

The Superhero in Film, Television, and Popular Culture: HONS 1304
Spring 2016

Time: 6-9 p.m. Mondays

Instructor: Professor Rob Weiner
rob.weiner@ttu.edu

Location: Education 303
Office hours: By appointment or before or after class
(806) 834-5126

Please note that scheduled lectures/discussions may change if need be.

HONS 1304 course satisfies three hours of the Creative Arts requirement in the Core Curriculum. It is a seminar style course.

Creative Arts: *Students graduating from Texas Tech University should be able to construct, present, and defend critical and aesthetic judgments of works in the creative arts. This is a seminar style course*

THECB CORE FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENT AREA CRITERIA DESCRIPTION:

Courses in this category focus on the appreciation and analysis of creative artifacts and works of the human imagination. Courses involve the synthesis and interpretation of artistic expression and enable critical, creative, and innovative communication about works of art.

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4.

THECB CORE CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES DESCRIPTION:

Critical Thinking Skills (CT): to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis evaluation, and synthesis of information;

Assessments used: 1, 2, 4

Communication Skills (CS): to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication;

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4

Teamwork (T): to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal;

Assessments used: 3

Social Responsibility (SR): to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.3, 4

TTU COLLEGE-LEVEL CORE COMPETENCY STATEMENT:

Students graduating from Texas Tech University should be able to construct, present, and defend critical and aesthetic judgments of works in the creative arts.

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4

TTU CORE CURRICULUM STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify and describe a body of works (individually and collectively) in the creative arts.

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4

2. Explain and differentiate creative works as expressions of values within cultural and historical contexts.

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4

3. Analyze and summarize aesthetic principles that structure creative works.

Assessments used: 1, 2, 3, 4

Course Description:

With the release of the X-Men movie in 2000, superhero films have become the model for what a “summer blockbuster” should be, especially in the last decade. In 2012, *The Avengers* broke records and became one of the most popular films of the year. Worldwide, three superhero films *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Iron Man 3* (2013) and *The Avengers* (2012) are in the top ten highest grossing films. Domestically, *The Avengers* (2012), *The Dark Knight* (2008), *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) are numbers five, six, nine, and ten, respectively, in the list of all-time top-grossing films. Hollywood producers now comb Comic-Con International searching for properties to film.

However, the superhero feature film as a distinct genre didn’t exist as we know it 30 years ago. This course will look at the history of the superhero in film, comics, and popular culture. Topics include early superhero films and serials, gender and superheroes, franchise reboots, sequel exhaustion, the rise of the superhero film as a distinct genre, and issues of adaptation. We will also look at the history of superheroes in television, including live action and animation, as well as popular culture in general. Through reading, discussion, lecture, and viewing of selected film clips, students should gain a perspective on how the superhero is different from other heroes in literature and film. We will also analyze the role of the super-villain. Students will be required to study some of the artists and writers who drew and created some of the superheroes over the past 70+ years. In addition, this course will look at some theories related to reading sequential art. Both the Marvel Cinematic and DC Cinema Universes are integral topics in the course.

Learning Outcomes & Assessments

- A) Students will use critical thinking skills to effectively evaluate a particular film and television series. In addition students are asked to assess how a particular character is adapted to film, television, video games, from sequential art source material.
Assessments: Class Discussion, 2 written papers, Final Paper and Presentation (CT, CS)
- B) Students will appraise the aesthetic and visual qualities of the superhero film/sequential art book-strip/graphic novel as a unique object. Students will also assess whether a particular superhero text is a commentary on social issues of the time of its creation. Is the text just a “popcorn” story or film, or are there deeper meanings to be found?
Assessments: Class Discussion, 2 written papers, Final Paper and Presentation (CT, CS, SR)
- C) Students will apply the general concepts of genre analysis. They should be able to go out into the real world and critically think about the concept of genre after finishing this course. In addition, students should be able to discuss critically issues of gender, multiculturalism, and the concept of the superhero on the world landscape.
Assessments: Class Discussion, 2 written papers, Final Paper and Presentation, Team Project. (CT, CS, T, SR)
- D) Students will cite information sources properly and effectively use both print and online resources to find appropriate materials for their assignments. Students will learn the basics of doing a literature review/annotated bibliography and how to use different types of sources from peer-reviewed, magazine, and newspaper articles to Internet blogs, books, and book chapters. NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT CITE WIKIPEDIA; however, you may use it to find other sources. Students will practice the ethics of information use, including copyright and intellectual property rights, and the need for proper citation of sources to avoid plagiarism.
Assessments: First paper, Final Paper and Annotated Bibliography. (CT, CS, SR).

