

FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
COURSE OUTLINE

ENGLISH 517.13-02 THEORETICAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES  
COMICS AS A WAY OF THINKING  
Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:15  
Classroom: SS1153

FALL 2015

Instructor: Nick (Walter) Sousanis  
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Office hours: Tuesday 9:30-10:30am or by appointment  
Website: <http://spinweaveandcut.com/comics-as-thinking-15/>

**Course description:** This course will explore comics as a unique and robust communication form, with an emphasis on understanding comics by making them. We will take a multifaceted approach to analyzing the medium, from uncovering comics' historical roots and examining the various genres developed in the West and across the globe, to delving into the theoretical and formal elements, as well as considerations of comics in relation to other media such as film, poetry, and even architecture. Beyond narratives, we will look at the growing role comics are playing in the fields of journalism, education, and health/medicine. While making comics will be a significant component of the course, *prior drawing experience is not required*. Rather, we will expand upon what drawing means by creating spaces for students to play and explore the multiplicity of possibilities that emerge when we work in the bilingual fashion that comics facilitate. The course will serve as a springboard for students to develop ways to incorporate visual practices gleaned from comics into their own creative and critical work. **PREREQUISITE:** One full-course equivalent in English at the 400 level or consent of the Department. (Please see Calendar Description for more information)

**Texts and readings:**

Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics* (Avon).  
Matt Madden. *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* (Chamberlain Bros.)  
Lynda Barry. *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* (Drawn & Quarterly)  
Peter Kuper. *The System* (PM Press)  
Marjane Satrapi *The Complete Persepolis* (Pantheon)  
Ellen Forney *Marbles* (Avery)  
Paul Karasik, David Mazzucchelli, Paul Auster. *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* (Picador)

All of the above are required for this course and are available in the bookstore. Additional shorter readings will be provided by the instructor or available online.

**Materials:** Since we will be drawing (!) – you will need to have a few simple and readily available materials on hand. You can of course get more than these if your interest allows, but here are some basics:

A notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort  
Drawing implements: pencil, blue line pencil, colored pen, pencils/markers, brush pen (optional)  
Construction paper, scissors, glue

## **Assignments and Evaluation:**

- Participation: 20%
- Ongoing Short Assignments: 25%
- Composition Journal/Notebook: 10%
- Visual Analysis mini-Midterm: 10%
- Final Project Proposal: 5%
- Final Project: 30%

**Participation:** This includes actively participating in discussion and engaging in the in-class comics/drawing exercises (15%), and your attendance (5%). Some thoughts and specifics:

We learn in community and gain from each other's perspective. Let's be here on time and respect one another's point of view and discover what we can learn together. We want this classroom to be a great learning environment for everyone, so we need to all take care of each other to make it so. Laptops and smart devices, if used well, can complement discussion and so are permitted. If they are being used in a way that detracts from the overall environment, the instructor will address that.

**Attendance:** Class functions best when we are all present to continue ongoing discussion. Of course, sometimes obligations, illness, or other unforeseen events make attendance impossible. To account for such events three absences after the add/drop date are allowed before your grade is affected – a third of a grade (an A to A-) per additional absence. If you know of an upcoming obligation or ongoing health/personal challenges that that will preclude your attendance, let me know in advance and we will make alternative arrangements.

**Ongoing Short Assignments:** a variety of activities that may include comics-making or other drawing exercises, visual analysis/annotations of comics, responses to readings in comics form, brief presentations – introducing the class to a particular work or way of working in comics and its significance, others to be dreamed up by participants and instructor as we go! Emphasis will be placed on inventiveness, curiosity, effort, and willingness to dive in and try with vigor something you haven't. Student evaluation will be based primarily on completion not skill – with the expectation that at least 80% of the assignments will be done with the qualities mentioned above to receive full credit – we want to build a portfolio of your explorations that should be rich in its depth.

**Composition Journal:** We will be keeping a notebook or journal for notes, exercises, and some specific visual journaling and notetaking explorations, drawing on the work of Lynda Barry, sketchnoting, and more. This is a chance to do your thinking through physical activity and visual representation. As with the description of Short Assignments above, attending to it with inventiveness is most valued.

**Midterm:** at home, in-depth visual analysis/annotation of a small number of comics pages.

**Final Project:** Conduct an extensive exploration in comics or a related image-text form that demonstrates the use of comics within a particular context. This will be something related to your own work or area of interest. Alternatively: write up in more traditional form, an analysis of the usage of comics within a particular context, addressing its effects and ways it can increase understanding. Topic and format will be discussed in class and approved in conversation with the instructor, and as part of your final, you will produce a short proposal statement laying out the goals of the project. Everyone will make brief project presentations in our final sessions – completed projects are due one week after last meeting (December 15).

There is no Registrar-scheduled exam for this course.

Additional projects may be proposed for extra-credit or as substitution for existing assignments by determination of the instructor.

We will be creating a digital portfolio of everything we create over the term. I will be responsible for compiling it – but *you* are responsible for documenting it and delivering it to me in timely fashion. Over the term, some assignments will be handed in both physically and digitally, others digitally only – often this can be as simple as scanning or taking a decent shot of a work with a camera phone and sending it to me.

Students are expected to complete all assignments. Failing to do so will result in a lowered mark for the course. Late assignments are discouraged as it makes parallel discussion around the contributions of each class member difficult. Thus, assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a third of a grade (an A- to B+) for each business day [not class] that the assignment is overdue. If something is hindering your ability to complete an assignment, please bring it to my attention in advance and together we will seek an acceptable solution.

