

Research into Comics - Fall 2023

USP407/507 (CRN 13734/13730)

WR407/507 (CRN 13813/13833)

Toulan School of Urban Studies & Planning and Department of English, Portland State University

Class Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:50pm

IN-PERSON: URBN Room 304 (506 SW Mill)

INSTRUCTORS

Kacy McKinney, PhD (she/her pronouns) - Email: kmckinney@pdx.edu

Teaching Assistant Professor in Urban Studies & Planning and Illustrator/Comic Artist

Ryan Alexander-Tanner (he/him pronouns) - Email: ra9@pdx.edu

Adjunct Faculty and Professional Comic Artist

CONTACT

The best way to contact us is through email using your pdx.edu email account. *Please do not use messaging in Canvas.* We ask that you please write "Comics into Research" or the course number (407 or 507) in all email subject lines and please send general questions to *both* of us. We will send emails to the class to your pdx.edu accounts and make announcements and changes to the syllabus through Canvas. *We expect that you will check your pdx.edu email account and Canvas regularly.* We generally do not respond to emails before 9am or after 5pm (and not at all on weekends) - we also do not expect responses from you during these times.

OFFICE HOURS

Wednesdays 12-1:30pm (via Zoom)

This is the best way to meet with us - use the link provided on the Canvas course site and in the first email from us to schedule an appointment during office hours. We plan to hold office hours together during this time. If this time does not work for you, please just email us to arrange for an appointment at another time.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students in this class will explore comics as a deeply engaging medium for communicating complex stories and research findings. Students will learn about comics theory and gain hands-on experience in processes of independent and collaborative research for and with comics creation. Offering a range of approaches to research and comics creation, students of the social sciences, arts and humanities, the natural sciences, and professional fields will all gain critical skills for communicating research to wide audiences. No prior experience with comics creation or drawing skills necessary.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate a rich understanding of how comics function as a visual/storytelling medium.
- Complete a full process of research-based comics development (*focused research; ideation, drafting/layout, editing, penciling, inking, lettering, etc.*).
- Utilize a complete vocabulary for discussing and evaluating comics and research.
- Describe the ways that academic disciplines utilize and discuss comics in relation to research.
- Craft a persuasive case for the use of comics in research/as mode for reporting on research.
- Explain a range of issues, approaches, and challenges of effectively communicating research through comics (from ethics of representation to positionality and authorship).

RESEARCH

Please note that this course requires you to conduct research – to learn about the world outside of yourself, to gain new knowledge. We will show you how to apply/translate that research into the form of comics. While you are welcome to use your personal experience and identity as part of your storytelling/framing/logic – at least 75% of the work you create should reflect active and engaged research, new learning and growth. In your projects, please choose topics through which research may offer you a change in perspective, growth through the process. We want to see research broadening and informing your work/your research should shape the outcome of the project.

As you consider topics for the different assignments, please seek range. We encourage you to stretch yourself, to take the opportunity to learn about something new, to enrich your understanding. In other words, in this course you are learning about and practicing both advanced research AND using the medium of comics to communicate that research. We will also discuss the uses of comics *within* research processes and fieldwork, but you won't be expected to practice this during the class. For graduate students with advanced research experience or who are in the process of writing a thesis using research they have already conducted, the final assignment could offer a means to translate that ongoing work.

COURSE READINGS & MATERIALS

You will need to either purchase or borrow *one book from a list we will provide* for the midterm (we'll discuss this in the first week). All other readings will be available on the course Canvas website for download or reading online. We recommend bringing readings to class as much as possible (*whether on a laptop or printed out*). We will draw both in and out of class. The supply list is up to you - use your tablet, bring pens/pencils and erasers and paper - just be sure that you always have something to draw with. If you prefer to use a tablet, please also have a pen/pencil you like handy for in-class group activities.

INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Building an inclusive learning environment requires us to work together to listen, and make room for all to have a say - asking questions and interacting in an encouraging way while also taking care to create space for others; to support each other to find our voice; and to recognize and anticipate a wide range of perspectives, backgrounds,

experiences, identities, and ways of being in the world. We hope to begin from a place of mutual respect and gentle personalism – *taking each other where we're at each day, offering the benefit of the doubt, and being aware that the workings of power & privilege impact different communities/individuals in different ways.*

These continue to be extremely difficult times and we are all experiencing the impacts (though in differing ways and to differing degrees) of: COVID-19 and on-going struggles against oppression and inequality. *Please be gentle with one another and do not make assumptions about what anyone is going through. We can all promote safe and inclusive learning by listening deeply (including reading carefully and reflecting) and being ready to learn from those around us.* Words matter and are powerful, and we encourage you to think critically about the words you are using, particularly when speaking about a community or an individual from a community that you are not a part of. Take your time, and consider the impact of your words. Find a balance between participating actively and also making space for and encouraging the participation of others. Thank you, in advance, for your patience with both of us and with one another as we continue to navigate the current reality together. We will work to support you in engaging with us and with one another in respectful and encouraging ways; *begin from the knowledge that behind each comment, drawing, and statement is a person who deserves to be treated with respect and care.* We will collectively develop a group/community agreement in the first week of class, which will be a living document to guide us throughout the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

Please do your best to arrive on time. If you are late, please enter the room discreetly. Consistently arriving late to class will impact your grade. If you're sick, please do not come to class. Missing one/two classes will not impact your grade significantly. In terms of missed material, you are responsible for catching up and communicating with us: it is a good idea to find someone in the class to touch base with in case you have to miss class. Be sure to check Canvas for materials and information you may have missed, which will be listed in the module for the week. Please do not expect either of us to email you a summary of missed material. You're welcome to schedule an appointment for office hours to discuss questions, concerns, and missed material. Please let us know if you need to miss class due to religious observation. Please communicate as soon as possible if there's something getting in the way of learning or making you fall behind (due to illness/extreme circumstances). *We'll support you in any way we can.*

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

Through these assignments we will examine different formats including comic strips, comics for the web (infinite canvas), and comics for traditional print media. Several assignments require you to draw. **We'll evaluate your work on the clarity of communication using comics/understanding of the medium, evidence of ethical/responsible and high standards of research, and other components of the assignment, not on the quality of your artistry - though we're happy to provide feedback on that, at your request.**

Engagement & Participation (20% of course grade)

Along with class attendance and participation in everyday discussions of readings, we will have small group discussions and other in-class activities and, occasionally, written reviews of readings. Please arrive on time and ready to participate actively. Be sure you always have something to draw with (pencil/pens/paper).

Assignment 1: Self-Intro (5% of course grade) - DUE 10/3

This short assignment (the body of this must be exactly 200 words) is a chance for us to get to know you. Help us understand who you are and what matters to you. What do we need/what do you want us to know about you? What is your interest in comics? What is your interest in research? What specific things are you hoping to accomplish in this class? Feel free to interpret this as creatively as you like, but watch the word count. You can also include comments, concerns, questions. Submit on Canvas.

Assignment 2: Comic Strip (15%) - Draft DUE 10/10; Final DUE 10/17

Choose a news article and adapt it into a 4-panel comic strip. This assignment requires you to distill the information presented in the article down to a few essential points and/or facts in order to present it in the concise format of a comic strip. Submit your chosen article with your draft. Submit on Canvas.

Midterm: Book/Method Review/Presentation (15%) - DUE 10/26

By week 3, choose a research-based full length graphic novel (from a list we'll provide or one that you choose but run past us first). (1) read the book carefully/thoroughly, (2) write a critical review of 750-1,000 words - submit via Canvas before class on 10/26, and (3) present briefly for 3-5 minutes in class on 10/26 (showing a couple of pages as slides to give us a sense for the work); there will be a google folder for you to upload pages/panels/slide into before class. Your review and presentation should focus on the questions we will be asking as a class about using the medium to effectively communicate complex ideas and research-based information (how did they do it, what approach did they take, how clearly/effectively does it communicate?).

Assignment 3: Explainer Comic (20%) - Draft DUE 10/31; Final DUE 11/9

A short (roughly 16 panels) comic that examines and explains an issue or an event. This assignment requires you to do your own research. Include at least three legitimate sources, a quote either from an interview you did or a primary source who is knowledgeable on the issue, and a chart or graph, and it should be formatted for the web (we will discuss). Submit on Canvas. Please write in complete sentences.

