

## Harper College Graduate Equivalency Course (GEC) Syllabus

### Comic Books and Visual Literacy in the Community College Classroom

3 GECs  
Fall 2017

**Online Dates:** Oct 5, 2017 – November 30, 2017

**Face-to-Face Dates:** Thursdays, Oct. 5, Oct. 19, Nov. 2, Nov. 16, Nov. 30, 3 p.m. - 5 p.m., D269

#### Faculty Information

**Name:** Brian Cremins, Ph.D.

**Email:** [bcremins@harpercollege.edu](mailto:bcremins@harpercollege.edu)

**Office:** L235

**Fall 2017 Office Hours:**

Monday 7:00 am–9:00 am

Tuesday 7:00 am–9:00 am; 11:00–12:15

Wednesday 7:00 am–9:00 am

Thursday 7:00 am–9:00 am; 11:00–12:15

Or by appointment.

#### Course Information

##### Course Description

Have you ever found yourself trying to convey a complex, abstract idea to a classroom filled with students only to discover that words have failed you? We've all been there before, from English and math to history, nursing, physics, fire science, and every subject in between. In this course, we'll discuss various strategies to address these issues by introducing visual narratives to the classroom.

One way to assist and to encourage students who might be struggling with difficult concepts is to employ texts that combine verbal and visual elements. The medium of comics or graphic novels includes a number of texts—from the historical and literary to the scientific—that hold great promise for faculty and teachers of all disciplines. Comic books, of course, have a long and complex history in the United States and around the world. With origins in the newspaper comic strips of the nineteenth century, the modern graphic novel or graphic narrative has its starting point at Eastern Color Printing in Waterbury, Connecticut, which began printing collections of newspaper strips in the early 1930s. Eighty years later, comics can now be found on bestseller lists and as objects of study at colleges and universities across the country. How might you use comics in your classes to engage students and to enhance their learning experience?

We'll discuss how these narratives might be employed in a number of classes. Along the way, we'll read a lot of great comics, including a book about the life cycle of a honey bee written and drawn by a biologist; an autobiographical response to quantum physics; a story about the Holocaust told by the son of two survivors; and an account of OCD and depression that offers suggestions on how health

professionals might better serve their patients. We may even read a couple of superhero comics for fun as we consider how these visual narratives might refresh our teaching and engage our diverse body of students.

### **Course Goals**

In this course, faculty will:

1. Study the significant role that graphic narratives might play in a variety of classrooms. As high-impact, high-interest texts, comics have the potential to generate interest in a diverse body of students. The study of comics will also enable us to consider the role that visual literacy plays in the classroom, and how these forms of literacy might challenge us to rethink our teaching strategies.
2. Examine the large body of critical and pedagogical theory that has developed in the field of comics studies and visual literacy over the last two decades. These theories of how readers interpret mixed narratives that include words and pictures will be useful in classrooms filled with students who exist in a culture saturated with visual media of all forms. In addition to historical works on visual narratives and their development, we'll also take a look at some cutting edge ideas from cognitive science on how we read, interpret, and understand visual images.
3. Create lesson plans that reflect their interests and the needs of their students. Have you ever considered creating a visual narrative of your own, for example, that might inform a student of how to draw blood? How to write an effective paragraph? How to perform CPR? How to solve quadratic equations? While no drawing skills are necessary for this class, you will get the chance to create visual organizers that function more like stories and less like static images. In the process of creating these materials for students, you may also find yourself engaging in new, creative, and exciting ways with the material in your discipline.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Faculty in this class will:

1. Develop assignments for their classrooms based on the texts studied in class.
2. Utilize their critical writing and thinking skills by responding to a variety of texts, both primary sources as well as secondary critical studies.
3. Read and discuss several innovative and challenging texts that they might use in their own classrooms, especially in lesson plans and course units.

### **Required Texts**

Marnie Galloway, *Particle/Wave* (So What? Press)  
Jay Hosler, *Clan Apis* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing)  
John Porcellino, *The Hospital Suite* (Drawn & Quarterly)  
Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (Pantheon)

We will also be reading some online comics, including work by Keiler Roberts and Ben Passmore. I will post links to those readings on our Blackboard site over the course of the semester.

