

HON 207: Graphic Novels & Memoirs (Spring 2020)

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Starr Nisetich

Course Times: Thursdays 2:45-5:15

Location: 237 Luther Bonney Hall

Email: rebecca.nisetich@maine.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00 (Portland) & by appointment

Office Location: 250 Luther Bonney (Portland);

Phone: 780-4189 (direct); 780-4321 (main)

Course Description: Over the past few decades, the study of comics has become a lively field of interdisciplinary inquiry. The growing popularity of this genre is perhaps clearest in the ascendance of events like Comic-Con, the Hollywoodization of superhero comics, and by the commercial and critical success of the graphic novel. Once marginalized, comics, graphic novels and other forms of what Will Eisner calls “sequential art” are becoming increasingly mainstream. Graphic novels like *Maus*, *Persepolis*, *Jimmy Corrigan*, *American Born Chinese*, *Fun Home*, etc. are now standard items on high school and university syllabi.

This course invites students to explore the field of Comics Studies, with a particular focus on the graphic novel. We will consider texts from a variety of genres (including memoir, fiction, fantasy, journalism), perspectives, and contexts. In particular, we will consider how graphic and sequential artists use the form to bring marginal voices to the center, and we will consider what particular aspects of sequential art lend themselves to marginalized individuals and stories. Students will have opportunities to learn theories and approaches in Comics Studies, and to create graphic and sequential art of their own.

Note: This course does not require students to have any prior artistic experience or expertise. Come with an open mind and a willingness to try new things, and you will be amazed at what you can accomplish!!!

Course Materials

Required (available at USM Bookstore)

- ★ *Making Comics*, Lynda Barry (2019)
- ★ *Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel (2006)
- ★ *A Contract with God*, Will Eisner (1978)
- ★ *Super Late Bloomer*, Julia Kay (2018)
- ★ *Hey, Kiddo*, Jarrett J. Krosoczka (2018)
- ★ *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud (1994)
- ★ *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman (1991)
- ★ *Palestine*, Joe Sacco (2011)
- ★ *Vietnamerica*, G.B. Tran (2011)
- ★ *Black Power Barbie*, Shay Youngblood (2013)
- ★ Students' Choice (TBD)

Technology Requirements:

- Regular access to BlackBoard course site
- Ability to stream feature-length videos
- Ability to stream podcast/audio files
- Ability to download PDF readings

Art Supplies: The Honors Program will provide basic supplies for your multimodal projects, including high-quality paper, charcoal, colored pencils, pens and markers, as well as embellishments like stamps, washi tape, etc. These materials will be available in the Honors Center during University business hours.

HON 207: Graphic Novels & Memoirs (Spring 2020)

Core Learning Outcomes:

This seminar is designed to support and augment critical, empathetic, and creative thinking. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of how an art form expressed the culture that produces it;
3. Describe a creative process an artist uses to produce unique views and ideas;
4. Use, orally and in writing, the vocabulary, theories, and principles of an art form;
5. Express yourself by creating a work of art using appropriate processes, media, tools and techniques.

Honors Learning Outcomes:

In addition, the Honors Program learning outcomes for this course are:

1. Design and produce independent and creative projects;
2. Contextualize and/or situate their work in an appropriate disciplinary or multidisciplinary context;
3. Present your work publicly to your faculty and peers.

Grade Distribution:

Participation	15%	Project 1	25%
Discussion Facilitation	10%	Project 2	25%
Response Writing	15%	Final Showcase	10%

Participation:

Talking through your thought process and collaborating to create meaning are foundational to coming to terms with difficult texts and new ideas. Sharing your thoughts with others exposes you to different points of view and helps you to understand your own unique perspective. Discussion and active participation is thus an integral component of your work for this course. Remember--there are very few absolute right and wrong answers, and every student's participation will be expected and respected. Your participation grade is worth 10% of your final grade, and can mean the difference between an "A" and a "B" in this course. To support in-class participation, pairs of students will sign up to be *Discussion co-facilitators* for 1 class period. This ensures that students have opportunities to participate in the discussion in a variety of ways, and enables us to cover the material in ways that are attuned to your own diverse interests.

