

San Francisco State University: Liberal Studies  
**LS 304.1 Making Comics**  
Spring 2017

Class Meetings: M 4:10-6:55  
Classroom: HUM 581\* (was HUM 114)  
Instructor: Nick Sousanis [sousanis@sfsu.edu](mailto:sousanis@sfsu.edu)  
Office: HUM 581 Phone: 415-338-3166  
Office Hours: Monday 2-3, Wednesday 11-12, or by appointment

Introduction to the hands-on making of comics. 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. [**Prerequisites:** Upper division standing or consent of instructor]

**Course Outline:** We will look at a wide variety of comics produced around the globe and through history, to get a better sense of the techniques and approaches that went into their construction. This will involve some analysis, deconstruction, mimicking or riffing off particular stylistic methods, and reworking existing examples in our own way. In addition to various texts explored in class demonstrating unique or outstanding (and occasionally reproachable) formal qualities, we will draw on texts on theory and practice of comics to explore how different creators/theorists have articulated their working methods. This will include authors like Scott McCloud, Matt Madden & Jessica Abel, Lynda Barry, Ivan Brunetti, Will Eisner, Sousanis, and others.

Through instructor-led in-class individual and collaborative exercises, students will learn basic methods of constructing a page, developing a narrative across multiple pages, and a variety of formal issues that go into the creation of comics. The ultimate project for the course will be the creation of a short comic by each of the students that will then be collected in a physical and/or virtual anthology at the conclusion of the term. Students will also create online portfolios/blogs to showcase their works in progress, finished projects, process, and to learn about growing an audience for their work.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

- identify significant formal features in the creation of comics and speak to their purpose and contribution to the storytelling;
- create comics utilizing a variety of different approaches, i.e. varying ratio of word to image, 9-panel pages versus splash pages, etc.;
- able to effectively communicate a narrative or idea through the comics form;
- have a command of a variety of techniques to produce comics;
- 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;
- 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;
- understand the steps that go into making a comic – from conception, to layouts, to producing a finished work;
- use the comics form as a means of self-discovery and expression.

**Required Reading** (available at SFSU bookstore. Also, Comix Experience and Comix Experience Outpost near campus will offer discounts on these readings and all comics for class members who present a printout of their syllabus – check out these and other SF comics shops!):

Matt Madden: *99 Ways to Tell a Story*

Lynda Barry: *Syllabus*

**Recommended Texts:** Comics making is a highly individual and idiosyncratic activity. To that end, we will have no particular “how to” text for the course. However, here are some texts that discuss elements of craft and theorize on the ways in which comics can say things in ways other media can’t that we will draw on in the course. I recommend acquiring at least one over the term that you find particularly insightful.

Scott McCloud: *Understanding Comics*

Scott McCloud: *Making Comics*

Matt Madden & Jessica Abel: *Writing Words & Drawing Pictures*

Matt Madden & Jessica Abel: *Mastering Comics*

Ivan Brunetti: *Cartooning*

Will Eisner: *Comics & Sequential Art*

Nick Sousanis: *Unflattening*

Old School Bonus!: Stan Lee & John Buscema: *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*

**Required Materials:** Since we will regularly be drawing and making comics in this course, it goes without saying that you will need to have basic drawing 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.

- A notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort
- Drawing tool of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.) (Color options are nice too)

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

30% Ongoing mini-assignments (in-class and take home), attendance, participation

5% Portfolio collecting all the assignments and projects undertaken over the term

10% Artist Process mini-lecture

10% Visual analysis/annotation project

10% Making Comics Recipe Book mini-chapter

35% Final project

**Ongoing Min-Assignments/Attendance/Participation:**

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. While this is a making course – **no prior drawing experience is required!** Willingness and openness to explore, to dive in and try things with vigor and put yourself into the experience are key. Student evaluations, from our mini-assignments to final projects, will be based primarily on completion, effort, inventiveness, ambition, inventiveness, curiosity, and effort – not pre-existing skills.

