

San Francisco State University: Liberal Studies
LS/HUM 604.1 Making Comics
Spring 2018

Class Meetings: M 4:10-6:55

Classroom: HUM 581* (*appears elsewhere in course listing)

Instructor: Nick Sousanis sousanis@sfsu.edu

Office: HUM 581 Phone: 415-338-3166

Office Hours: Monday 2-3, Wednesday 11-12, or by appointment

Prerequisites: Must have taken LS304: Making Comics or consent of instructor.

Overview: Advanced comics-making. Students will engage in numerous in-class exercises and small projects in making comics alongside analysis of comics, in order to grow their understanding of how to communicate in comics and discover working methods that best work for them. All in-class exercises, activities, assignments, will work towards producing a significant work ready for publication. It is intended that the class produce an anthology of student comics.

Course Outline: While comics certainly draw on both drawing and writing, they are a form all their own that embrace diverse drawing styles and skills and boundless approaches to storytelling.

In this class, students will grow in their ability of *how to say things in comics that can't be done in other forms* and *gain command of approaches to communicate their own narratives*. This will entail exploring every aspect of comics-making, with a strong emphasis on grasping all that goes into the construction of a comic. This will include layouts, thumbnails, drawing, inking, lettering, color (if applicable), pacing, page turns, as well as professional aspects, like production and “breaking in”.

In-class individual and collaborative exercise prompts will entail explicit experiments with form, as a way of pushing students out of their comfort zone to expand their boundaries. Longer assignments will increase students’ understanding of storytelling and conception of subject matter, and serve to refine their working process. It is expected that over the term, students will come to develop their working approach and style, and document their workflow as part of the course.

Students will conduct thorough investigations into how established authors create their works – looking at their habits, working process, and techniques. This will also involve analyzing and reverse-engineering page layouts and design choices as a means of informing students’ own creative approaches.

Critique will be an essential component of the course. We will work to hone our eyes and responses in order to offer constructive feedback to peers, and create a community of shared practice – supportive and able to help everyone improve.

Even as we investigate comics texts to highlight formal qualities, we will continue to read theoretical and practical treatises articulating working methods, including such authors as Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, Matt Madden & Jessica Abel, Lynda Barry, Ivan Brunetti, Will Eisner, Kevin Huizenga, and others.

Over the term, we will be building in each student *a self-sustaining comics-making practice* and *cultivating the confidence to tackle a project from start to finish* and have a solid understanding and expectation of what that means and what it takes. This will prepare students to know how to pitch a project to an editor, publisher, or a client – and be able to clearly define deliverables and timetable. Students will keep and maintain two sketchbooks (or one split sketchbook) – one for ideas and layouts and the other for drawing practice, and compile a thorough portfolio – to showcase their process and development over the term.

The class will culminate with each student producing a significant, self-directed project (specifics of which will be agreed upon between student and instructor), ready for publication. Students will begin developing the concept for this early on in the term, and more time will be allotted in class as the term progresses for consultation and critique around these projects. It is intended that the class produce a physical and/or virtual anthology of student comics that showcases their collective work, with perhaps a public reading and launch event.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. identify significant formal features in the creation of comics and speak to their purpose and contribution to the storytelling
2. create comics utilizing a variety of different approaches, i.e. understanding of pacing, page turns, how to integrate lettering, etc.
3. able to effectively communicate a significant and compelling narrative or idea through the comics form
4. have a command of a variety of techniques and steps that go into making a comic – from conception, to layouts, to producing a finished work
5. understand which ways of working best suit the student as author and how to use them most effectively to convey the sorts of narratives they want to tell
6. recognize the ways that they can employ the comics form to speak to real world situations – and have an awareness and sensitivity of the way in which working with visuals can provoke different effects than working solely in text
7. be confident in their ability to produce publishable work

Readings: We will be selecting one long form comic as a shared reading among the class, and there will be readings (comics or theory) provided by the instructor throughout the term. Comix Experience and Comix Experience Outpost (near campus) will offer discounts on comics for class members who present a printout of their syllabus – check out these and other SF comics shops!

Recommended Texts: As with *Making Comics 1*, given the highly individual and idiosyncratic nature of comics making, there is no “how to” text for the course. However, I recommend acquiring some texts around the elements of craft and theory that you might find insightful to begin to build your own library. Some recommendations: Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics & Making Comics*; Matt Madden & Jessica Abel *Writing Words & Drawing Pictures* and *Mastering Comics*; Lynda Barry *Syllabus*, Ivan Brunetti *Cartooning*; Will Eisner *Comics & Sequential Art*; Nick Sousanis *Unflattering*; Stan Lee & John Buscema *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*; Walt Stanchfield *Drawn to Life*, books on perspective, anatomy, as suit your needs...