Reflective Response Writing:

The course material we'll be working with is demanding: the written texts require that we read carefully and reflect critically, and full investment in the course content requires both attention and reflection. Response writing is informal writing that helps you make connections between abstract ideas, texts, concepts, and your own lives. It also encourages a sense of mastery with the material. *I do not expect your response writing to be error-free*, but I do expect active engagement with course texts, themes, and concepts. Response writing is exploratory, tentative, and personal, rather than a standard closed-form academic essay with a thesis/argument and evidence. The essential purpose of reflective response

HON 207: Graphic Novels & Memoirs (Spring 2020)

writing is to give you an opportunity to explore the connections between course materials and your individual lives, experiences, emotions.

The topic of each reflective essay is yours to choose; I will give guidelines in the beginning but over time, I expect you to use this writing as an opportunity to explore the course materials in ways that honor your own curiosity and interests. As the semester progresses, we will begin to use reflective writing as a place to hone and shape your ideas for your own graphic novel (final assignment). Instructions (and prompts) forthcoming.

- ★ There are 10 written responses assigned throughout the semester. I expect each of you to complete **7 total** --this means you can either choose to *skip* 3, or hand in more than 7 and I will count your highest 7 responses towards your grade. Reflective response writing is worth 15% of your final grade.

Major Projects:

This course is divided into two major units: Understanding Comics and Making Comics. Each unit has a significant project associated with it, and each project is worth 30% of your final grade. These projects include a formal analysis essay; and the creation of your own graphic novella (accompanied by an Artist's Statement). You will have the option to incorporate technologies into each project, but you may also choose to use pen and paper and I will not privilege one form over another. Specific instructions will be given in advance, and we will devote at least 1 class period for independent work on each project.

Final Showcase:

During the last 2 weeks classes, we will showcase our graphic novellas in the viewing area of the Glickman Archives (on the 6th floor). Each of you will be responsible for selecting a piece of your larger work to be displayed, and for writing a ~50-word description of your project. We will host an opening reception on April 24th and I encourage you to invite your friends and families to celebrate your work!

Students' Choice:

The last 2 weeks of the semester will be devoted to reading a graphic novel that YOU select. Students will conduct research and prepare brief proposals to present to the class. We'll choose our last text by majority vote.

The Seminar Environment:

One of the signature distinguishing features of USM's Honors Program is our small, discussion-based classes. The "seminar" designation means that I expect each of you to come to class prepared to participate in meaningful, thought-provoking discussions that deepen our individual and collective understandings of the course materials. This classroom is a safe space where ideas will be expressed and respected. That does not mean that political perspectives, value debates, or conflicts over cultural differences are not allowed--on the contrary, I encourage you to raise such issues in class, and to engage with conflicting perspectives. I expect each of you to be mindful and respectful, and I strongly encourage you to be sensitive and careful about the language you choose to use in speaking and writing. Deprecating fellow classmates or others will not be tolerated. Prejudiced or hateful speech will be confronted.

HON 207: Graphic Novels & Memoirs (Spring 2020)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

Everyone associated with the University of Southern Maine is expected to adhere to the principles of academic integrity central to the academic function of the University. Any breach of academic integrity represents a serious offense. Each student has a responsibility to know the standards of conduct and expectations of academic integrity that apply to academic tasks. Violations of academic integrity include any actions that attempt to promote or enhance the academic standing of any student by dishonest means. Cheating on an examination, stealing the words or ideas of another (i.e., plagiarism), making statements known to be false or misleading, falsifying the results of one's research, improperly using library materials or computer files, or altering or forging academic records are examples of violations of this policy which are contrary to the academic purposes for which the University exists. Acts that violate academic integrity disrupt the educational process and are not acceptable.

Attendance:

Because of the collaborative nature of this seminar, your presence and active engagement is essential. Absences for anything other than illness, emergency or religious holiday may reduce your final grade. If problems arise, notify me as soon as possible. Waivers for any part of this policy will occur at my discretion.

Class Cancellation:

In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a class meeting, I will notify you as soon as possible via email, and will adjust the course schedule accordingly.

Inclement Weather:

From time to time USM will close the University due to inclement weather (usually snow or ice). When the cancellation is for an entire day, the class content will be made up at another time or through additional, outside of class, assignments. When the school opens late or closes early, and the time selected is during the middle of class, we will still hold the class unless you are otherwise notified by me.

Final Examination:

We will *not* have a final exam. Cheers to that!