- E) Students will seriously analyze and discuss the work of a particular artist applying principles of critical thinking and aesthetic judgment. Students should be able to understand and express why particular artists are important and learn how to work together as a team. Students will gain experience speaking and presenting in front of their colleagues both individually and within a group framework

Assessments: Team Project, Final Presentation (CT, CS, T)

- F) Students finishing this course should be able to critically think about the concept of the hero and villain and what distinguishes them in our society. Students will analyze the ethical implications of living with superheroes and supervillains as though they existed in our world. What do stories about comic book heroes tell us about social responsibility? Students are expected to verbalize and converse about this in their writings for the class and class discussion.

Assessments: Class Discussion, Papers 1&2, Final Paper and Presentation (CT, CS, SR)

Textbooks:

What is a Superhero? edited by Robin Rosenberg and Peter Coogan ISBN 9780199795277

Martians by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross ISBN: 078514286X

Squadron Supreme by Mark Gruenwald, Bob Hall, and Paul Ryan ISBN: 978075184690

Batman: The Killing Joke by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland ISBN: 1401216676 (link to E-version in Blackboard)

And the Universe is So Big Understanding Batman: the Killing Joke by Julian Darius ISBN: 9781481041706

Irredeemable volume 1 by Mark Waid & Peter Krause ISBN: 9781934506905

Deadpool Classic volume 1 by Fabian Nicieza and Joe Kelly ISBN: 0785131248

Kick-Ass volume 1 by Mark Millar and John Romita ISBN: 0785184015

Civil War by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven ISBN: 078512179X

Unbeatable Squirrel Girl volume 1 by Ryan North and Erica Henderson ISBN 0785197028

Batgirl of Burnside volume 1 by Brenden Fletcher and Cameron Stewart ISBN: 1401257984

Green Arrow/Green Lantern by Neal Adams and Denny O'Neil ISBN: 1401235174

and selected assigned readings –

Please note: The above books are on reserve at the library, and I don't mind if you use e-versions, used copies, etc., whatever is most convenient for you. **You don't have to buy them if you choose not to.**

Please note: This course has a great deal **READING** and **WRITING!** You are expected to do all the readings before class. The instructor will call upon members of the class at random to discuss the readings during each class session.

Assignments:

You are required to write two short 3- to 5-page papers (900-1,200 words). While writing all of these papers, please keep in mind Dr. Coogan's view of the Superhero: mission, powers, and identity. Please discuss how Dr. Coogan's model fits in with what you watched or not. Please proofread your papers carefully before you turn them. Good style, grammar, and train of thought are important. Please note points will be taken off for grammar and style. You can focus on the supervillain, but keep in mind Coogan's concepts of the villain from his chapter too (e.g. enemy commander). **Cite everything you use, including our textbooks, readings, and the film you pick.**

1: First paper:

Pick a live action television series or animated series which you watch and make notes on for least two hours. I don't want everyone in the class to watch the same program so a sign-up sheet will be passed around a few weeks before the paper is due. Keep in mind Dr. Coogan's criteria. Make sure you argue whether the characters are really superheroes? Please cite two other sources (Web is ok). Also, I want to know what you think, your feelings, etc. Does the narrative structure and artistic rendering work? If not, why? Please list the name of the episode or episodes and the director in your paper (bibliography).

2: Second paper:

As part of the core curriculum you are required to answer some questions regarding the content in this course. These questions are in Blackboard and are on the graphic novel *Marvels*. Please think about your answers as you write them. I want to know what you think and I want answers that make sense based on the QUESTIONS asked.

3: Team Project/Artist Presentation:

In groups of 2 you will be assigned to put together a presentation on a historical comic artist. You can do a PowerPoint, podcast, or short film. Briefly discuss the artist's history/background, artistic style, and importance. Groups will have 7 to 12 minutes to present. Each person in the group must participate and present before the class in the group setting.

4: Final Project: Paper & Annotated Bibliography/Literature review:

Please pick a superhero feature film —Put together a paper with an annotated bibliography/literature review. You must have at least 10 sources. The final product should be around 1,000 -1,500 words. You must also watch the film. Please summarize your ideas about the film. Do you think the critics were right in their assessment of the film? What do you think of the film artistically and in terms of narrative structure? PLEASE NOTE you cannot use a film we viewed in class. The instructor will pass around a sheet a few weeks before the final and you will choose your film then. We don't want to have several people presenting on the same film. Please be thinking about what films you might want to write about. *Please do not use your textbook or the assigned readings.* You are to do original research in a wide variety of formats and not strictly web research. **At least 3 sources cannot be web/internet sources! But you can use the invisible web (eg. Databases this will be explained in class). Please note you have to do TWO things: an annotated bibliography and a short review in your words of the film.**

Criteria for Sources: You must have the following.

