their website at <https://www.trentu.ca/wellness/sas>. Please feel free to be in touch with your course instructor or workshop leader.

Academic Integrity: The university expects that you will hold to the highest level of academic integrity. The university's standards for academic integrity are outlined in the [Undergraduate Academic Integrity Policy](#). For questions, please consult the [Academic Integrity FAQ](#).

Academic Freedom: We all enter this classroom with pre-existing political, ethical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely not required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss in whole or in part.

Respect: This course forms a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here. Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will severely negatively impact your standing in this course.

University Policies:

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from failure on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's *Academic Integrity Policy*. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity.

Access to Instruction

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and documentation from a regulated health care practitioner and feels that they may need accommodations to succeed in a course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS) at the respective campus as soon as possible.

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