**ENGL 50973   
Visual Rhetoric, Graphic   
Novels and Comics**

Spring 2017

Friday 1:00-3:40 pm

Reed 125

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# Course Description

Visual rhetoric investigates the ways meaning making happens in cultural artifacts like film, literature, art, theater, and digital media. The medium of comics offers an avenue into the fundamental concepts of visual rhetoric along with the genres and conventions particular to the medium.

In this seminar we will be studying visual rhetoric through comics and graphic novels and their complex interplay of visual and verbal elements. The first weeks of the course will offer an introduction to the history and terminology of comics to put all of us on similar footing as we begin to dig deeper. Students will not need to have any prior experience with comics. After learning the fundamentals, we will study contemporary approaches to comics from literature, rhetoric, art history and philosophy—like visual studies, comics studies is an interdisciplinary field made up of scholars from a wide variety of departments.

Each week we will read academic work on comics along with an actual comic or graphic novel. As we study comics culture, we’ll visit a comic shop and perhaps a convention, if schedules permit. Students will write a variety of shorter essays in the class and create comics, culminating in a scholarly project aimed at publication. These projects will be in a format appropriate for their chosen journal; it’s possible to make a scholarly comic about comics. The course is designed to support work in both rhetoric and literature.

This class is organized around eleven questions (four main questions and seven related questions):

**What is visual rhetoric?**

**How do I read a comic?**

**What are comics?**

**What is the difference between image and text?**

**What are the possible relationships between image and text?**

**What practices shape perception?**

**What’s the difference between reading and seeing?**

**How do I see?**

**What are some current conversations in scholarship?**

**What practices shape scholarship?**

**What are the potentials for scholarship?**

## Required Texts

Bechdel. *Fun Home*: 978-0618871711 (on reserve)

Deconnick and De Landro, *Bitch Planet*: 978-1632153661

Groensteen. *System of Comics*: 978-1604732597

Herriman, George. *Krazy & Ignatz 1935-36*: 978-1560976905 (on reserve)

McCloud, *Understanding Comics*: 978-0060976255 (on reserve)

McGuire, *Here*: 978-0375406508

Sousanis, Nick. *Unflattening*: 978-0674744431

Ware, *Building Stories*: 978-0375424335

## Supplies

Spiral bound sketchbook – approximately 9”x12”

18" X 24" rough newsprint 100 sheet pad   
Pencils (non-mechanical)

Compressed charcoal

Point rolling ball black ink pen (or any pen you like that flows well)

Erasers - pink pearl block, large kneaded eraser.

# Assignments

## Discussion

Throughout the semester you will be expected to contribute to class discussion. During each class session I will keep a record of who talks. For each session you will receive a grade of 0 for an absence, 3 for no contribution, 4 for one contribution, or 5 for two contributions. Once you have talked twice, you have fulfilled the requirements for that session, but by all means, continue contributing!

## Minor assignments

Throughout the semester you’ll do a variety of responses to readings and other minor assignments. Most of these are mentioned in the schedule, but no doubt some will be created because of class discussions. They will all be graded at the same weight.

One assignment you will do is keep a sketchbook. Many weeks you will have a particular sketchbook assignment. When sketchbook assignments are due, they must be turned in by noon on Thursday so that I can return them in class. Sketchbooks can be turned in by placing them in the box outside my office, Reed 317c.

## Major assignments

### Minor Literature Presentation

Early on in the semester you will offer a 10-15 minute presentation covering a minor literature of comics. We will base our understanding of what a minor literature is on Deleuze and Guattari and our class discussion. You will select a comics tradition that is not part of the US Mainstream canon and present it to the class. The presentation should cover the basic history of the tradition as well as its current movements. The presentation should discuss the cross currents between it and more mainstream movements. At least five minutes should be a prepared presentation and at least five minutes should be left for a discussion that you lead, having prepared discussion questions beforehand. See grading rubric.

Some possible traditions: Feminist Comics, Manga, Franco-Belgian comics, Canadian Comics, Black Comics, Underground Comix, Queer Comics, Photo-Comics, and any other relevant tradition.

