

ENG 1131-1363

#13862

WRITING THROUGH MEDIA IN THE AGE OF SUPERHEROES

M/W/F 4 (10:40 AM-11:30 AM)

T 9-11 (4:05 PM-7:05 PM)

WEIL 408

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Hours: TBD

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Superhero narratives have been a staple of popular culture since the arrival of Superman in *Action Comics* in 1938, and today they are more ubiquitous than ever. Why are we still so interested in them, and how can writing about superheroes help to articulate the problems of individual and collective life? Comics writers and artists have long used this genre to critique the inequalities of everyday life, and their readers have created fandoms and communities with far-reaching socio-political implications. Superheroes also now populate a wide spectrum of mediums, genres, and forms: from the *auteur* comics of Alan Moore; the underground hip-hop of MF Doom; experimental novels such as Eugene Lim's *Dear Cyborgs*; madly popular YA series like G. Willow Wilson's *Ms. Marvel*; and from Hollywood films (*Black Panther* et. al) to "Golden Age" television and streaming (FX's *Legion* and Netflix's *Jessica Jones*). Thus, it seems of the utmost importance to better understand the plurality of ways in which this genre is deployed, received, and adapted. Superheroes, we will see, are not just pulp; genres are more social than that. For example, contemporary conversations of diversity, inclusivity, and racial/gender/sexual parity often coalesce around superhero productions (e.g. *America*). The genre likewise morphs as new media technologies develop and is thus grounded in its transmissibility and, crucially, in its fan's collective lives. And as both artworks and commodities, superhero narratives necessarily foreground matters of creative and cultural labor, and of struggles over workers' rights and intellectual property.

This course's (image)texts include superhero narratives from what comic book historians call the Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Modern Ages; comics, films, and television from our own tentatively defined contemporary moment; and secondary selections from comics studies and writing. Students will learn not only what makes the comics medium unique, but also, by learning to read and write genre conventions, how to interpret narrative and to form and logically elaborate their own critical arguments and insights. We will also arrange visits the UF Suzy Covey Comic Book Collection, where students will encounter superhero narratives in their original print medium while learning archival research skills.

GENERAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).

Composition courses provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.

The University Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication, and critical thinking:

Content: Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.

Communication: Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.

Critical Thinking: Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND IMAGETEXTS

Keeping the cost of trades and hardcover comic books in mind, I encourage you to use an e-reader. I will only order hard copies through the UF bookstore when we will read a complete volume, “graphic novel,” etc. I recommend ComiXology or Kindle (though, as I only found out after buying some comics, the latter won’t zoom on my PC). Both are accessible via an already existing Amazon account. Other options are out there, and you may use whatever you prefer so long as you procure the correct issues on the reading list. If you are a completist who wants to read the full volumes or collected editions in which our readings appear, I recommend buying used hard copies. Whatever your choice, *it is your responsibility to order texts in time to read them for our class discussions and to procure the correct issues.*

Print/Electronic Image-texts

- *Action Comics* #1, #3, #8 (1938-2011), Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster
- *Amazing Spider-Man* #300, #316-317 (1963-98), David Michelinie, Todd McFarlane
- *America* (2017-18), Gabby Rivera and Joe Quinones
- *Captain America: Steve Rogers* (2016) Free Comic Book Day, #1, Nick Spencer and Jesus Naiz
- *Daredevil* #181 (1964-98), Frank Miller and Klaus Janson
- Eugene Lim, *Dear Cyborgs* (2017)
- *Fantastic Four* #52, #53 (1961-98), Stan Lee, Jack Kirby
- *Green Lantern* #76 (1960-86), Dennis O’Neill and Neal Adams
- *Ms. Marvel* #1, #2 (2015-), G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*
- *Sensation Comics* #1 (1942-52), Charles Moulton
- *Watchmen* (1986), Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
- *Wonder Woman* #178 (1942-86), Dennis O’Neill
- *Wonder Woman* #202, #203 (1942-86), Samuel R. Delany and Dick Giordano
- *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* (1982), Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson

Film, TV, Streaming

These will be provided and screened in our evening class meetings. A Netflix subscription is recommended, even if just the free trial for the duration of the course.

