

WRT 105: Truth, Justice, and the “American” Way? Comic Books and the Rhetoric of Nationalism

Formal Class Meeting: Monday/Wednesday—3:25 to 4:40 Rush Rhees G-108

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Office: Rush Rhees 327

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 6pm to 7pm in the Robbins Library.
Individual appointments available on request, in person and on Skype (ProfONeil)

Required Texts: *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture*, Second Edition.
Edited by Randy Duncan, Matthew J. Smith, and Paul Levitz.

Course Description:

David Jay Gabriel, executive director of the New York City Comic Book Museum, has identified comic books as one of five “pure” American art forms alongside jazz, musical comedy, the mystery novel, and the banjo. Gabriel is just the latest to make such a claim. What about comic books makes them American? As the nation has changed, have comics changed in response? Do film and video game adaptations of comic titles carry the same sense of American heritage as their source material? In this course, we will explore these questions by analyzing the various periods of comic history, including super hero comics and the emergent digital age. These issues will be the focus of our work with writing, and we will utilize class discussion, pre-writing, peer review, self-assessment and the revision process to produce several well-organized essays. Our work will culminate in an 8-10 page research paper, which will demonstrate your ability to engage in a critical conversation connected to our course topic.

Objectives:

Regardless of your chosen major or profession, writing will be an important part of your academic and professional life. Becoming a *good* writer is not about mastering a particular pattern or technique. It isn’t about five-paragraph structures or the dutiful avoidance of the first person pronoun. Becoming a *good* writer is about understanding that your approach to writing must perpetually change depending on topic, audience and the ultimate impact that you want your writing to have. This notion of writing as a skill in constant flux is at the heart of our study of performance, as we will discuss and practice ways in which argumentative writing can be viewed as a performative process.

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Read deeply—It is impossible to create good writing without starting with good reading.
- Ask engaging questions about the texts that you read.
- Locate and synthesize professional discourse on a given topic, and find openings for you to participate in those conversations.
- Develop a debatable thesis about a text or issue that grows out of your questions and participates in the academic discourse.
- Support your ideas with multiple and various kinds of evidence.
- Identify different audiences for your thesis, and adapt your writing in order to more effectively convey your thoughts to those different audiences.

Primary Writing Requirement:

This course fulfills the University of Rochester's primary writing requirement. Please be aware that you must earn a grade of "C" or better in this course to successfully fulfill that requirement.

Grading:

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- **10%** Participation (including Peer Review and Self-Assessment)
- **15 %** Homework (Regular reading and short writing assignments)
- **10 %** Essay #1 (2-3 pages)
- **15 %** Essay #2 (2-3 pages)
- **15 %** Essay #3 (Abstract and Annotated Bibliography)
- **35 %** Essay #4 (8-10 page research paper)

Final drafts of formal essays will be assigned a letter grade (A, A-, B+, B, etc). Informal assignments will be graded with a check, check minus, or incomplete.

Required Reading/Viewing:

Required readings and film viewings may be listed in the course schedule below. I reserve the right to alter this schedule as the course progresses, but I will only do so if absolutely necessary for our work. The majority of course readings will be available in digital format on Blackboard. Whether you print these readings or have an e-reader, I will expect everyone to have access to the readings during class meetings. If you bring a digital device (e-reader, laptop, etc), the **only** appropriate use for that device in class is accessing our readings. Surfing the web is not something that needs to be done during our class meetings.

Attendance and Class Participation:

Please be in class, on time, with your homework (readings and writings) completed. Attendance is crucial for success in this course. We need you here to offer your own unique observations and feedback. Further, we will be engaging in an approach to writing, editing and revision that you have likely never encountered before. If you accrue too many absences, it will be very difficult for you to catch up with the rest of the class. **If you need to miss class for any reason, please talk to me beforehand.** Being in class is only half of the battle—please come prepared to work collaboratively. We're here to learn from each other and (ideally) have some fun.

Late or Missed Homework/Classwork:

I do not accept late homework for any reason. Stick to the course calendar. If you need to miss class for any reason, consult the course calendar and continue on with the reading. Missing the previous class meeting is not a valid reason for being unprepared for the next course meeting. Take advantage of my office hours if you need help getting caught up.