### Short analytical interpretive paper

For this assignment, you will select a comic that we did not read for class and make an interpretive argument about it based on a close analysis of its visual form. In other words, your argument cannot only describe the words that occupy the texts boxes and balloons. You will look closely at the visuals themselves and think carefully about why they look the way they do. What materials did the artist use? How do elements like page layout, panel size, line weight, color, etc. contribute to meaning? How are the visuals historically and culturally situated? The paper should be roughly 1000-1500 words and should include at least two images of the visual being critiqued (at minimum a large image and a detail from that image). In putting together your paper, you will also need to think carefully about your own layout choices. Ten percent of this paper’s grade will be based on its visual design (see online rubric for full grade detail on this assignment). This paper can be repurposed as a part of your seminar paper and conference presentation.

### Seminar Paper

This is the quintessential assignment of a graduate seminar. You will produce a seminar paper of publishable quality of roughly 7000-8000 words (the actual word count should be determined by the target journal). You are encouraged to consider creating a comic as your seminar paper and targeting a journal that would accept such a submission (*Kairos, Itineration, Encuturation, Digital Humanities Quarterly,* and many others would be appropriate for such submissions). Please list at the top of the paper the journal or journals (no more than three) at which you are aiming.

You will submit a 500-word proposal by March 24 and bring in an article from your target journal by Monday, March 27th. Two weeks before the seminar paper is due (April 7), you will send a draft of your paper to an assigned peer in the class. You are responsible to respond to your peer's essay with a 500-600 word commentary (constructive criticism, ideas, possible new avenues for exploration, etc.) before class on Friday, April 14). You will use these commentaries to improve your seminar paper. See grading rubric.

### Conference presentation (Final Exam Period, May 12 at 11:30-2:00)

You will give a 10-minute presentation of *some* of the material from your seminar paper. This will involve selecting a section, modifying it a bit, adding new material, etc. You will turn in a script on April 28. One page equals roughly two minutes of speaking time (depending on speaker), so keep this in mind. Scripts should be roughly three or four pages, double-spaced, but this is up to you. The key is that you can deliver it within the timeframe. After looking at the proposals, I will group you into panels by topic. Each panel will last about 45 minutes, including time for questions. You should use visuals to create a dynamic and engaging presentation. We will discuss conference presentation practices in class. See grading rubric.

## Grading Breakdown

Minor Assignments 20%

Discussion 10%

Minor Literature Presentation 10%

Short analytical interpretive paper 10%

Seminar Paper 30%

Conference presentation 20%

## Grades

Simply fulfilling the minimum requirements of the course warrants an average grade (i.e., C). Coming to class every day and doing assignments is not something that earns extra credit or an automatic A; it’s an expectation for being in the course. A grade of “C” on any assignment indicates that you have met the minimum requirements for that assignment adequately. A “B” indicates that you have exceeded expectations and produced a quality product, while an “A” indicates work that is exceptional. Grades of “D” and “F” are reserved for work that does not meet the requirements of an assignment.

### Final Numerical Grade Calculation (+/-):

| Grade | Score |
| --- | --- |
| A | 94-100 |
| A- | 90-93 |
| B+ | 87-89 |
| B | 84-86 |
| B- | 80-83 |
| C+ | 77-79 |
| C | 74-76 |
| C- | 70-73 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 64-66 |
| D- | 60-63 |
| F | 0-59 |

# Schedule

**What is visual rhetoric?**

**Jan 20** Introductions.   
Read history of comics articles: Ramsey ([link](http://the-artifice.com/history-of-comics/)) and Petty (pdf).  
Drawing exercises in class

**How do I read a comic?**

**Jan 27** Discuss comic reading strategies  
*Read* McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (on reserve); Deleuze and Guattari “What is a Minor Literature?”; Williams, “Joshua Tree”  
Due: Comic response to McCloud.   
Drawing exercises in class

**What are comics? (historical and formal normativities)**

**Feb 3** Discuss historical genres of comics both nationally and internationally  
Read Heer, “The Kolors of Krazy Kat”; and Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz 1935-36* (on reserve)Due: go to a comic shop and buy a comic (see assignment for Mar 10)  
Minor lit presentations in class

**Feb 10** Discuss definitional issues in comics  
*Read* Meskin “Defining Comics?” (pdf), Ware *Building Stories*  
Due: Comic response to Ware and Meskin (Is *Building Stories* a comic?)  
Minor lit presentations in class

**What is the difference between image and text?**

**Feb 17** Discuss modality  
*Read* Mitchell, “Beyond Comparison” (pdf), Bechdel *Fun Home*Drawing exercises in class

**Feb 24** Discuss limit cases  
Read Groensteen, *System of Comics*; Tran-Caffee, *Failing Sky* ([link](http://failingsky.com/))  
Drawing exercises in class