Required Materials: You will be responsible to build up your own tool as you develop your particular approach to comics making, but I’ve listed the bare essentials here.

- Sketchbooks: Must have two separate sketchbooks (or a dual one that is split distinctly between sections). In the first you will keep ideas, compositions, comics in progress, and exercises. The other, “What I don’t like drawing (and what I do)” – will contain your daily drawing practice. This might include copying other artists, drawing from life, lettering, working on things like hands, trees, cars, facial expressions, etc. Frequently we will tie the week’s focus into a mini-assignment.
- Drawing tools of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.), color options if you are so inclined...
- Paper – this is highly individual too and something we can discuss together – find something that works for the way you want to work.

Assignments and Evaluation:

- 35% Ongoing mini-assignments (in-class and take home), attendance, participation
- 30% Small Finished Projects
- 35% Final project

(Evaluation criteria for final project: 1) Does the work demonstrate the student's ability to employ the different features of comics creation to convey their meaning with clarity on the page? 2) Does the work demonstrate an ability to understand the variety of approaches that can be brought to bear to make meaning in comics?)

Ongoing Min-Assignments/Attendance/Participation (35%): This includes actively participating in discussion and engaging in the in-class and take home ongoing mini-assignments which will consist of a variety of comics-making activities or other drawing exercises, done independently and collaboratively.

Portfolio: compile a thorough professional portfolio – to showcase process and development over the term, additionally, you will be encouraged to develop an online presence as an important aspect of understanding how to grow an audience.

3 Muses: At the beginning of the term, you will identify three authors you feel a strong connection to and want to study more deeply. To do so, you will analyze their use of the form, identify key elements that make their work stand out, copy them, and draw on them as a source of inspiration for how you compose pages, how you handle shading, whatever the case may be in order to help you find your own way. In addition to your self-study that will be undertaken in your sketchbook, we will also develop a few quick exercises around your muses to put them into action...

Three Small Finished Projects (30%): As the heading suggests, these three projects will not be large in length or scope – but will require you to work them to a publishable state of completion.

- 1) **Observational Comic** – this can be slice of life, diaristic, something you observed and want to share (an interaction on the street, watching a bird, whatever). It need not be about you in a memoir sort of way, only about what you observed.
- 2) **Mini-Comic** – straightforward or experimental. Any subject, format you wish – but something you can make in multiples and distribute. We'll workshop formats, designs, and look at a range of examples leading up to it.
- 3) **Non-fiction Comic** – this can be as short as one page, something taking up a topic from another class or field you're interested in, a team up with another department, graphic medicine, informational, consider the office of engagement, or other.
- +1) **Why Comics** – This is a class collaboration exploring why we make, study, and think about comics. A piece created together that could serve as an argument for the comics studies program here at SFSU. Format to be determined! May also become part of the anthology...

Final Project (35%): Anthology Contribution. Finished short comic (4-6 pages, to be agreed upon as we develop the project). Produce concept sketches, layouts, a mockup of your piece, and final piece with time for revisions. You must also provide an artist statement, bio, and process sketches to accompany your comic. Plan to include all of these elements in an anthology that we will publish. Consider holding it together with a theme – either something that runs loosely through all of the works or thematic break down – i.e.: fantastical, memoir, non-fiction, comics poetry, etc. We will work together on publication design later part of term.

Course Outline In addition to some of the key dates below, I will keep you all apprised in class, via email, and iLearn of what's coming up so that we all remain on the same page, and you are expected to regularly check iLearn and your **sfsu.edu email account** to ensure you are on top of things.

Class 1 1/22: Intro

Class 2 1/29:

Class 3 2/5:

Class 4 2/12: Observational Comic DUE

Class 5 2/19:

Class 6 2/26:
Class 7 3/5:
Class 8 3/12: Mini-Comic DUE
Spring Break NO Class 3/19
Class 9 3/26:
Class 10 4/2:
Class 11 4/9:
Class 12 4/16: Non-Fiction Comic DUE
Class 13 4/23:
Class 14 4/30:
Class 15 5/7:
Class 16 5/14:
Final Exam Period Monday, 5/21 4:10-6:50

Guests: Cartoonist Brian Fies, cartoonist Justin Hall will be coming Tuesday 2/14 12:35-1:50 as part of a joint class between women/gender studies and LS426 – you are all invited. Comic shop owner Brian Hibbs may come for a visit as well, and perhaps others TBA.

iLearn: We will be using the iLearn website for this class. Those unfamiliar with iLearn can find resources and assistance online as well as with the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in iLearn for all of your courses registered at SFSU.