Short Written Work:

There will be regular writing assignments in this class including short prompts in class (such as journals and self-evaluative writing) as well as writing to be completed for homework (such as short research-related assignments and Blackboard discussion prompts). These assignments will be assessed in a variety of ways, and they should ultimately help you in both constructing and revising your larger, more formal written work.

Essays:

Final drafts of all essays should be submitted via e-mail. These final drafts should follow standard MLA formatting requirements (1 inch margins, double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, etc). Late papers will lose one third of a letter grade for every day that they are late—(this policy refers to calendar days, including weekends and holidays); if you are having trouble completing your paper before deadline, please speak to me **before** the paper is due.

Peer Review, Self-Assessment, and Revision:

Peer Review, Self-Assessment and Revision will be built into the structure of the course. All of our work should be done in the spirit of constant revision—You

should always be thinking about how new information, opinions and audiences will influence your overall argument.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center (located on the ground floor of Rush Rhees Library, near Connections) is an invaluable resource available to you. I encourage you to visit the writing center at least once for this course to get support at any stage of your writing process—from choosing a topic to revising your final draft. Nobody writes in a vacuum. My colleagues and I frequently get together to offer feedback on each other's writing and professional writers have been doing the same thing for hundreds of years. The Writing Center provides you with just such an outlet. Use it.

From the Writing Center's website: *"At the University of Rochester, we are all writers, and every writer needs a reader. The College Writing Center is a place where you can find readers who can provide critical feedback at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming for a topic to polishing a final draft. To learn more about the College Writing Center services and/or to find a tutor, please visit <http://writing.rochester.edu>*

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty should never be an issue in this course. Early in the semester, we will discuss the reasons and methods for avoiding plagiarism. After that point, this course will have a zero-tolerance policy regarding plagiarism, up to and including receiving a zero for the assignment and a referral to the Academic Honesty Board. Please read, internalize and be aware of the following information (this page is official university policy):

<http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/policy.html>

Support Services (CETL)

Please know that this classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and that I invite you to talk with me about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully. Further, I encourage you to make use of the resources available to you on campus, particularly the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The following information is from CETL's website: "CETL is a resource available to all students in the College. All kinds of students with all kinds of GPAs and academic records make use of our programs. We work with strong students who wish to become even better, as well as with students who have not yet tapped into the strategies needed to succeed in college, and everyone in between. We offer an extensive study group and Workshop program, individual study skills counseling, study skills workshops

and a study skills course, and disability support. We are located in 107 Lattimore Hall on the River Campus. To make an appointment or to learn more, stop by our offices, call us at (585) 275-9049, or send an email: cetl@rochester.edu ”

Community Contacts	
Alternatives for Battered Women Crisis Line	232-7353
Deaf Hotline TTY	232-2854
Family Court Domestic Violence Hotline	428-5787
Gay Alliance Victim Resource	244-8640
Lifeline	275-5151 or 211
Monroe County	
Domestic Violence Consortium	428-2215
Health Dept. STD/HIV Clinic	753-5375
Sheriff's Victim Assistance Office	753-4389
Rape Crisis Service	546-2777
Rochester Police Department	
Emergency	911
Victim Assistance	428-6630
SAATHI	234-1050
All phone numbers Area Code 585	
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Campus Support	
University Counseling Center (UCC)	275-3113
University Health Service (UHS)	
Eastman School	274-1230
Health Promotion Office	273-5775
Medical Center	275-2662
River Campus	275-2662
www.rochester.edu/uhs	
Center for Student Conflict Management	
Title IX Coordinator	275-4085
University Director of Spiritual Life	275-7814
University Director of Spiritual Life	275-8422
University Intercessor	275-9125
University Security	275-3333
www.rochester.edu/CARE	
All phone numbers Area Code 585	
We care. Call us.	
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Course Calendar:

1/13 (Wednesday)	<p>WRITE: Diagnostic—30 minutes—Choose one topic ONLY. E-mail it to me at the end of the 30 minutes from your preferred e-mail address.</p> <p>DO: Syllabus. Break class into three regular groups (The Marvels, the DC's, and the Digitals). Peer review/importance thereof. Importance of attendance (Cost of UR), Plagiarism Story and the UR plagiarism policy, discussion about “first drafts.” Discussion about the way I provide feedback (evaluative vs. summative, Grading Criteria in assignment sheets). Other notices—Homework in the syllabus (what the TBD means, scan vs. iStore vs. your own “ingenuity”), grading philosophy, “I Noticed,” Blackboard tour (Posting expectations—I Noticed, Info Card, etc.)</p> <p>HW (Due next class): READ—Ch. 1 in <i>Power of Comics</i>, “The History of Comic Books, Part I.” WATCH—Episode 1, “Truth, Justice, and the American Way,” of the documentary <i>Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle</i> (streaming for free via the Library—I’ll show you how to get there).</p>
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1/20 (Wednesday)	<p>WRITE: Journal—What do you associate with the notion of “American”? What are some of the things that are associated with your own country/state/home town/high school etc?</p> <p>DO: Discussion of HW, Pulling facts/quotations from sources (one from book and one from documentary)—Purdue Owl work (in text and works cited). Triangle, close reading. What is a thesis? Letter Jacket Diagnostic, Star Wars theory, and “A Birthday Party”—close reading and formulation of thesis based on factual research and close reading. Preview/prep for Library Day One.</p> <p>HW (to be read by 9/16): Golden Age Artifacts: Read Action Comics #1 (on Blackboard) and the first two issues of Captain America (via the iTunes download). You can read more Cap, but everyone needs to read the first two issues.</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
1/25 (Monday) Library Day One	<p>Library Day One: Our course librarian will come to class and give a tour of the library and its resources.</p>
1/27 (Wednesday) Paper 1 First Draft Due Peer Review	<p>WRITE: How do you edit a paper? What processes have you used for editing in the past?</p> <p>DO: Cutting a scene (What goes into a good paragraph? Group work—two step process: demo paragraph and then your own work from the first draft).</p> <p>HW: Don’t forget to read the Captain America and Superman comics by Wednesday.</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>

2/1 (Monday)	<p>WRITE: Identify something that you noticed while reading these comic books, and support that observation by referring to three SPECIFIC panels within those comic books (they don't need to be from the same issue).</p> <p>DO: Discussion (group and whole class) of Cap and Supes. The idea of the Research Question and how it leads to a thesis. Research break—what facts can you find that might shed some light on the things that surprised us?</p> <p>HW: Read the short article by Rawlins (on Blackboard).</p>
2/3 (Wednesday)	<p>WRITE: Journal—How do you go about getting something from a parent (be specific—which parent, what are you trying to get, how do you go about it)? How would you go about getting the SAME thing from a grandparent/aunt/uncle or other family member (again, be specific)?</p> <p>DO: Audience, Movie preview introductions, thesis writing, logical fallacies/Monty Python. Workshop our own introductions—selection of audience and “reading” of that audience.</p> <p>HW: Work on your papers. We MAY be going to the MAG on Monday (If not, the syllabus will be changed long before this date).</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
2/8 (Monday)	<p>FIELD TRIP: We will meet in our regular classroom, and then move to the bus ramp to go to the MAG museum for a tour and a workshop on reading different kinds of blended (visual + text) works.</p> <p>HW: Finish your papers. They are due on Wednesday.</p>

<p>2/10 (Wednesday)</p> <p>Paper 1 Final Draft Due (start of Unit 2)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Reflection/Self-Assessment: What do you think went well with your first paper? What are you still a little stuck on?</p> <p>DO: Intro the second paper. Argumentative Sources, Burke and the Parlor Metaphor. Writing personae—what have yours been thus far? Reflection of our trip to the MAG.</p> <p>HW: READ—Ch. 2 in <i>Power of Comics</i>, “The History of Comic Books, Part II.” WATCH—Episode 2, “With Great Power comes Great Responsibility,” of the documentary <i>Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle</i> (streaming for free via the Library—I’ll remind you how to get there).</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
<p>2/15 (Monday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Read the following excerpts from <i>Seduction of the Innocent</i> (provided in class). Choose one or two of them, and react to the ideas expressed in some way. Try to bring in information that you’ve learned from <i>The Power of Comics</i> and the <i>Superheroes</i> documentary.</p> <p>DO: Discussion of HW and <i>Seduction</i> excerpts. Marvel Age of comics. Parlor approach to <i>Seduction</i> (who has written about/in reaction to it? How?). Begin discussion about the kinds of parlors your second paper might join. Preview notion of 12 Angry Men (ie: present evidence and get reactions).</p> <p>HW: Watch <i>12 Angry Men</i> (link on Blackboard).</p>