**What relationships are possible between image and text?**

**Mar 3** Read Lyotard, “It’s As If a Line . . .” (pdf); Adami (link); and Deconnick and De Landro, *Bitch Planet*Tran-Caffee Skype (tentative)  
Drawing exercises in class  
Due: Short analytical interpretive paper

**What practices shape perception?**

**Mar 10** Read Ulmer, “The Object of Post-Criticism” (pdf);   
Read from XKCD and Achewood   
Ulmer Skype  
Due: pick a comic that resists easy categorization or definition

**Mar 17** SPRING BREAK

**What’s the difference between reading and seeing?**

**Mar 24** *Read* Elkins, “Ten Ways to Make Visual Studies More Difficult”; and  
McGuire, *Here*  
Due: proposal for final paper (include info on target journal)

**What are some current conversations in scholarship?**

**Mar 31** Discusscurrent conversationsRead student assigned comics and discuss journal articlesDue: bring in one academic article on comics from the journal you are targeting (send the class the article by Monday the 27th)

**After class: Dallas Fan Expo, Mar 31, 4-9 PM. Tickets $25**

**What practices shape scholarship?**

**Apr 7** Discuss current conversations  
*Read* Critical Inquiry special issue ([online](http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/ci/2014/40/3) through library website)  
Due: Rough draft of seminar paper

**What are the potentials for scholarship?**

**Apr 14 NO CLASS**One on one conferences   
Read *DHQ* Special Issue on Comics as Scholarship ([online](http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/9/4/index.html))  
Due: meet with Dr. Helms and your peer review partner (separately)

**Apr 21** Discuss how to convert an article into a presentation  
Discuss scholarly practices  
Read Sousanis, *Unflattening*Due: Seminar paper

**Apr 28** Discuss how to present at a conference   
Read Helms, *Rhizcomics* ([link](http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/books/rhizcomics_drc/))Due: rough draft of conference paper and proposal

**May 5**

**Final: May 5 at 1 pm**

The final will be a mini-conference where you will present your conference presentation.

# Course Policies

#### New Media Writing Studio

The New Media Writing Studio (NMWS) is available to assist students with audio, video, multimedia, and web design projects. Located in Scharbauer 2003, the Studio serves as an open lab for use by students during posted hours. The Studio has both pc and Mac computers outfitted with Adobe CS3, which includes Adobe Acrobat, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, Flash, and InDesign. A variety of equipment is available for checkout to students whose teachers have contacted the Studio in advance. For more information and a schedule of open hours, see [www.newmedia.tcu.edu](https://mobile.tcu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=1221ef495cce4fcc9c874a9fdb17d47b&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.newmedia.tcu.edu%2f" \t "_blank)

#### The Writing Center

The Center for Writing offers assistance with writing projects and assignments to all TCU students. Staffed by professional writing instructors and peer consultants, the Center for Writing provides students with one-on-one tutorials free of charge. Conferences usually focus on a particular project or assignment, but may also include general writing instruction. The 10 PCs in the center's computer lab are available for use by any TCU student during normal office hours. Located in Reed Hall 419, the Center for Writing is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Students may make appointments by accessing an online scheduling service through the center's Web site ([www.wrt.tcu.edu](http://www.tcu.edu" \t "_self)) or by calling 817.257.6520.

#### Policies and Procedures for Students with Disabilities

Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 1010. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-6567.

Adequate time must be allowed to arrange accommodations and accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations. Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator. Guidelines for documentation may be found at [***http://www.acs.tcu.edu/disability\_documentation.asp***](http://www.acs.tcu.edu/disability_documentation.asp).

Students with emergency medical information or needing special arrangements in case a building must be evacuated should discuss this information with their instructor/professor as soon as possible.

#### Safe Zone

My goal is for each student to feel comfortable and able to connect with course content and classroom discussion. Please know that I welcome, affirm, and celebrate persons in the LGBTQIA communities of Texas Christian University. (LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Ally). I will not allow homophobic comments in class, and will strive to use inclusive language. For more information please consult: <http://www.allies.tcu.edu/training.asp>.

#### TCU Campus Resources for Students

Many resources exist on the TCU campus that may be helpful to students: Mary Couts Burnett Library (257-7117); Center for Academic Services (257-7486, Sadler Hall. 1022); the William L. Adams Writing Center (257-7221, Reed Hall 419); Student Development Services (257-7855, BLUU 2003); and Office of Religious & Spiritual Life (257-7830, Jarvis Hall), Campus Life (257-7926, Sadler Hall 2006),  and the Counseling, Testing, and Mental Health Center (257-7863, Brown Lupton Health Center).