Race: Reflection & Reality (Fall 2019)

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Nisetich

Course Times: M/W 1:15-2:30

Location: 237 Luther Bonney Hall

Email: rebecca.nisetich@maine.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays 10:00-12:00

Office Location: 250 Luther Bonney (Portland);
104A Anderson (Gorham) (Thursdays)

Phone: 780-4189 (direct); 780-4321 (main)

Course Description: In this course, we will explore the evolving conceptions of “race” in the United States, with a particular focus on Maine. To do so, we will draw upon a variety of disciplines including literature, history, law, sociology, cartography, and art. Throughout the semester, we will explore the dynamic power relationships that are engendered and sustained by American legal, literary, and cultural practices, charting the conversations about “race” as they emerge in literature, art, and social discourse. As our course texts demonstrate, “race” is not a stable identity categorization; rather, it is an ideological framework through which power and domination, liberation and self-determination are articulated and enacted. We will incorporate perspectives from a variety of writers, theorists, artists and activists.

Course Materials

Required (available at USM Bookstore)

- Gary Schmidt, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*
- Ashley Bryan, *Freedom Over Me*
- Siobhan Senier, *Dawnland People*
- Duncan Tonatiuh, *Undocumented*
- Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Supplemental (available via Amazon)

- Tommy Orange, *There There*
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*
- Ibram Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*
- Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why it's So Hard to talk to White People about Race*

Technology Requirements:

- Regular access to Google Classroom
- Ability to stream feature-length videos
- Ability to stream podcast/audio files
- Ability to download PDF readings

Core Learning Outcomes:

This seminar is designed to support and augment critical, empathetic, and creative thinking. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Read a range of genres and texts and engage with them both orally and in writing;
2. Demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis;
3. Recognize the influences of social forces on our conceptions of “race” and appreciate the contingent and contested nature of racial categories;
4. Think critically about “race” in relation to your own individual experience, and recognize that your experience, thinking, and culture provide one of many possible perspectives;
5. Engage in effective and respectful dialogue with others in ways which honor diversity.

Honors Learning Outcomes:

In addition, the Honors Program learning outcomes for this course are:

1. Exhibit an intellectual curiosity and a propensity to act on that curiosity by posing and exploring questions in areas that are unfamiliar and challenging;

Race: Reflection & Reality (Fall 2019)

2. Adopt a self-reflective posture and be able to put your experience into context with other perspectives and voices.

Experiential Learning: Samantha Frisk and I have created strong connections between our courses (HON 101 and COR 101), with the shared goal of providing meaningful learning experiences that enhance our classroom-based learning. To facilitate this, we have arranged a number of activities and events which will encourage you to connect our readings and discussions to co-curricular events and activities. Detailed assignment descriptions will be provided in your COR 101 syllabus, and will include the following experiences:

- Welcome dinner at Asmara Restaurant
- Introduction to Mindfulness and Meditation
- Workshop: *Peeling Away the Masks: Why Practice is Vital for Uncovering our True Selves*
- Kayak tour of Malaga Island
- Walk the Portland Freedom Trail
- Wabanaki REACH Mapping Activity
- Maria Girouard Lecture: Maine Indian Land Claims
- W.E.B. Du Bois Lecture

This course satisfies the USM Core Engaged Learning requirement by providing students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities beyond the traditional classroom through sustained application, reflection and collaboration on issues of relevance beyond the university.

In “Engaged Learning” courses, students:

1. Apply their theoretical and conceptual knowledge to a substantial, sustained, and collaborative project or activity.
2. Situate the engaged learning experience in historical, cultural, technological, or other contexts.
3. Effectively listen to, collaborate and communicate with participants in the engaged learning experience.
4. Demonstrate self-directed learning through a substantial, sustained, and collaborative project or activity.
5. Critically reflect on their theoretical and conceptual knowledge as a result of the engaged learning experience.

Grade Distribution:

Participation	15%	Project 2	20%
Response Writing	15%	Project 3	20%
Project 1	20%	Final Project	10%

Participation:

Talking through your thought process and collaborating to create meaning are foundational to coming to terms with difficult texts and new ideas. Sharing your thoughts with others exposes you to different points of view and helps you to understand your own unique perspective. Discussion and active participation is thus an integral component of your work for this course. Remember--there are very few absolute right and wrong answers, and every student’s participation will be expected and respected.

Race: Reflection & Reality (Fall 2019)

Your participation grade is worth 10% of your final grade, and can mean the difference between an “A” and a “B” in this course.

Response Writing:

The course material we’ll be working with is demanding: the written texts require that we read carefully and reflect critically, and full investment in the course content requires attention and reflection.