I will post selected readings from these **secondary, critical sources** on our Blackboard site:

W. G. Sebald, selections from *Austerlitz*

Hillary Chute, from *Disaster Drawn*

Ramzi Fawaz, selections from *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*

Dale Jacobs, from *Graphic Encounters: Comics and the Sponsorship of Multimodal Literacy*

Marianne Hirsch, from *The Generation of Postmemory*

Scott McCloud, from *Understanding Comics*

Richard and Patricia Lupoff, selections from *All in Color for a Dime*

Trina Robbins and cat yronwode, selections from *Women and the Comics*

Qiana Whitted, “‘And the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics’: Comics, Visual Metonymy, and the Spectacle of Blackness”

Joseph Witek, selections from *Comic Books as History*

### Student Expectations and Requirements

**All students in this class are expected to abide by the guidelines for student conduct and behavior outlined in the Harper College Student Handbook of Policies and Procedures. The Handbook also provides information on academic dispute resolution procedures. This handbook is available in electronic form on the Harper College website.**

- 1. Regular attendance is vital to your success in this class.** Please contact me immediately if you will be missing a class.
- 2. All papers and assignments must be turned in on time!** I do not accept late papers or offer extensions except in cases of family or medical emergencies. Please contact me as soon as possible if you are having any trouble keeping up with an assignment. I am always happy to offer suggestions and to read rough drafts!
- 3. Academic Integrity/Plagiarism:** Please review the Student Code of Conduct and Dispute Resolution Procedures in the Harper College Handbook of Policies and Procedures.

Section III of the Student Code provides information on issues of academic integrity: “Whenever a student commits or attempts to commit a violation of the Student Code of Conduct on the College campus, or at an activity, function or event sponsored or supervised by the College, discipline and sanctions may be imposed on the student.” Included in these violations are “academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarizing, or furnishing false information on such forms as transcripts or applications for admission.”

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, plagiarism is the act of “[using] or [passing] off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another.” This includes copying or cutting & pasting directly from any secondary sources including but not limited to books, encyclopedias, magazines, newspaper, and

websites. This also includes but is not limited to improperly citing primary and secondary texts and copying and/or purchasing essays from other sources such as term paper websites.

**4. Respect yourself and your fellow students.** Class disruptions such as excessive talking, texting, or cell phone use will not be tolerated. Also, the use of defamatory or threatening language especially involving race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation will not be tolerated.

### Course Requirements and Assignments

This course consists of weekly readings that are listed on the outline below. Please complete the readings by the day on which they are listed. We will discuss the readings in class or online.

In addition to the primary and secondary readings, students will also complete the following assignments:

1. **A weekly reading journal.** You will write nine short journal entries that respond to the readings for the class. I will collect these journals at the midpoint and at the end of the course.
2. **Two short papers of 3-4 pages each.** In these papers, you will have the opportunity to develop more formally ideas or arguments from your readings journals or from our class discussions. You will receive the prompts for these two papers in the second week of class. For the second of these short assignments, you will have the option of creating a minicomic of your own, one that will enable you to develop new, innovative strategies for presenting complex concepts to your students (trust me, is a really fun assignment. No drawing skills are necessary!).
3. **A final project and formal presentation.** You will complete a lesson of your own for the final project. In this assignment, you will draw on your critical and creative faculties to develop a course unit—including lessons plans and assignments—that you will be able to use in one of your classes. You will then present your work to the rest of the class as part of the final, which will mimic the format of an academic conference presentation.

### Methods of Evaluation

You will earn your final grade according to the following percentages:

Weekly Response Journal: 20%

Short Paper #1: 15%

Short Paper #2 (or minicomic): 15%

Final Project/Presentation: 50%

Grading Scale: On written assignments, you will receive a letter grade. For final grades, I convert these letter grades to numerical grades according to the following scale:

A	= 100	B	= 85	C	= 75	D	= 65
A-	= 92	B-	= 80	C-	= 70	D -	= 60

B+ = 89                      C+ = 79                      D+ = 69                      F = 0

An F or a 0 (no credit) on an assignment is issued when the assignment has not been completed, when directions have not been followed, or when the assignment has been plagiarized.

If you receive an “R” on an assignment, you must see me to discuss a revision. If an assignment receives an “R” but is not revised by the assigned revision due date, it will revert to an F, which is a 0.