2 articles/reviews you found using the *Internet Movie Database*. Do not use user reviews!

1 book

1 magazine article

1 newspaper article

1 peer-reviewed journal article (reviews from a journal are fine as long as it is from a peer-reviewed journal. Please make sure of this).

1 Internet blog/website (*Ain't It Cool News/Bleeding Cool*, etc.)

3 sources of your choice

For the final, each of you will present for 5 minutes to the class what you learned about this particular film: critical reception, how it fits within the class, artistic achievements, etc. Make sure that at least three sources are not online or general web sources.

Late Work and Make-ups:

Late assignments due to unexcused absences can be only one week late, with 1 point taken off for each day.

Citation of sources used:

I don't care what citation style you use — MLA, APA, Chicago — JUST BE CONSISTENT! Please use parenthetical citations with a bibliography at the end of your papers. Please note that you must cite any graphic novels/comics you use as well as the films. Here are some citation websites:

Purdue Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Duke University Style Guide: <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/index.html>

Citing Comics: <http://www.comicsresearch.org/CAC/cite.html>

Citing Films: <http://www.wfu.edu/~zulick/writing/mla5.html>

Guide to writing an Annotated Bibliography: <http://lib.skidmore.edu/library/index.php/li371-annotated-bib>

Grading Rubric:

Attendance and participation: 35 points

Two short papers and team presentation: 15 points each or 45 points total

Final project: annotated bibliography/literature review and presentation: 20 points

Total: 100 points

90-100 — A

80-89 — B

70-79 — C

60-69 — D

59 or below — F

Content Disclosure

Content in the arts can sometimes include works, situations, actions, and language that can be offensive to some students on the grounds of sexual explicitness, violence, or blasphemy. As TTU is devoted to the principle of freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, and it is not the common practice to censor these works or ideas on

any of these grounds, students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course. Material presented in this course is often of a historical nature and is not “politically correct” by today’s standards. Please note, however, that material in the course is for informational purposes and does not necessarily include the views of the instructor, the Honors College, or TTU.

Note on Field Trips:

Please note that I have worked with the Alamo Drafthouse to schedule several screenings of superhero related films. Please make every effort to come to as many screenings as you can. We have the great pleasure of having at least three superhero related films coming out this semester as well as a screening of the *Watchmen* and perhaps more if all goes well. Going to these films will enhance your class experience greatly.

Statement of Attendance:

Attending class is mandatory. Failure to attend a class meeting will result in a participation grade of zero for that particular class period (or six points off final grade for unexcused). Just showing up for class does not ensure full attendance/participation credit – you must be actively participating in class. Excessive absences constitute cause for dropping a student from class (See *TTU Undergraduate and Graduate catalog* p. 48). It is the student’s responsibility to show up. If you are absent, you need to find out what you missed and turn in all assignments on time. **Please note that since this class only meets once a week if you have two or more absences your grade will automatically drop a letter grade for each absence. YOU MUST ATTEND CLASS. Keep in mind that you signed up for this class knowing the time and day.** Unless you have a school-related or religious holiday function and can provide documentation, please don’t miss class. **The only university-recognized excused absences are for participation in official university business or for religious holy days. Job interviews, fraternity/sorority meetings or just not feeling well do not count as an excused absence. You have to come to class. Each unexcused absence will result in 6 points being taken off your grade.**

If you are really ill, you should make every effort to contact the instructor prior to class. Documentation of a doctor’s visit will be required at the next class meeting in order to get attendance credit.

If you miss class to observe a religious holiday, you will be allowed to take any exams or complete any assignments scheduled for that day within one week of the absence (see *TTU Undergraduate and Graduate catalog* p. 49). Let the instructor know ahead of time if you plan to miss a class due to religious observation so proper arrangements can be made. <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.19.pdf> . "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Texas Tax Code §11.20. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence.

Thirty Five percent of your course grade is based upon participation. Class participation covers a variety of things. Primarily it will be the way you participate in class that is your contribution to class discussion. It also includes the various ways in which you interact with your classmates.