Assignment 4: Research-Based Comic (25%) - Draft DUE 11/21; Final DUE 12/7

Present a body of research in the format of a **4-page comic**. This assignment is open to creative interpretation in consultation with us. Students can simply create a new explainer comic in this expanded format, adapt an historical event or biography, create an historical (accurate and research-based) work of fiction, write an entirely fictional work founded in research (i.e. a science-fiction narrative grounded in scientific research). Use a minimum of four sources of information that are qualified sources. These could include: published articles, books, primary documents, news articles, interviews (as in Assignment 3). Include a full/complete bibliography with your draft and final work. For the draft also include a note describing how you are incorporating research into this comic. *Project specs:* Original pages are 11 (wide) X 17 (tall). Talk to us before using a different canvas size. .5-inch margins on the top and bottom, .25-inch margins on the sides. Gutter size is 1/8 of an inch.

Assignment 4.2 (required for grad - USP/WR 507 - Students only) - DUE 12/7

Meetings with Kacy by week 7 to discuss details. Draft or outline due Wednesday 11/30. Create a proposal for a larger research project either using comics as a method in the research or with the intention to report the research findings in comic form. Describe the research and plan, make a solid argument for the use of comics as a method or as a reporting mechanism, and be sure to include a literature review. We'll provide more details, but note that this can be adapted to fit specific grant or fellowship applications.

DUE DATES AT A GLANCE:

Assignment 1: 10/3

Assignment 2: Draft 10/10 – Final 10/17

Midterm: 10/26

Assignment 3: Draft 10/31 – Final 11/9

Assignment 4: Draft 11/21 – Final 12/7

Assignment 4.2 (Grads only): Draft 11/21 – Final 12/7

COURSE SCHEDULE

Subject to change, and we will notify you through Canvas announcements of any changes. Please check Canvas for the most up to date readings list and schedule. We'll aim to have any presentations/slides and other materials available on Canvas on Fridays for the following week. Thank you for your patience and also please note that we can adapt as needed to the specific interests and needs of students in the course. Tell us what you are interested in and how we can support your learning!

WEEK 1: Getting Started & Research Standards I

Tuesday 9/26: Intros, Syllabus, Intro to Assignment 1, Jam Comic Exercise

Reading: Course Syllabus

Demo: How to hand in your work

Thursday 9/28: Research Standards, Vocabulary of Comics Lesson, Discussion

Reading: Chute, Hillary. 2017. "Introduction: Comics for grown-ups?" In: *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere*. Harper: New York. Pages: 1-32.

WEEK 2: Research Standards II, Process, Intro to Academic Comics

Tuesday 10/3: Research Standards, Guest: Librarian Emily Ford, Intro to Midterm

*****LOCATION: PSU Main Library Room 160**

DUE: Assignment 1 (*Submit in Canvas before class*)

No Readings. Bring research and comics collection questions for Librarian Emily Ford.

Thursday 10/5: Process Lesson; Intro to Assignment 2/Intro to Strips; Academic Comics

Assignment 2 is a short turnaround time on purpose

- Kuttner, P.J., N. Sousanis, M.B. Weaver-Hightower. 2018. "How to Draw Comics the Scholarly Way: Creating Comics-Based Research in the Academy". In: Leavy, P. (Editor). *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Guildford Press: New York. Pages 396-422.
- Weaver-Hightower MB. 2017. "Losing Thomas & Ella: A Father's Story (A Research Comic)". *Journal of Medical Humanities*. Sep. 38(3): 215-230.

WEEK 3: Anatomy of Comics, Assign. 2 Draft/Feedback, Academic Comics

Tuesday 10/10: Anatomy of Comics; Midterm Book Choice; Readings Discussion

DUE: Assignment 2 DRAFT (Submit in Canvas before class)

- Atalay, S. et al. 2019. "Multimodal Anthropologies: Ethno/Graphic Storytelling: Communicating Research and Exploring Pedagogical Approaches through Graphic Narratives, Drawings, and Zines" *American Anthropologist*. 121(3): 769-772
- Choose 1-2 essays mentioned in the Atalay et al (2019) reading to focus on.