- *Black Panther*
Dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018
- *Jessica Jones* Season 1
Showrunner, Melissa Rosenberg, 2016
- *Legion* Season 1
Showrunner, Noah Hawley, 2017



ASSIGNMENTS

Below you will find a brief description of this course’s major assignments. I will provide you with detailed instructions via Canvas during the semester in advance of each assignment.

Comic Book Entries

As we think through multiple modes of literacy, I want at least two of your written assignments to take the form of a comic book. I will not grade you on your artwork, so just go with this. The point of these assignments is to not only think about, but to practice how comics writers and artists must collaborate through different mediums to produce narrative. Here is a link to a brief interview with Nick Sousanis—whose book, *Unflattening*, was adapted from the first comics doctoral dissertation—on why one should draw comics even if they “can’t draw.” <https://medium.com/the-queue/why-you-should-draw-comics-even-if-you-cant-draw-f835e57e909a>

Introduction: A simple introduction that acquaints me with your interests, goals for the class and broader college career, and so on.

250
words

Superhero Narrative: Using our discussions of medium, form, and technique (McCloud), and of genre, adapt something from current events and rewrite it as a superhero comic (genre loosely defined).

750
words

Archive Entry

UF’s Smathers Libraries are home to the Suzy Covey Comic Book Collection. Each of you will supplement our class readings by doing some independent archival work. Find one issue in the Collection that:

- speaks to the discussions we’ve been having in class
- elaborates further on a trend, theme, or problem raised by our readings
- broadens and enriches the scope of our class

We will assemble your entries into a collective annotated bibliography.

500
words

New Canon Entry

In your archival entry, you built an historical sense of the development of the superhero genre and comics medium. If we have canons comprised of Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Modern Age titles, what would a canon for our Contemporary Age look like? What texts do you think most speak to your present? What, in other words, does a reader need to know about superheroes *now* to better understand the cultural, social, and political present? Imagine a class like this 80 years in the future: what would they read to get a sense of our present’s culture, norms, politics, and so on? Find one image-text from your reading and make a case for its inclusion in a “new canon” of superhero narratives. We will assemble your entries into a collective bibliography.

500
words

Abstract

Whatever your final project, you are required to submit an abstract five weeks prior its completion. Usually, abstracts are found at the beginning of a published article (which means

500
words

they were written *after* the article). Here, your abstract acts as a proposal. Sketch out a research topic, expected primary and secondary texts, and venture an argument that you want to make. Explain, moreover, how you intend to do so: will you write a research paper, a comic book, assemble an edited collection, or something else? Going off your abstracts, I will sign off on, make suggestions for refinement, or reject your final project.

While writing, keep in mind: no good work comes to its author fully formed. You can change or significantly adapt your project later. The main idea right now is to begin thinking early about your final project.

Annotated Bibliography Entry

Bibliographies gather primary sources and reliable, peer-reviewed secondary sources. An annotated bibliography lists sources but provides, additionally, notes on the significance and logic of the source. Part summary, part interpretation, and part creative application, strong annotations will provide:

- A summary of the author's arguments, a sense of their interlocutors, and a gloss on the critical conversations in which they are participating
- Implications for our understanding of their topics
- Assessments of what their line of thinking now enables us to think in turn

As your final project of the semester will require research and citations, part of your work this semester will be to seek out sources to help you in your assignments (in addition to readings provided in class). Each of you will be responsible for finding, reading, and *annotating* one secondary source. We will use these annotations to build a collective class bibliography to help you all in your final research projects.

Final Project

One of the core arguments of this class is that literacy takes many forms and that critical thought can likewise be elaborated through varied styles, genres, mediums, and presentations. Thus, your final project may take one of many forms. (Whether you prefer a classic research essay or a comic book of your own, you will still have to develop and abstract and submit it for vetting.)

- Research paper
- Comic book
- Critical edited collection
- Pitch me something else

As part of this assignment, you will submit a draft introduction **five** weeks before the due date.

500
words

500
words
(intro)
+
2,500
words
(final)

6,000
words

POLICIES

Attendance

- Students who miss more than six (6) class meetings (including screenings) will not earn credit for the course. For more information on UF attendance policies, including exceptions to the attendance policy, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Comportment

- You are expected to understand and follow basic principles of classroom behavior. Unruly or disrespectful behavior in class will not be tolerated.
- This is a small class involving lots of discussion. Thus, slighter transgressions such as cell phone use, non-course-related web-browsing, sleeping, talking above others, etc. go a long way toward disrupting the class dialogue and will not be tolerated.
- Be considerate of diverse identities within and outside of the classroom and treat your peers with respect.