Response writing is informal writing that helps you make connections between abstract ideas, texts, concepts, and your own lives. It also encourages you to cultivate a sense of mastery with the material. I do not expect your response writing to be error-free, but I do expect active engagement with course texts, themes, and concepts. Response writing is exploratory, tentative, and personal, rather than a standard closed-form academic essay with a thesis/argument and evidence. The essential purpose of reflective response writing is to give you an opportunity to explore the connections between course materials and your individual lives, experiences, emotions. *There are 11 opportunities to write responses in our class this semester--I expect you to choose EIGHT responses. This means you may choose to skip 3 with no penalty to your final grade!*

Major Projects:

This course covers three major units: Visualizing Race & Malaga Island; Dawnland People; and New Mainers. Each unit has a significant project associated with it, and each project is worth 20% of your final grade. These projects include: a deep map of Maine (Project 1); an Osher Map Library-based project (Project 2); and a graphic novella (Project 3). You will have the option to incorporate technologies into each project, but you may also choose to use pen and paper and I will not privilege one form over another. Specific instructions will be given in advance, and we will devote at least 2 class periods for independent work on each project.

Final Project:

For this final project, you will curate a sample of your work for this class from throughout the semester (including response writing, major projects, as well as responses to experiential learning activities) and assemble a portfolio that exhibits how your thinking about “race” has evolved throughout the semester. The writing in your final portfolio should be polished and clean (i.e. revised according to feedback, and with minimal typos and errors). In a 3-5 page Cover Letter, I expect you to discuss the ways you will apply the knowledge you acquired in this class to your life and work.

Extra Credit: students may earn up to 3 extra credit points for attending 1 additional experiential learning activity. Total points available per student is 9 points (for 3 events). Throughout the semester, thematically relevant opportunities will undoubtedly present themselves, as well. Students wishing to earn extra credit in HON 101 must do the following:

1. Notify me in advance (can be via email, and can be short notice)
2. Attend the event *in full*
3. Complete a 500-word reflection essay that connects the experiential learning opportunity/event with a theme related to this course.
4. Hand in the reflection essay no later than 3 days after the event.

Race: Reflection & Reality (Fall 2019)

The Seminar Environment:

One of the signature distinguishing features of USM's Honors Program is our small, discussion-based classes. The "seminar" designation means that I expect each of you to come to class prepared to participate in meaningful, thought-provoking discussions that deepen our individual and collective understandings of the course materials.

This classroom is a safe space where ideas will be expressed and respected. That does not mean that political perspectives, value debates, or conflicts over cultural differences are not allowed--on the contrary, I encourage you to raise such issues in class, and to engage with conflicting perspectives. I expect each of you to be mindful and respectful, and I strongly encourage you to be sensitive and careful about the language you choose to use in speaking and writing. Deprecating fellow classmates or others will not be tolerated. Prejudiced or hateful speech will be confronted.

Race: Reflection & Reality (Fall 2019)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

Everyone associated with the University of Southern Maine is expected to adhere to the principles of academic integrity central to the academic function of the University. Any breach of academic integrity represents a serious offense. Each student has a responsibility to know the standards of conduct and expectations of academic integrity that apply to academic tasks. Violations of academic integrity include any actions that attempt to promote or enhance the academic standing of any student by dishonest means. Cheating on an examination, stealing the words or ideas of another (i.e., plagiarism), making statements known to be false or misleading, falsifying the results of one's research, improperly using library materials or computer files, or altering or forging academic records are examples of violations of this policy which are contrary to the academic purposes for which the University exists. Acts that violate academic integrity disrupt the educational process and are not acceptable.

Attendance:

Because of the collaborative nature of this seminar, your presence and active engagement is essential. Absences for anything other than illness, emergency or religious holiday may reduce your final grade. If problems arise, notify me as soon as possible. Waivers for any part of this policy will occur at my discretion.

Class Cancellation:

In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a class meeting, I will notify you as soon as possible via email, and will adjust the course schedule accordingly.

Inclement Weather:

From time to time USM will close the University due to inclement weather (usually snow or ice). When the cancellation is for an entire day, the class content will be made up at another time or through additional, outside of class, assignments. When the school opens late or closes early, and the time selected is during the middle of class, we will still hold the class unless you are otherwise notified by me.

Final Examinations / Final Projects

In lieu of a final exam, I have created a Final Project, which will be due on **Wednesday, December 18th by 4:30 pm**. Final Projects may be turned in via email, or handed in at my Portland office (250 Luther Bonney Hall).