Participation requires attendance, but also goes beyond merely showing up. To receive full credit for participation, you will also need to be prepared, alert, and willing to engage in civil, yet lively discussions. In order for our classroom experience to be as fulfilling as possible for everyone, we all need to contribute. Please also be aware that there is such a thing as negative participation: if you behave in a manner that detracts from the quality of the classroom experience for the rest of the group, it will lower your participation grade.

Statement on Tolerance and Class Civility:

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. To this end, students will respect their peers' ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Further, students will not discriminate against their peers based on race, religion, gender, color, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability. Discrimination of this kind will not be tolerated in this class.

Note on Cell Phone Use and Other Wireless Communications:

Ringling cell phones and phone conversations are disruptive to the learning environment and inappropriate in the class. This class follows the University Library's policy on cell phone use and other wireless communication:

Cell phones and other wireless devices must be turned off or put on silent or vibrate mode upon entering the classroom. If your phone rings, makes any noise, or is found next to your ear, you will be asked to leave the classroom and will lose participation points for the day (at the discretion of the instructor. You could lose as much as 10-20 points off your final grade). **PLEASE DO NOT USE YOUR CELL PHONE, TABLET, or LAPTOP at any time during class unless we have a break. Put cell phones and other devices in your backpack, pocket, or under your desk! Please be courteous to the instructor, guest speakers, and to your other classmates. If you want to take notes please use paper and pen/pencil. Again, reiterating the previous statement:** Please do not look at your computer or phone when we are watching a film or film clips. This will result in getting a zero for participation for the day and could result in your grade dropping a letter. **PLEASE PUT AWAY YOUR COMPUTER, IPAD, PHONE, ETC., DURING CLASS UNLESS YOU ARE ASKED TO USE IT FOR A QUICK REFERENCE. DO NOT PUT YOUR COMPUTER OR DEVICE ON YOUR DESK. PUT IT UNDER YOUR DESK!**

Academic Integrity:

The attempt of students to present as their own any work what they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense and renders the offenders liable to serious consequences and possible suspension. Dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class.

Assignments that are plagiarized in any way, both totally or in part, from published sources or other writers, outside of the assistance of a writing coach or similar professional, are dishonest and will receive grades of F (0.0). Plagiarism may merit failing a student for the entire course. The following is the definition of plagiarism followed in this course:

Plagiarism is present when a writer:

(1). Copies verbatim or paraphrases from an author without using quotation marks or without naming the source in the text of the paper, in a parenthetical note, or in a bibliography or reference list.

(2). Turns in a paper which has been written wholly or partially by someone else. (*Borrowed from Coogan Superhero Syllabus*)

If you borrow ideas, give the source. It is not cheating to get help and suggestions from others, but everything you do not give a source for must be your own work. Please refer to the university catalog for more information. (See <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.12.pdf>)

Students with Disabilities:

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may need special arrangements in order to meet course requirements must notify the instructors during the first week of class so arrangements can be made. Students should

present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services, 335 West Hall, 806-742-2405. See OP <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.22.pdf>; <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP10.08.pdf>

Class Schedule:

Be prepared to discuss ALL OF THE READINGS/Graphic Novels/and Coogan/Rosenberg Books-You will be called upon individually at random to discuss them.

Dates	Topics	To Do/Film
Jan 25 th	Week 1 — Introduction to the class — Genre Discussion – Comics as Art	Film to be Announced
Feb 1 st	Week 2 — The Definition of a Superhero/Introduction to Superhero on Film and Television –How to read-comics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Rosenberg and Coogan Section 1 & 2 pp xi-39 • Read Coogan, Superhero Genre 1, Origin of a Superhero 2, pp. 24-60. (in Blackboard) • Read Wyle (in Blackboard) • Superman, <i>Action Comics 1</i> (in Blackboard) • Read Andrae (in Blackboard) • Read Potts (in Blackboard) • Read Worth Jack Kirby article (in Blackboard) • <i>Superman and the Mole Men</i>
Feb 8 th We will take a field trip to go see <i>Deadpool</i> to the Alamo on SUNDAY Feb 14 th	Week 3 — Brief History of Comics/Serials Superheroes as modern mythology	<p>Start working on your 1st paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Rosenberg and Coogan Section 2 pp. 41-75 • Read Julian (in Blackboard) • Read Murphy (in Blackboard) • Read <i>Deadpool volume 1</i> • <i>PBS Superheroes</i> • <i>Superhero Serials</i>
	Week 4 — Sequels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Kick-Ass volume 1</i> graphic novel