Office Hours and Communication

- Office hours are for consultation (elaborating on class conversations, planning assignments, pitching ideas, etc.). Email and Canvas are for quick, routine queries or emergency updates (e.g., informing me you're sick, making an office hours appt., and so on).

Assignments and Submission

- You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course.
- I will not accept late work. Exceptions may be made in exceptional circumstances, but you must first discuss the possibility of such accommodations with me.
- I require hard copies of your assignments. You must also submit electronic copies of all assignments via Canvas (it's good to have backups).
- Speaking of backups, keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over. (I won't require you to produce more than one copy of anything hand-drawn. Just scan and retain a digitized copy for yourself.)
- Assignments will be graded not only for their writing style and their deployments of genres, forms, and media, but also for complexity of thought and the quality of their arguments. Therefore, I will not grade any assignment that advocates sexist, misogynist, racist, homo-, trans-, or xenophobic stances since, strictly speaking, these are not arguments at all.
- In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

University Policies

- Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. Plagiarized work will not be graded.
- Students with disabilities who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide you appropriate documentation.
- For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
- *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
- *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE					
Readings are to be completed <i>before</i> the date on which they appear in the schedule.					
FALL 18	M	T	W	F	
AUG	1		22 Introduction	24 <i>Action Comics</i> #1, #3 (1938)	
	2	27 <i>Action Comics</i> #8 (1939)	28 Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> pp. 1-9, 48-57, 60-93	29 McCloud pp. 94-109 Comic Entry #1	
SEPT	3		4 Suzy Covey Collection	5 <i>Wonder Woman</i> #178 7 <i>Wonder Woman</i> #202, #203	
	4	10 Excerpts from Will Eisner, <i>Comics and Sequential Art</i>	11 Archive	12 <i>Green Lantern</i> #76 14 Excerpts from Alan Moore, <i>Writing for Comics</i> and McCloud, <i>Making Comics</i>	
	5	17 <i>Fantastic Four</i> #52-53	18 Archive	19 <i>Uncanny X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills</i> Archive Entry	
	6	24 <i>God Loves, Man Kills</i>	25 <i>Black Panther</i> screening	26 <i>Black Panther</i> 28 <i>Black Panther</i>	
OCT	7	1 <i>Amazing Spider-Man</i> #300	2 Archive	3 <i>Amazing Spider-Man</i> #315-317 5 <i>Daredevil</i> #181 Comic Entry #2	
	8	8 <i>Watchmen</i> 1-2	9 <i>Jessica Jones</i> S1, E 1-2 screening Homework: <i>JJ</i> 3-4	10 <i>Watchmen</i> 3-4 12 <i>Watchmen</i> 5-6	
	9	15 <i>Watchmen</i> 7-8	16 <i>Jessica Jones</i> 5-6 screening Homework: <i>JJ</i> 7-10	17 <i>Watchmen</i> 9-10 19 <i>Watchmen</i> 11-12 New Canon Entry	
	10	22 <i>Jessica Jones</i>	23 <i>Jessica Jones</i> 11-12 screening	24 <i>Jessica Jones</i> discussion 26 <i>Jessica Jones</i> Ep. 13 screening	
	11	29 <i>Jessica Jones</i>	30 <i>Legion</i> S1 E1-2	31 <i>Legion</i> Abstract	
NOV	12	HW: Read Lim's <i>Dear Cyborgs</i> for discussion beginning 11.9			9 Eugene Lim, <i>Dear Cyborgs</i>
	13	12 Lim	13 <i>Legion</i> E3-4	14 <i>Legion</i> 16 Lim Annotated Bibliography Entry	
	14	19 Lim	20 <i>Legion</i> E5-6	21 <i>Legion</i> Draft intro Peer Review	
	15	26 <i>Ms. Marvel</i> #1, #2	27 <i>Legion</i> E7-8	28 <i>Legion</i> 30 <i>Steve Rogers: Captain America</i> Free Comic Book Day, #1	
DEC	16	2 <i>America</i> #1	3 Excerpts from <i>All New Captain America</i> Peer Review	4 Final Assignment Course retrospective	