#### Academic Conduct Policy

An academic community requires the highest standards of honor and integrity in all of its participants if it is to fulfill its missions. In such a community faculty, students, and staff are expected to maintain high standards of academic conduct. The purpose of this policy is to make all aware of these expectations. Additionally, the policy outlines some, but not all, of the situations which can arise that violate these standards. Further, the policy sets forth a set of procedures, characterized by a "sense of fair play," which will be used when these standards are violated. In this spirit, definitions of academic misconduct are listed below. These are not meant to be exhaustive.

#### Academic Misconduct

Academic Misconduct (Sec. 3.4 from the [Student Handbook](http://www.studenthandbook.tcu.edu/student_handbook.pdf)): Any act that violates the academic integrity of the institution is considered academic misconduct. The procedures used to resolve suspected acts of academic misconduct are available in the offices of Academic Deans and the Office of Campus Life and are listed in detail in the Undergraduate Catalog. Specific examples include, but are not limited to:

* **Cheating**: Copying from another student’s test paper, laboratory report, other report, or computer files and listings; using, during any academic exercise, material and/or devices not authorized by the person in charge of the test; collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or laboratory without permission; knowingly using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release; substituting for another student or permitting another student to substitute for oneself.
* **Plagiarism**: The appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another’s work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one’s own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another’s work without giving credit therefore. In this class I will sometimes use TurnItIn to detect plagiarism.
* **Multiple Submission**:The submission by the same individual of substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) for credit more than once in the same or another class without authorization.
* **Collusion**: The unauthorized collaboration with another in preparing work offered for credit.

#### Attendance and Participation

Attendance in this class is mandatory. A seminar-style class depends on class discussion. If you know you will be absent, please contact me beforehand. I will be reasonable and flexible in determining excused absences. You may be required to bring some kind of documentation of an excused absence.

I keep track of absences, but I do not deduct points from your final grade for them (though you will receive a zero for your discussion grade for that day). However, missing more than one class will likely impact your final grade indirectly. If you miss more than three classes, you are unlikely to pass the class.

#### Tardies

This class begins promptly at the scheduled time. You will be counted tardy for coming in late, and three tardies will result in an unexcused absence. The work you miss cannot be made up unless it is part of an official university absence.

#### Late Work

Work is due by class time on the date noted on the schedule (unless otherwise indicated) and will be considered late thereafter. Submitting assignments electronically during classtime is not acceptable. If there is ever a reason that you know you will not be able to turn an assignment in on time, you ***should always*** talk to me about it in advance.

#### Office Hours

During the office hours posted above, I will be in my office and available to talk with you about any questions, comments, or concerns you have about the course. Please stop by and see me during these hours—that time is yours. If the hours don’t work for you, come make an appointment.

#### D2L

We have a course website we’ll use for various activities throughout the course and it will be a ***major*** component of this class. You should spend some time during the first week getting comfortable with it. I am always available to answer whatever questions you have concerning the e-Learning course tools, but lack of proficiency with the site is never an excuse for not turning in an assignment. You can view your grades on D2L’s gradebook throughout the semester. Because D2L makes weighting a fairly cumbersome procedure, I can only guarantee that the weighting is done correctly at the end of the semester (though earlier weighted grades should be roughly accurate).

**Quick guide to D2L**

* Access via my.tcu.edu > Student Quick Links > TCU Online
* OR login at the following website: d2l.tcu.edu (your username and password will be your TCU network information - the same username and password that you use when you login into my.tcu.edu).
* For information about logging into TCU Online, view these instructions: [*http://tcuonline.tcu.edu/kb/how-do-i-log-in/*](http://tcuonline.tcu.edu/kb/how-do-i-log-in/)
* If you have not yet taken the TCU Online Student Tutorial, please do so immediately. To access it, click on the "TCU Online Student Tutorial" on your home page. Follow the instructions. Good luck!
* Technical requirements for using the system: [*http://tcuonline.tcu.edu/kb/platform-requirements/*](http://tcuonline.tcu.edu/kb/platform-requirements/)
* If you experience any technical problems while using TCU Online, please do not hesitate to contact the HELP DESK (at D2L). They can be reached by email, phone, or chat 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.