**ARHU106: Practical Application in the Arts**  
The Honors Humanities Program, Second Semester Colloquium (1 credit)  
University of Maryland

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**Graphic Novels & Graphic Cultures**

Spring 2007, Section 0301, Thursdays 4:00pm - 4:50pm in QAN 0108 (Queen Anne’s Hall)

**Instructors:**  
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**Course Description**

This course serves as introduction to critical methods in popular culture studies, with a focus on the graphic novel as cultural product and practice. Together, we will explore the ways in which meanings emerge in several classic texts of the graphic novel genre. Our readings of these texts will be informed by a diversity of theoretical perspectives, including visual culture studies, poststructuralism, postmodernism and intersectionality. We will interrogate the relationships between the concepts “graphic novel” or “comic book” and “popular culture,” with each of us bringing our lived experiences to our readings and discussions. In the context of contemporary society, we will see how critical studies of popular culture have a distinct place in the arts and humanities. Will we consider the contradictory ways in which difference, power and knowledge are articulated in cultural production. Through in-depth studies of several primary texts, including Watchmen, Sandman, and V for Vendetta, we will learn how graphic novelists use and manipulate historical and contemporary social issues as the building blocks for their art. Finally, we will apply these skills to create our own application of the art of graphic novel.

By the end of this fifteen-week course, students should be able to:

1. Conceptualize graphic storytelling as a cultural and artistic process that is productive of (often) complex meanings within the “circuit of culture.”
2. Recognize social, metaphorical, and philosophical meanings/themes in graphic novels and be able to critically analyze these pieces as “texts.”
3. Produce a piece of graphic storytelling that deals with one or more contemporary social issues.

Despite the one-credit aspect of this course, however, it should be understood that ARHU106 is an Honors course and a critical component of the Honors Humanities curriculum. The reading load may be considered heavy, though this course strictly follows the University standard of three hours of out-of-class work per credit hour. Commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the course is essential to success in the class and will be reflected in students’ final grades. It should also be noted that many of the ideas presented in this course will be built upon in ARHU205: Modes of Knowing and Doing in the Arts and Humanities. Though graphic novels will serve as primary texts, no previous knowledge of any of these books is required (or even preferred.) Every student, regardless of her familiarity with these books or the genre in general, will have an equal opportunity to succeed in the course.

Patrick Grzanka will be your primary instructor for this course, though your Honors Humanities Keystone Project progress may be evaluated by Sibbie O’Sullivan (depending on who you have been working with up to this point). Daniel Greene will serve as the teaching assistant.

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**Evaluation**
Grading for the course is as follows:

15%: **Class participation.** While attendance is not mandatory, thoughtful participation in class is a crucial part of succeeding in the course. The instructor will lead discussions, but it is each student's responsibility to actively participate in class. Because summaries of the readings are not required every week, in-class participation is the only way for the instructor to know whether a student is doing the required reading. In-class participation is not limited to speaking in class -- short, written quizzes on the assigned material will be given throughout the semester.

10%: **Assignments.** All written assignments, not including your analytic essay, are due in hard copy form at the start of class for which they are due. Late assignments will not be accepted.

20%: **Analytic Essay.** During the semester, you will develop a 4-7 page essay analyzing at least one graphic novel using the analytical tools and frameworks we learn in class. This essay will be due toward the end of the semester, but you will work on it throughout the course.

35%: **Final project.** This course is about practical applications in the arts. Thus, the practical application – development of a piece of graphic storytelling – is the most important part of this course. Students may work individually or in groups (of up to 4 people) for the final project. More details will be provided during the first half of the course.

20%: **Annotated bibliography for the Honors Humanities Keystone Project.** All HonHum students are required to maintain satisfactory progress towards completion of their Keystone Project throughout ARHU106. By the end of the semester students will have expanded and annotated their bibliography to 20 sources.

The grading will be on a traditional scale of 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, etc.

**Required Texts:**
***These books can be purchased from Liberty Books and Comics, 7315 Baltimore Ave (Rt. 1) in College Park opposite the Wawa shopping center. We encourage you to patronize this local establishment.***

Course readings, available via WebCT ([www.courses.umd.edu](http://www.courses.umd.edu)) or provided in photocopy format.

**Keystone Project Annotated Bibliography:**
Students are required to maintain satisfactory progress towards completion of their keystone project during the spring semester in ARHU106. This semester you will read the sources you identified in your bibliography during the fall semester, you will expand your bibliography from ten to at least 20 sources, and you will **annotate** all of your sources in the MLA style. Guidelines for annotation are available on the WebCT page. To access your WebCT space, go to [www.courses.umd.edu](http://www.courses.umd.edu) and follow the student tutorial.

Analytic Essay:
For your analytic essay, you may write on any of the graphic novels we read in the course, or you may select from other substantive texts. Below is a list of suggested sources:

*Astonishing X-Men: Gifted or Dangerous or Torn*, by Joss Whedon. Marvel Comics.
In addition to these texts or one of your choosing, you may want to write an essay that compares an original graphic novel to its cinematic adaptation. Though such an essay might be daunting (especially if your goal is not simply to highlight what is “different” about the film), we will be discussing adaptation in class.