Academic Technology website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>
iLearn log-in page: <https://ilearn.sfsu.edu/login/index.php>

Course Policies

Classroom approach: I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one's own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together. As a class, we all come from different backgrounds and offer distinct vantage points – we want to draw on all of them – to expand the possibilities for what we can all learn as we each find our own way.

To that end...

Class participation is essential! We learn in community, 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: This class will be conducted seminar-style. This means that everyone is expected to participate in ongoing discussions on the readings and topics, and that you come to class well-prepared to do so. Attendance and participation are critical components of this class and will be taken very seriously. In addition, repeatedly coming late to class is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Of course, sometimes obligations, illness, or other unforeseen events make attendance impossible. 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.

Late Papers and Homework Assignments: An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of class on the day it is due. Assignments that are turned in ontime will be graded and returned in a timely fashion. Assignments that are turned in up to a week late will be marked accordingly, receive a full-

grade deduction, and will not be reviewed by the instructor until the end of the semester. Medical or family emergencies are valid excuses and will be accepted with written documentation. However, in all circumstances assignments will not be accepted after a week from the due date. Also, assignments will not be accepted over email unless special arrangements are made with me

Contact and Feedback: You are encouraged to visit office hours or make an appointment to discuss the topics covered in class, and to clarify any questions you may have about assignments and requirements. When sending emails to me, please use your “sfsu.edu” account when possible, and put “LS/HUM 604” followed by your subject in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Disability access: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

Student disclosures of sexual violence: SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpsaem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/

Counseling & Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>

For more information on your rights and available resources: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

SFSU

LS/HUM 604 SPRING 2018

ADVANCED MAKING COMICS

★ DEETS ★

M 4:10-6:50; HUM 581

Nick SOUSANIS

Office HUM 581 → Comics LAB

Office hours: M 2-3; W 11-12 OR BY APPT.

SOUSANIS@SFSU.EDU

DATES

- 1 1/22
- 2 1/29
- 3 2/5
- 4 2/12 Observational DUE
- 5 2/19
- 6 2/26
- 7 3/5
- 8 3/12 MINI-COMIC DUE
- 9 3/26
- 10 4/2
- 11 4/9
- 12 4/16 NON-FICTION DUE
- 13 4/23
- 14 4/30
- 15 5/7
- 16 5/12

FINAL EXAM Period
M 5/19 4:10-6:50

GRADES

- 35% Ongoing Activities/ Participation
- 30% Small Projects
- 35% Final Project

3 SMALL FINISHED PROJECTS

Short but Resolved to Publishable State

① OBSERVATIONAL COMIC:

Slice of life, diaristic - Say-
Interaction on street, watching a
bird, whatever... **DUE 2/12**

② MINICOMIC: Straight forward or Experimental - ANY subject format - KEY → Made in multiples **DUE 3/12**

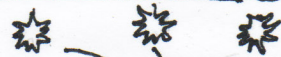
③ NON-FICTION COMIC: Explore/ Explain Informational topic - Short but Deep **DUE 4/16**

#1 WHY COMICS

= CLASS COLLABORATION =
WHY we Make, Study,
Think about Comics.
A statement about
COMICS STUDIES AT SFSU.
FORMAT TBD...

CHOOSE

3 MUSES



Authors You
Will Copy,
Analyze, DRAW Inspiration
from to help you find
YOUR OWN WAY.

2 SKETCHBOOKS

① Ideas, Exercises,
compositions, &
comics-in-progress

② "Things I don't
like Drawing (or
things I do)."

- for Drawing Practice,
copying, hands, trees,
Lettering, Expressions,...

- 1 SHARED COMICS

READING TBD-----

+ Regularly distributed
COMICS + Theory Reads

Portfolio - physical (+ VIRTUAL
if possible)

- Statement/Bio, Process
- Key Works
- Connect to Anthology

FINAL ANTHOLOGY

Either - connecting Theme for all,
OR THEMATICALLY ORGANIZED,
i.e. fantastical/memoir, Non-fiction,
comics Poetry, ... YOU

WILL Produce Concept
Sketches, Layouts,
a tight mockup
for critique and
Revisions. Will be
accompanied by
artist's statement/bio
+ process Notes.
PUBLISHED END OF
TERM!

GRIDS
9-panel
VARIATIONS
NO BORDERS

DISCUSSION TOPICS

LAYOUT PAGE TURNS

LETTERING

CONSTRAINTS

GRIDS
PICTURE-LESS
COMIC
COLLABORATIVE

HOW TO
READ NANCY

GUESTS

- BRIAN FIES
- Justin HALL*
- TBA

Tues 2/14
12:35-1:50