Feb 15 th	<p>& Near Misses/Flops – Superheroes in the Real World?????</p> <p>Guest lecture by Dr. Darren Hudson Hick</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Squadron Supreme</i> graphic novel
Feb 22 nd	<p>Week 5 — Superheroes and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Unbeatable Squirrel Girl volume 1 GN</i> • Read <i>Batgirl of Burnside GN</i> • Read Whaley (in Blackboard) • Read Donaldson pp. 139-152 (in Blackboard)
Feb 29 th	<p>Week 6 — Batman on Film</p> <p>How to analyze and study film guest lecture by Dr. Paul Reinsch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in first paper • Read <i>From Gotham to Hollywood</i> (in Blackboard) • Read Hick (in Blackboard) • <i>Batman Television Program</i>
<p>March 7th</p> <p>Field Trip to the Alamo to see the <i>Watchmen</i></p>	<p>Week 7 — The Supervillain-</p> <p>Trip to see the <i>The Watchmen</i></p> <p>SPRING BREAK March 12th -20th</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Joker/ fan strip The Deal-(link in Blackboard) • Joker-“Everything Burns” web article (link in Blackboard) Read BEFORE Litsey • Litsey (in Blackboard) • Read <i>The Joker Comics</i> (in Blackboard) • Joker’s Greatest Triumph”-(in Blackboard) • Read Coogan, <i>Origin Super Villain</i>, pp. 61-115 (in Blackboard)
<p>March 21st</p> <p>Field Trip March 26th to the Alamo Drafthouse to see <i>Batman v</i></p>	<p>Week 8 —</p> <p>The Dark Age--The Anti-Hero</p> <p>Guest Lecture by Dr. Aliza Wong Italian Comics Fumentì</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Irredeemable by Waid</i> volume 1 graphic novel- • Read <i>Green Lantern/Green Arrow</i> graphic novel • The Punisher fan film • <i>Italian Spider-Man</i>

<i>Superman: Dawn of Justice</i>		
April 4 th	<p>Week 9 —</p> <p>March 28th No Class</p> <p>Week 10 The Super Villain-continued–Guest Dr. Rob Peaslee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Moore graphic novel, <i>The Killing Joke</i> — be prepared to discuss (in Blackboard). • Read Rosenberg and Coogan section 3 pp. 77-111 • Read Weiner and Peaslee (in Blackboard) • Read Darius <i>And the Universe is So Big</i> • Read Brooker “Right, Wrong, and In Between: The Killing Joke” (link in Blackboard Read AFTER you Read Darius) • Real Reason (link in Blackboard) AFTER You have read all of the above. This one is short. • “<i>Necessary Evil</i>” • Work on Team Presentation
April 11 th	Week 11 —	Artist Team presentations due
April 18 th	<p>Week 12 —</p> <p>Fandom-Fan Films-Guest lecture by librarian Mrs. Shelley Barba</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Marvels</i> Graphic Novel • <i>Turn in Marvels Paper!!</i> • Read Schelly pp. 3-18 (In Blackboard) • <i>Batman-Dead End, Grayson, Spider-Man: Green Goblin’s Last Stand, Confessions of a Superhero</i> • <i>The Big Bang Theory</i> • <i>Super Villains, Comic Book Shop Movie</i>
April 25 th	<p>Week 13 —</p> <p>Guest lecture Dr. Wyatt Phillips</p> <p>World Superheroes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Rosenberg and Coogan section 4 pp. 113-159 • <i>Ultraman, Astro Boy, Japanese Spider-Man – Krrish,</i>

<p>May 2nd</p> <p>Field Trip to the Alamo May 7th to see <i>Captain America: Civil War</i></p>	<p>Week 14</p> <p>Superheroes in the Real World-Marvel's <i>Civil War</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>Civil War</i> graphic novel • Davidson in Blackboard • Read Langley in Blackboard • Read Cleary in Blackboard • Read Beaulieu in Blackboard
<p>May 9th</p>	<p>Week 15 — Superhero Video Games Guest Lecture: Mr. Ryan Cassidy</p> <p>Racial issues related to superheroes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review <p><i>Black Panther, Blade, Hancock, Spawn</i></p>
<p>May 16th</p>	<p>Week 16 —<i>Final Presentations Due</i></p>	<p>We will meet May 16 from 7:30-10:00 for presentations</p> <p>Good luck on your other finals!</p>

Remember you can always ask me for help while here at TTU or you can find your personal librarian at:
<http://guides.library.ttu.edu/>