<p>2/17 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Jot down the details of the case—based on what you would have known before the jury deliberation began, how do you think you might have voted if you were a juror? Which juror would you have disagreed with the most? Which juror would you have leaned on for support? Why (be specific in each case).</p> <p>DO: Discussion of <i>12 Angry Men</i> (and why it's here, haha). Model of parlor/academic discussion process. Using quotations—What are “Floating Quotations” and why are they evil? Two-Line scenes and quotations.</p> <p>HW: Prepare for Peer Review (ie: work on your paper, and have quotations/your parlor ready for workshopping). Read <i>Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane</i> (on Blackboard).</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
<p>2/22 (Monday)</p>	<p>Peer Review: Workshop EACH quotation in your draft with your partner—identify the quote, your reaction to it, and how to make that clear in your paper. Set up the parlor discussion jury room style. Who are the voices around this table? What are those voices saying? What are you adding that is new in some way?</p> <p>DO: Discussion of Lois Lane comic.</p> <p>HW: Read <i>Action Comics #252</i> and <i>Superman #199</i> (both on iTunes).</p>
<p>2/24 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Twenty+ years have gone by since our last encounter with these characters. What changes did you notice? What surprised you? Be specific, and point to individual pages/panels.</p> <p>DO: Discussion of Supes in the Silver Age. Supplement those discussions with breakouts to search for fact-based and argument-based sources that deal with the characters/time/context/trends that we notice.</p> <p>HW: Read <i>X-Men #1</i>, <i>Giant Sized X-Men #1</i>, <i>Amazing Fantasy #15</i>,</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>

<p>2/29 (Monday)</p> <p>Paper 2 First Draft Due</p>	<p>WRITE: These new comics are unencumbered with the Golden Age history of our previous touchstones. In what ways were they different from Superman and Captain America? In what ways were they the same?</p> <p>DO: Discussion of the 60s/70s comics. Return to the “pure American” notion. Is it being defined the same way? Go through each property and issue and find sources in breakouts to guide our thinking. Close Reading of the Gwen Stacy images.</p> <p>HW: Read <i>Superman vs. Ali</i>.</p>
<p>3/2 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: How do you react to the merging of the real and comic worlds?</p> <p>DO: Peer Review (Blocking for Performance, full paper work).</p> <p>HW: Work on your second paper. Start thinking about what you might write about for the big research paper.</p>
<p>3/6 through 3/13</p>	<p>SPRING BREAK!</p>
<p>3/14 (Monday)</p> <p>Paper 2 Final Draft Due (start of Unit 3)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Reflection/Self-Assessment: What do you think went well with your second paper? What are you still a little stuck on?</p> <p>DO: Intro paper three. Workshop abstracts and annotations (use previous papers). Comic grab bag day if time.</p> <p>HW: READ—Ch. 3 in <i>Power of Comics</i>, “The History of Comic Books, Part III.” WATCH—Episode 3, “A Hero can be Anyone,” of the documentary <i>Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle</i> (streaming for free via the Library—I’ll be disappointed if you can’t get there on your own yet, haha).</p>

<p>3/16 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE:</p> <p>DO: Discussion of modern era (HW reading/viewing). Historical events that influenced this era of comics. Group work/discussion on ideas for final papers and what kinds of research/conversations/parlors might be useful. More work with abstracts and annotations. Formal declarations of research questions.</p> <p>HW (Due by 11/4): Read the articles on Subtext by Collins and Morley (on Blackboard).</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
<p>3/21 (Monday)</p>	<p>Library Day Two. Our course librarian will be here to offer help in your search for sources—USE THIS TIME WISELY.</p> <p>HW: Read the <i>Death of Superman</i> (on Blackboard in three parts)—this is in addition to the Collins and Morley from last class).</p>
<p>3/23 (Wednesday)</p> <p>Paper 3 First Draft Due</p>	<p>NO FORMAL CLASS—Each student will arrange a 1 on 1 meeting to discuss ideas for the final research paper.</p>
<p>3/28 (Monday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Where have you seen subtext used in real life? Have you ever consciously used subtext? When/why/how? Be specific.</p> <p>DO: Subtext (Morley/Collins—find quotations to react to in each), Code switching/Linguistics, Seth Letter, Where to use subtext in writing (audience, intro/conclusion/topic and transition sentences). Workshop these using previous papers. Discussion—Cap and Supes in modern comics. Differences and Similarities?</p> <p>HW: Read <i>X-Men #170</i>, <i>Spiderman #17</i>, and <i>X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills</i> (all on Blackboard). Also, please read the "Smokescreen" promotional comic (on Blackboard).</p>

