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## **JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY**

**COURSE CODE: "CMS 318"**

**COURSE NAME: "Comic Books, Graphic Novels, and Visual Storytelling"**

**SEMESTER & YEAR: Fall 2015**

### **SYLLABUS**

**INSTRUCTOR:**Peter Sarram

**EMAIL:** psarram@johncabot.edu

**HOURS:**MW 11:30 AM 12:45 PM

**TOTAL NO. OF CONTACT HOURS:**45

**CREDITS:**3

**PREREQUISITES:**

**OFFICE HOURS:**M&W 11-12

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### **COURSE AIMS:**

The course will be devoted to 'comics' (understood as both serialized comic strips and comic-books) and the more contemporary format of the 'graphic novel'. Other forms of graphic storytelling, ranging from tapestries to children's book illustrations to the underground graphic productions of the counterculture, will also be investigated, including traditions of sequential art in a global context. An initial historical contextualization will be followed by analyses of the form's specificity through a number of theoretical perspectives (including visual culture studies, critical theory, narrative and narration, authorship, ideology, postmodernism, fan cultures, and reception), allowing students to critically engage the works as 'texts'. The relation of the specific visual culture of comics with other mediums -particularly the cinema and gaming- as well as its influence in other realms of popular culture will also be explored.

### **SUMMARY OF COURSE CONTENT:**

In addition to this historical perspective the course will investigate the nature of the medium, the specificity of comics as a form of expression and the theoretical perspectives (including visual culture studies, narrative and narration, myth and genre, authorship, ideology, postmodernism, fan cultures and audience/reception studies) that have been brought to bear on the form and that will allow us to critically engage these works as 'texts'.

Finally we will consider the contradictory ways in which difference, power and knowledge are articulated in cultural production and the ways in which they circulate within the social field as meaning and ideology, linking the methodological framework of the course with those encountered in other realms of 'media studies'. The comic-book medium, at the intersection of image and text, is particularly suited for the development of specific and theoretically informed analytical skills while the growing importance of

graphic novels within the contemporary cultural sphere attests to the need for a critically informed engagement with this medium as it comes into its own after years of marginalization.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

The course will articulate itself through a series of readings, lectures, class discussion and screenings. Students will be encouraged to read at least 3 additional comic-books or graphic novels in addition to those assigned and be ready to discuss these in class.

By the end of the course students will be able to demonstrate an informed appreciation of comics as an artistic and cultural practice and conceptualize graphic storytelling as a cultural and artistic process that is productive of complex meanings within the circuit of culture. Students will also be able to articulate their knowledge of a history of the medium and of its intersection with wider social, cultural and historical processes. More generally the course will constitute an important element in strengthening students' core analytical, rhetorical and theoretical skills.

**TEXTBOOK:**

Book Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN number	Library Call Number	Comments
The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture	Randy Duncan & Matthew Smith	Continuum	978-0826429360		

**REQUIRED RESERVED READING:**

NONE

**RECOMMENDED RESERVED READING:**

NONE

**GRADING POLICY**

**-ASSESSMENT METHODS:**

Assignment	Guidelines	Weight
Course Assessments:	Course grade will be determined by two short written assignments (15% each), a midterm (20%), a presentation (15%) and a final analytical paper (25%). Attendance and participation are also key factors in the course (10%).	

**-ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:**

A Work of this quality directly addresses the question or problem raised and provides a coherent

argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information or content. This type of work demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate concepts and theory and has an element of novelty and originality. There is clear evidence of a significant amount of reading beyond that required for the course.

**B** This is highly competent level of performance and directly addresses the question or problem raised.

There is a demonstration of some ability to critically evaluate theory and concepts and relate them to practice. Discussions reflect the student's own arguments and are not simply a repetition of standard lecture and reference material. The work does not suffer from any major errors or omissions and provides evidence of reading beyond the required assignments.

**C** This is an acceptable level of performance and provides answers that are clear but limited, reflecting the information offered in the lectures and reference readings.

**D** This level of performances demonstrates that the student lacks a coherent grasp of the material. Important information is omitted and irrelevant points included. In effect, the student has barely done enough to persuade the instructor that s/he should not fail.

**F** This work fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question. Most of the material in the answer is irrelevant.

#### **-ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Please note that frequent absences automatically lower your participation grade.**

**Also consider that three unexcused absences** (those not justified by a medical certificate or a note from the administration) will result in your final grade for the course to be dropped by one letter grade. Anything above five unexcused absences will result in failure.

**Lateness:** Students more than 10 minutes late are marked as absent. Late arrival (less than 10 minutes) is marked as such, and 3 late arrivals are counted as one absence.

**Class procedure:** Students are requested to make sure their cell phones are turned off (and not just muted) at the start of class.

#### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

As stated in the university catalog, any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs. A student who is reported twice for academic dishonesty is subject to summary dismissal from the University. In such a case, the Academic Council will then make a recommendation to the President, who will make the final decision.

#### **STUDENTS WITH LEARNING OR OTHER DISABILITIES**

John Cabot University does not discriminate on the basis of disability or handicap. Students with approved accommodations must inform their professors at the beginning of the term. Please see the website for the complete policy.

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## SCHEDULE

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Topics and Course Schedule:

### **Part 1:**

The Aesthetics of Graphic Storytelling

The Image & The Frame

Words and Images: The Interstitial

Film Animation: Cross&Transmedia Experiences

### **Part 2:**

The Historic Evolution of the Comic Strip

Early Masters

The Aesthetics of Early Comics

Seduction of the Innocent: Culture Wars, Youth Culture and Moral Panics

Superheroes: The Classic DC Superhero

Superheroes: The Marvel Way: Genre and Authorship

Revising The Superhero: Watchmen & The Postmodern

### **Part 3:**

Alternative Traditions

Underground Comics

The Autobiographical School

Documentary Comics

Experiments in Narrative and Narration

The Graphic Novel as Literary Discourse

### **Part 4:**

Comic-Books in Global Popular Culture

Japanese Manga

Underground Political Cartoons in Italy

Punk U.S.A., DIY Comics and 'Zines

**Part 5:**

Audiences, Fans and Reception

Comics and Gender

Comics, Race and Ethnic Identity

Fan Cultures

**Part 6:**

Digital Culture

Reinventing the Comic Book Online

Final Presentations