

San Francisco State University: Comics Studies
CMX 540 Topics in Comics: Superheroes!

Spring 2026

Class Meetings: MW 11-12:15 HUM 217 [+ ZOOM for illness/emergencies]

Instructor: Nick Sousanis sousanis@sfsu.edu Office HUM 581 [the Comics Lab]

Student Hours: M 12:30-1:30; W 9:45-10:45 or by appointment (in-person or Zoom)

A Note about Now: Let me acknowledge to start off, current circumstances aren't quite normal, and our expectations must reflect that. As understanding as I typically am about deadlines and workload, I'm even more so now. Your health, your lives *should always* come first and we can work out solutions for whatever is going on (with a good channel of communication). I want to see the work we do together as helpful to what you are experiencing and not an added burden. This doesn't mean we won't work hard and that it won't be challenging, just that it serves you as something meaningful and relevant to find your own ways into it. Deadlines are important, because they allow us to keep the conversation moving and keep learning from one another, but life is bigger, always, and definitely now, so I'll remain flexible and we'll work it out together.

The course will be in person, but to continue to take care of each other may mean masking in indoor spaces, and we'll do our best with ventilation/filtration. If you're sick – please stay home and take care of yourself. I will be streaming the class on zoom and recording it, so even if you can't make it, you can tune in live or watch when you can to access what we did, and all the instructions and resources will be available on Canvas. The key in all of this is to reach out and let me know what's going on and what you need. As a teacher, I see my role as being there *to support you in where you are going*. With that said, on with what we'll do together...

Course Outline: Introduction to the scholarly study of superheroes in comics (and other media), their origins, the kinds of stories and themes addressed throughout their history, along with prominent titles and authors. Students will engage with the material through creative projects, including drawn responses to comics and scholarly readings as well as creating their own superheroes/comics featuring their characters. We'll explore why the comics medium is well-suited for the impossible action of superhero stories. Final projects will entail a deep dive on a critical aspect of superheroes, and students will present their thinking in comics, other visual media, or written work.

Required Reading (*Comix Experience* offers discounts on readings and all comics for class members with a printout of the syllabus – visit them and other SF comics shops!):

All comics and scholarly readings will be supplied by instructor, except for:

Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons *Watchmen*

Kelly Thompson & Hayden Sherman *Absolute Wonder Woman Vol. 1*

Maybe one more TBD...

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.

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

Note: As it is impossible for any one of us to be aware of all the comics out there, we welcome bringing your recommendations for readings and artists to check out for all of us to learn from.

Assignments and Evaluation:

35% Ongoing Activities (in-class and out)

5% Student Hours

30% 2 Projects

30% Final

Ongoing mini-assignments (35%): Frequent in-class & at-home drawing, comics-making, & written responses to our readings and discussions. They will be posted to Canvas to prepare for discussion. Evaluation purely on completion – not skill, No Drawing experience necessary! Emphasis on curiosity + willingness to dive in and have fun!

Student Hours (5%): Talk comics, ask questions, help me get to know you!

Project 1 (15%): Discuss why superheroes matter to you. in comics, writing, video, or other format, take up what we've learned to reflect on the significance of superheroes.

Project 2 (15%): Discuss why superheroes matter to you. in comics, writing, video, or other format, take up what we've learned to reflect on the significance of superheroes. Come up with Powers, costume, backstory, lair, villains – all of it!

Final Project (30%): An in-depth exploration on the subject of superheroes and related to the aims of the course. In terms of subject, here are some possible directions: critical examination of a particular comic, series, character; exploration of a theme across multiple comics; research relating superheroes to culture more broadly; investigation of superheroes in comics alongside their representations in other media; research project in our comics archives on campus; educationally-focused material; a superhero comic building off earlier explorations in the course. These are only suggestions – we will figure this out together, and final projects will be determined in conversation between students and instructor (with input from cohort along the way.)

Additionally, the presentation of the final projects might also take on diverse forms: We can certainly anticipate many of these being in comics and related visual forms, video or other transmedia are welcome, and something in words is also allowable :)

Course Outline Our schedule will likely evolve as we explore and generate responses to course material. In addition to key dates below, I will keep you all apprised in class, via email, and Canvas of what's coming. To ensure we remain on the same page, you are expected to check *Canvas* and your **sfsu email** account regularly.

1. **M/W 1/26-1/28** Intro
2. **M/W 2/2-2/4**
3. **M/W 2/9-2/11**
4. **M/W 2/16-2/18**
5. **M/W 2/23-2/25**
6. **M/W 3/2-3/4**
7. **M/W 3/9-3/11**
8. **M/W 3/16-3/18**
 - ** NO CLASS MW 3/23-3/25 *Spring Break*
9. **M/W 3/30-4/1**
10. **M/W 4/6-4/8**
11. **M/W 4/13-4/15**
12. **M/W 4/20-4/22**
13. **M/W 4/27-4/29**
14. **M/W 5/4-5/6**
15. **M/W 5/11-5/13**

Wednesday May 20 10:15-12:14 FINAL EXAM PERIOD – Project Sharing!

Note: I frequently share examples of what we do in class on my educational website/social media. Please let me know if you *do not* want me to share any of your images.

Canvas: We will be using Canvas for this class. Those of you unfamiliar with Canvas can find resources and assistance online as well as with the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in Canvas for all of your courses registered at SFSU. *Academic Technology* website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>
Canvas log-in page: <https://canvas.sfsu.edu/canvas>

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.

Classroom Policies: This is a class that thrives on interaction, improvisational collaboration, so it's best if everyone is in attendance and on time. That said, given the circumstances and in regards to my note at top – our expectations will be different. The main thing is to keep me posted on what's going on if you can't join in regularly – we can work with anything from a point of communication.

Late Assignments: Again, as above, I'd like to see deadlines observed or clear communication about missing them if necessary – conversations grow best when we're working together. But understanding, flexibility, and grace are essential now more than ever – so keep me updated as you can, and we can make it work.

Contact and Feedback: You are encouraged to visit me during student hours or make an appointment to discuss class, raise questions, or just check in. When emailing me, please use your "sfsu.edu" account when possible and put "CMX 304" and topic 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 LCA 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: I welcome the opportunity to support students with disabilities in my classroom. 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.

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)