**Final Project – An Original Piece of Graphic Storytelling**

For the course’s final project, students may work individually or in groups of up to four members to create an piece of original graphic storytelling. This may take the form of an issue of a series, an outline of a story with character sketches, a complete storyboard with script, a series outline, or an outline of a complete graphic novel. This may be a completely original story, or use characters already existing in a comic book universe. The plot of the outline must deal with one or more contemporary social issues (loosely construed). The extensiveness of the project will depend on the format chosen by the student and group size. For example, if working alone, the student will be expected to demonstrate that they have developed both a plot and some graphic storytelling for at least one issue (20 pages or so). If four students work together, they must submit a more thorough outline of a complete issue or series with a substantial graphic component. I am extremely flexible with the form this final project takes, and I encourage all students to be creative and draw from their strengths (e.g. if visual art isn’t your forte, then team up with someone who might be stronger in this area).

More details about the final project will be provided later in the course.

**Questionnaires**

As part of ongoing research being conducted by Pat Grzanka, students in this course will be asked to complete several surveys, which will pertain mostly to their attitudes toward contemporary social issues and their television viewing habits. The brief surveys, which have been approved by the University’s Institutional Review Board, will be completed in-class. The surveys are completely anonymous. Responses will not have any effect on the students’ grades and responses will not be seen by the instructor until final grades for ARHU106 (0301) have been posted in late May. We will discuss these questionnaires more in-class. Any questions should be directed to Pat Grzanka (pgrzanka@umd.edu).

**Documented Disabilities**

Students who have documented disabilities and who wish to discuss academic accommodations within this course should contact the instructor as soon as possible after the beginning of the course.

**Incompletes**

In this course, the mark of "I" will be granted only to a student who meets both of the following criteria: (1) the student has satisfactorily completed a major portion of the work of the course and (2) the student has been unable to complete some small portion of the work of the course because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control. Examples of reasons for the inability to complete course work that will not qualify a student for an "I" mark include the following: employment or volunteer commitments, social responsibilities, travel plans, and unexpected difficulties in satisfying course requirements.

**Academic Integrity**

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic
integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonor council.umd.edu/whatis.html

Assignments and Course Schedule
*All assignments, including readings, will be due the week they are listed unless otherwise noted.*

**Week One (1/25/07) – Image Matters**
- Visual culture studies and the arts and humanities, introduction to the course.

**Week Two (2/1) – Representation & The Circuit of Culture (Grounding the theory, part I)**
- What is representation? Using readings by Stuart Hall, Nicholas Mirzoeff and Roland Barthes, we will discuss how representations work in popular culture.
- Assignment: What is your favorite graphic novel/comic book and why? If you've never read one, say more about that…
- Read:

**Week Three (2/8) – Graphic Novels as Marginalized Genre and Marginalized Subjects (Grounding the theory, part II)**
- What is a graphic novel? Where are graphic novels situated (in popular culture, in critical media studies)? How do they work?
- Read:
  - Selections from Eisner’s Graphic Storytelling and Comics and Sequential Art

**Week Four (2/15) – History, Biography, Memoir: Maus**
- Discussion of Spiegelman’s Maus
- Read:
  - Selections from Maus: Book 1

**Week Five (2/22) – (Re)storytelling: Sandman**
- Discussion of Gaiman’s Sandman
- Read:
  - Sandman: Dream Country

**Week Six (2/29) – Re-envisioning the Superhero Genre: Watchmen, Part I**
- Discussion of the first half of Moore’s Watchmen
- Read:
  - First six issues of Moore’s Watchmen

**Week Seven (3/7) – Postmodern Visions: Watchmen, Part II**
- Discussion of the second half of Watchmen, through the lens of postmodernism.
- Read:
  - Second half of Watchmen
Week Eight (3/16) – Brave New Worlds: *V for Vendetta*
   - Discussion of Moore’s *V for Vendetta*
   - Read:
     - First half of *V for Vendetta*
     - Selections from Eisner’s *Graphic Storytelling/Comics and Sequential Art*

Week Nine (3/22) – Spring Break, no class.

Week Ten (3/29) – Adaptation: *V for Vendetta*
   - Discussion of adaptation, with an emphasis on comic book to the movie screen.
   - Assignment: Analytic Essay proposal (<1 page)
   - Read and watch:
     - Second half of *V for Vendetta*

Week Ten (4/5) – Biography, Memoir and Tragedy: *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
   - Discussion of Bechdel’s *Fun Home*
   - Read:
     - First half of *Fun Home*
     - Selections from Eisner’s *Graphic Storytelling/Comics and Sequential Art*

Week Eleven (4/12) – Queer Gazes: *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
   - Discussion of Bechdel’s *Fun Home*
   - Assignment: Final Project proposals due in class TODAY.
   - Read:
     - Second half of *Fun Home*
     - Feminist visual culture article: either Butler, Haraway, or Halberstam (likely Haraway’s short “The persistence of vision.”)

Week Twelve (4/19) – Presentations
   - Assignment: Final Project proposal presentations in class.

Week Thirteen (4/26) – Draft Readings
   - Assignment: Prepare rough draft of final project for reading/editing in class.

Week Fourteen (5/3) – Reading/Editing
   - Assignment: Prepare rough draft of final project AND/OR analytic essay for reading/editing in class.

Week Fifteen (5/10) – Conclusions: *Image Matters?*
   - Conclusions.

Exam Week
   - Turn in analytic essay to the Honors Humanities office in Wicomico Hall by 5:00 p.m. on May 14th.
   - Turn in final project to the Honors Humanities office in Wicomico Hall by 5:00 p.m. on May 18th.
   - Turn in annotated bibliography for Honors Humanities Keystone Project by 5:00 p.m. on May 18th.