<p>3/30 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Think back—when, if at all, have you seen comic book characters mentioned in the news. Be as specific as you can be.</p> <p>DO: Discussion of modern age Spider-Man, Avengers, X-men. Media blitzing (Death of S./C., Breaking of B., S. and citizenship, New Ms. M., Break up of L and C, Riverdale and g.c., etc—break them up amongst the groups). Fan campaigns (Photon/Captain Marvel).</p> <p>HW: Read the 6 issues from <i>The New Warriors</i> (on Blackboard).</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
<p>4/4 (Monday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Why is it important to not just find “enough” sources, but the “right” sources? What are the “right” sources?</p> <p>DO: Discussion of modern modern comics. What makes them different? How are they similar? Comics "born" into modernity. Difference in medium (omnibus vs. floppy vs. digital vs. graphic novel).</p> <p>The importance of skimming and speculative tone in abstracts and annotations (write an annotation for a source you haven’t actually read yet—right in class).</p> <p>HW: Bring two copies of your mostly-completed third paper to class with you on Monday.</p>
<p>4/6 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>Peer Review/Workshop: You and two partners will go through each other’s third papers—this should be a paper that boosts your grade. This last-minute peer workshop/checklist should help that to happen.</p> <p>HW: Make your final edits to your third paper.</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>

<p>4/11 (Monday)</p> <p>Paper 3 Final Draft Due</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—8-10 page Research Paper. It looms. What are your thoughts about this project? Have you ever written something of this length before? If so, how did it go? What are your biggest concerns going into this project? Be specific.</p> <p>DO: Intro paper four—structure of the research paper. Ideas of adaptation (American Shakespeare/NW page). How to organize a research paper.</p> <p>HW: Chapter 12 in <i>Power of Comics</i>, “Comics Culture Around the World.”</p>
<p>4/13 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Many of the people in your generation know of comics from other media—they know the characters/storylines, but have often never read a comic book. What is your own non-comic book experience with comics culture? Be specific.</p> <p>DO: Discussion of other markets and other media. Video Games (Youtube examples—I will pull/show some, then you see what you can find based on the titles in our focus group). Sign up for Presentation Slots.</p> <p>HW: Watch the adapted media for Superman and Captain America (links on Blackboard). Prepare to present (5 minute individual close readings).</p>
<p>4/18 (Monday)</p> <p>Start Presentations</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—what did you think of the casting of the various shows? Did the characters/actors look or sound the way you expected? Why or why not? Be specific.</p> <p>DO: Discuss Supes/Cap media. Begin Presentations.</p> <p>HW: Watch the adapted media for Spider-Man, X-Men, and the Avengers.</p>

<p>4/20 (Wednesday)</p>	<p>WRITE: Journal—Same question I asked Monday, but for these texts.</p> <p>DO: Discuss Spidey/X/Avengers. Presentations. Check up on the final paper (in group and then full class—based on the various sections of a rubric/organization handout).</p> <p>HW: Work on your research papers. No more homework in this class.</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>
<p>4/25 (Monday)</p> <p>Final Paper Check Up Date.</p>	<p>DO: Watch and discuss some adaptations of Punisher/Spawn. Why no New Warriors? Why no Runaways? Generation X clip.</p> <p>Last day of presentations.</p> <p>Check up on final paper progress.</p>
<p>4/27 (Wednesday)</p> <p>Paper 4 Final Draft Due (sort of)</p>	<p>READ: I'll have something for you to read.</p> <p>EAT: I'll have something for you to eat.</p> <p>DO: Respond the reading, taking it forward, the realities and responsibilities of writing and reading in the world in which we live, and course evaluations.</p> <p>THINK: At the beginning of the semester, we discussed what it meant for anything to be “purely” American. Have your thoughts on this changed at all after our work this semester? Why/why not? How can these ideas be applied beyond our specific topic?</p> <p>HW: Go forth, and be amazing.</p> <p>I NOTICED:</p>