*Overview of potential in-class exercises in no particular order:* Grids & Gestures; cutouts; 3 person collab – composition/text/images; How you got here in 3 panels & 2 pages; Matt Madden 99 Ways; Symbolic comic – ala Nick’s Rabbit page; Airline safety card redesign; wordless comic; Poetry/song adaptation; comics poetry; comics journalism; 4 panel strip; Lynda Barry exercises; Panel Lottery; Sketchnotes; exquisite corpse and other constraint/collaborative games... others to be dreamed up by participants and instructor along the way! *Also, some key themes we will explore over the term:* Comics Poetry and Comics & Poetry, Architecture, Comics Journalism, Graphic Medicine, Memoir, Non-fiction Comics

**Portfolio:** Gather together and organize in a coherent fashion all the assignments and projects we’ve worked on over the term to showcase the richness of your explorations. You will also supply a brief reflection on what you learned through these experiences – which will also include thoughts on the creation of your final project. Due on the last class.

**Making Comics Recipe Book:** Imagine that as a group we are creating our own Making Comics Textbook, for which each class member contributes a short, single chapter highlighting some element of comics creation that you feel is particularly important, is unique to your own way of working, was helpful to you in learning to make comics – something that stands out and you’d like to explore a bit in depth in terms of organizing it in such a way to benefit others from your experience. This can include visual examples, process artifacts, the

sorts of things you would want to see to learn for yourself. We'll discuss the form and specifics together over the term, but in addition to book-like formats, we can try other formats – doing it as a video, in comics form, and something online – that provides links to related resources.

**Student supplied teaching lesson:** Over the term, each student will lead a short (5-10 minute) class discussion on a particular artist's working process that they find to be particularly relevant and interesting. You're the teacher here, and the task is to introduce us to this creator, offer highlights of their work, share some lessons you've drawn from the work and takeaways for our own work, and make us want to learn more! Students will sign up for a presentation day prior, and supply instructor with images and any other materials needed for their brief presentation in advance. We also welcome a less formal version of this at any point in the term – please feel free to bring and share recommended readings for all of us to learn from.

**Visual analysis/annotation assignment:** For this early-term assignment, you will choose a page from a comic of your choosing as well as one of your own to visually annotate and analyze. This will mean tracing or redrawing the pages or making photocopies upon which you will then annotate with notes and diagrammatic elements, as a means of explaining the effect of the various stylistic and other creative elements. In other words, you will need to offer analytical commentary about why certain interesting creative decisions seem to have been made, and what they do to your understanding of the comic. The emphasis here is on observation—how much can you notice?—and what you can deduce from everything you have observed. The assignment is designed to help you think about the construction of a comic—how is it made, why is it made in this way, and what is the effect of it being made this way? And by examining your own alongside a professional work, glean an even deeper understanding of process for your own practice.

**Final Project:** Make a comic of considerable length and depth of subject that shows what you've gained over the term, demonstrates a good understanding of making comics and how to say things with comics that you can't in another form. You will also provide a short reflection about your process, how the work evolved, what you learned along the way – that will be included as part of your portfolio. We will discuss over the term as you consider what to do, and then work on it and look at drafts together in class over the second half of the term.

**Course Outline** The schedule below is intentionally flexible – with the idea that the course will evolve as we explore and generate responses to the material we cover. 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.

- Week 1: 1/23 No Nick/No Class
- Week 2: 1/30 Intro, Your goals, Grids & Gestures
- Week 3: 2/6 Reading Lynda Barry, McCloud's triangle, cartooning
- Week 4: 2/13 Sequence, sequential, architecture, panel breaking
- Week 5: 2/20 Wordless...
- Week 6: 2/27 **Visual Analysis project assigned**
- Week 7: 3/6 **Visual Analysis Project due**
- Week 8: 3/13
- Spring Break 3/20
- Week 9: 3/27 **Final project proposal...**
- Week 10: 4/3
- Week 11: 4/10
- Week 12: 4/17
- Week 13: 4/24 **Recipe Book Contributions Due**
- Week 14: 5/1

- Week 15: 5/8
- Week 16: 5/15
- FINAL Exam Period: Monday 5/22 4:10-6:55 **Final Project Due**, Gallery view/read of our final comics, discussion.

**iLearn:** We will be using the iLearn website for this class. Those of you 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 on-time 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 304" 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.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

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/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu).

### **University Policy on Sexual Harassment & 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 Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

**The SAFE Place** - (415) 338-2208; [SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)

**Counseling and Psychological Services Center** - (415) 338-2208; [Counseling and Psychological Services Center website http://psyservs.sfsu.edu](http://psyservs.sfsu.edu)

For more information on your rights and available resources see: [Title IX at SF State http://titleix.sfsu.edu](http://titleix.sfsu.edu)