## Policies

### Withdraw Policy

The last day to unenroll in this course is Thursday, October 12, 2017. You must notify both the instructor, Brian Cremins - [bcremins@harpercollege.edu](mailto:bcremins@harpercollege.edu) and Katie Michelau - [kmichela@harpercollege.edu](mailto:kmichela@harpercollege.edu) if you wish to unenroll. After October 12, any student who does not successfully complete the course will receive a “WV” (Withdrawal) on their transcript, and no credit will be awarded.

### Students with Disabilities and Academic Accommodations

Your success in this class is important to me. If you have a disability (learning, ADHD, physical, psychological or other) and may require any accommodation during this course, please connect with me as soon as possible to discuss. Students with disabilities must contact Access and Disability Services to discuss approval of reasonable accommodations. Any student already connected with ADS should provide me a copy of your approved Accommodation Plan if you would like to utilize any accommodations during the course. Access and Disability Services is located in Building D Room 119; 847.925.6266 (voice) or 224.836.5048 (videophone for deaf and hard of hearing callers only).

### Equal Opportunity Statement

Harper College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or unfavorable discharge from military service

## Course Calendar/Course Outline

**Please note:** In class I will announce any changes and additions to the syllabus. Revisions to this schedule will appear on Blackboard. Please contact me if you have any questions!

**Week 1: Thurs, October 5, 2017**

**3:00 – 5:00 pm**

**D269**

**Course Introduction and Overview/A Discussion of Comics and Visual Literacy in the Community College Classroom**

**Readings** (selections on Blackboard): Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the origin of Superman (1938); Bob Kane and Bill Finger, the origin of Batman (1939); William Moulton Marston and H. G. Peter, the origin of Wonder Woman; Bill Parker and C. C. Beck, the origin of Captain Marvel (1940); selections from Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

- Excerpts from the documentary *Comic Book Confidential*
- Introductory readings including samples from comic strips and comic book of the early twentieth century
- A brief introduction to comics history in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

**Week 2: Visual Narratives and the Art of Postmemory, History, and Nostalgia**  
**ONLINE SESSION**

**Readings:** Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*; W. G. Sebald, selections from *Austerlitz*; Joseph Witek, from *Comic Books as History*

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entry #1

**Week 3: Visual Narratives, Nostalgia, and Postmemory, Part 2**

**Thurs, October 19**

**3:00 – 5:00 pm**

**D269**

**Reading:** Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (continued); Marianne Hirsch, from *The Generation of Postmemory*; selections from W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entry #2

**Week 4: “With great power comes great responsibility”: How to Be a Superhero in the Classroom**  
**(Wed., Oct. 4):**

**ONLINE SESSION**

**Readings:** selections from Chris Claremont and John Byrne, *The Dark Phoenix Saga* (Blackboard); Ramzi Fawaz, selections from *The New Mutants*

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entry #3

**Week 5: The Sciences, Epic Narratives, and Comics Storytelling**

**Thurs, November 2**

**3:00 – 5:00 pm**

**D269**

**Readings:** Jay Hosler, *Clan Apis*; selections from Hillary Chute, *Disaster Drawn*

**Writing:** Short Paper #1 due

**Week 6: Autobiography in Words and Pictures: Stories of Illness and Recovery**

**ONLINE SESSION**

**Readings:** John Porcellino, *The Hospital Suite*; selections from Keiler Roberts (online); selections from Trina Robbins and cat yronwode, *Women and the Comics*; selections from Charles Hatfield, Michael Chaney, and Hillary Chute

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entry #4

**Week 7: The Social Sciences, Epic Narratives, and Comics Storytelling, Part 2**

**Thurs, November 16**

**3:00 – 5:00 pm**

**D269**

**Readings:** John Porcellino, *The Hospital Suite* (continued); Marnie Galloway, *Particle/Wave*; selections from Ben Passmore (online); readings from W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entry #5

**Week 8: Comics and Visual Literacy in the Classroom**

**ONLINE SESSION**

**Readings:** John Porcellino, *The Hospital Suite* (continued); Marnie Galloway, *Particle/Wave*; selections from Dale Jacobs and James Sturm

**Writing:** Reading Journal Entries #6 and #7

**Week 9: Student Presentations!**

**Thurs, November 30**

**3:00 – 5:00 pm**

**D269**