Please make every effort to deliver assignments directly to the instructor or via email if so stated. If it is not possible to do so, take your assignment to SS 1152 and put it in the dropbox. Your assignment will be date-stamped and placed in the instructor's mailbox. It is your responsibility to keep a copy of all assignments in case of loss by any cause. Assignments cannot be returned by staff in the Department office.

**Grading system:** The following grading system is used in this course:

The University of Calgary's four-point Undergraduate Grading System, as described in the Calendar (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-2.html>), will be used in this course.

A+/A (4.0); A- (3.7); B+ (3.3); B (3.0); B- (2.7); C+ (2.3); C (2.0); C- (1.7); D+ (1.3); D (1.0); F (0)

Please note that, according to the University Calendar (F.1), instructors may use their discretion when rounding upwards or downwards when the average of term work and exams is between two letter grades.

Although the A+ is solely an honorific that entails no additional points in the four-point system, the course instructor will employ this mark to distinguish superlative work that exceeds expectations in style, correctness, intellectual depth and breadth, sophistication, and originality.

**Plagiarism:**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please refer to the following information and make sure you are familiar with the statement below on plagiarism.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>

**Scribe and Muse Club for English Students:**

The Scribe and Muse Reading and Writing Club (SMRWC) fosters and champions reading and writing through community service, leadership, and engagement. We strive to enhance the academic and social experience of undergraduate students by promoting academic excellence and interaction between students, faculty, and the community, through social, cultural, and academic events

<http://english.ucalgary.ca/scribe-and-muse-english-club>.

Our email address is [smecuofc@gmail.com](mailto:smecuofc@gmail.com).

**English Department Website:**

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please go to our website at <http://english.ucalgary.ca>. Please note that the course outlines posted on the English Department website constitute the official course outline for purposes of appeals. Students should verify any hard copies against this posted version. For courses which employ numerical grades, the official departmental percentage to letter grade conversion scale is also posted on the department website.

**Writing support:**

The Student Success Centre offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

**Guidelines on e-mail Etiquette:**

<http://www.enough.utoronto.ca/computeruse/eetiquette.htm>

**Library and Research Support:**

Melanie Boyd, Librarian for English, offers research support to students, including strategies for finding articles, books, and other library materials. Contact: [maboym@ucalgary.ca](mailto:maboym@ucalgary.ca)

Find The English Pages research guide here: <http://libguides.ucalgary.ca/english>

**Follow the Department of English on Facebook & Twitter:****Academic regulations and schedules:**

Consult the Calendar for course information, university and faculty regulations, dates, deadlines and schedules, student, faculty and university rights and responsibilities. The homepage for the University Calendar is

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/index.htm>

**Grade appeals:**

Consult the following University Calendar link and request advice from the English Department office, SS 1152. Please note that “mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision.”

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

**Deferral of term work and final examinations:**

Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an Application of Deferment of Term Work form must be completed. The University also has regulations governing the deferral of final examinations. See Calendar:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>,

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>.

**Student Accommodations:**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For

additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf).

**Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points:**  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>;

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act:**  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip/>

**“Safewalk” Program:**  
Campus Security will escort individuals day or night: call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths.  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk/>

**Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources:**  
Have a question, but not sure where to start? The new Arts Students’ Centre (ASC) is your information resource for everything in Arts! Drop in at SS102, call us at 403-220-3580 or email us at [ascarts@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ascarts@ucalgary.ca). You can also visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> which has detailed information on common academic concerns.

For program planning and advice, contact the Student Success Centre (formerly the Undergraduate programs Office) at (403) 220-5881 or visit them in their new space on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at (403) 210-ROCK [7625] or visit them at the MacKimmie Library Block.

**Contact for Students Union Representatives for the Faculty of Arts:**  
[arts1@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts1@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts2@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts2@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts3@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts3@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts4@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts4@su.ucalgary.ca)

**Contact for Students Ombudsman’s Office:** <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

**Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI):**  
"At the University of Calgary, feedback provided by students through the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) survey provides valuable information to help with evaluating instruction, enhancing learning and teaching, and selecting courses ([www.ucalgary.ca/usri](http://www.ucalgary.ca/usri)). Your responses make a difference - please participate in USRI Surveys."

## **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence. Please read the following information carefully. The penalty routinely recommended by the English Department for documented plagiarism is failure of the course in which the offence occurred; academic probation is also routinely applied at the Faculty level. Suspension or expulsion can result from severe or repeated plagiarism.

The University Calendar states:

1. Plagiarism - Essentially plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when:

- (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test),
- (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author,
- (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or,
- (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted.

Plagiarism occurs when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, or when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. Citing your sources in a bibliography is not enough, because a bibliography does not establish which parts of a student's work are taken from other sources. MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose. Advice on adequate documentation can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

## **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STATEMENT ON PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT**

According to the University Calendar, (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/j.html>) "The University of Calgary community has undertaken to be guided by the following statements of purpose and values: to promote free inquiry and debate, to act as a community of scholars, ..., to respect, appreciate, and encourage diversity, [and] to display care and concern for community". The Department of English, like the university as a whole, is committed to a "positive and productive learning and working environment." This environment is characterized by appreciation and encouragement of diversity and respect for the dignity of all persons: students, support staff, and faculty. The department will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour, such as threatening gestures, threatening or abusive verbal or written communication (including e-mails), or any conduct that "seriously disrupts the lawful education and related activities of students and/or university staff". Any cases of such misconduct should be reported immediately to the department Head, who, depending on the nature and severity of the incident, may then take further appropriate action.