Thursday 10/12: Comics & Field Research, Feedback on Assign. 2, Passage of Time & Subjective Perspective, Discussion

- McNicol, S. 2019. "Using participant-created comics as a research method" *Qualitative Research Journal*. 19(3): 236-247.
- Explore: [Graphic Lives Project website](#)

WEEK 4: Explainer Comics/Intro to Assign. 3, Drawing/Comics and Fieldwork

Tuesday 10/17: Intro to Assignment 3/Intro to Explainer Comics/Readings Discussion

DUE: Assignment 2 Final (Submit in Canvas before class)

- Blas, T. 2016. You Say Latino. *Vox*. 8/12. <https://www.vox.com/2015/8/19/9173457/hispanic-latino-comic>
- Quinn, A. and J. Roche. 2014. Syria's Climate Conflict. *Mother Jones*. 5/29. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/05/syria-climate-years-living-dangerously-symbolia/>
- Taylor, W. 2018. America Isn't Ready for a Pandemic. *The Nib*. 1/8. <https://thenib.com/america-ready-pandemic/>

Thursday 10/19: Comics, Drawing, Fieldnotes

- Forde, S.D. 2022. "Drawing your way into ethnographic research: comics and drawing as arts-based methodology" *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 14(4): 648-667.

- McKinney, K. 2017. "Writing/drawing experiences of silence and intimacy in fieldwork relationships" In: P. Moss and C. Donovan (Eds.) *Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography*. London: Routledge.

WEEK 5: Authorship, Assignment 3 Discussion, Presenting Midterms

Tuesday 10/24: Discussion of Authorship (through Explainers); Assignment 3 Ideas

- Alexander-Tanner, R. 2015. A Lost Possibility: Women on Miscarriage. *The Nib*. 2/15. <https://thenib.com/a-lost-possibility-women-on-miscarriage-e5e4237723c3/>
- Taylor, W. 2020. Black Mothers Face Far Worse Health Outcomes. How Do We Fix It? *The Nib*. 2/20. <https://thenib.com/pregnancy-and-race/>
- Wheeler, K. and R. Devereaux. 2019. Crossed. *The Nib*. 2/13. <https://thenib.com/crossed-family-separation/>

Thursday 10/26: Present midterms. Poll: what hands-on process demos would you like?

DUE: Midterm (Submit in Canvas before class) - No readings.

WEEK 6: Focus on Assignment 3 & Collab Research-Based Comics Anthologies Part 1

Tuesday 10/31: Peer Reviews, Process Demo

DUE: Assignment 3 Draft (Submit in Canvas before class)
No readings.

Thursday 11/2: Group Meetings & Collab Research-Based Comics Anthologies Part 1

- Bennett, M., A. Kolovos, T. Mares, J.D. Doucet (Editors). 2021. *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*. Vermont Folklife Center. (Scroll down to view first pages and click stories to read them).
- Mares, T., N. Wolcott-MacClausland, J. Doucet, A. Kolovos, M. Bennet. 2020. "Using chiles and comics to address the physical and emotional wellbeing of farmworkers in Vermont's borderlands" *Agriculture and Human Values*. 37: 197-208.

WEEK 7: Collab Research-Based Comics Anthologies Part 2 & Intro to Assignment 4

Tuesday 11/7: Collaborative Research-Based Comics Anthologies Part 2 and Assignment 3 troubleshooting, if needed.

- McKinney, K. (Editor) 2022. *Changing the Narrative: Stories of Student Homelessness and Housing Instability*. Street Roots/Portland State University.

Thursday 11/9: Assignment 3 DUE/Introduction to Assignment 4

DUE: Assignment 3 (Submit in Canvas before class)

No readings. Explainer readings in class (optional)

WEEK 8: Making the Case/Pitch, Getting Grants, Publishing and Promoting

Tuesday 11/14: Assignment 4 share ideas and discuss; Getting the work out part 1

No readings. Process demos in-class!

Thursday 11/16: Guest TBA; Getting the work out part 2

Assignment 3 Explainer Comics grades/feedback by end of day.

WEEK 9: Work Session, Feedback

Tuesday 11/21: Work Session/Peer Reviews/Check-ins

DUE: Assignment 4 Draft (Submit in Canvas before class)

No readings. In-class explainer readings (optional/strongly encouraged)

Thursday 11/23: NO CLASS (Receive feedback from instructors)

WEEK 10: Finishing Up

Tuesday 11/28: Assignment 4 Work Session/Trouble-Shooting

No readings.

Thursday 11/30: Party/Closure at Location TBA

No readings. Optional/encouraged readings of Explainers and 4-pagers if done early

DUE: Assignment 4 by 12/3 (Submit on Canvas by 11:59pm)

POLICIES:

ON PRIVACY: It is unacceptable to copy or share course materials, readings, text, or images from/of your classmates or from your instructors into any other online forum or space outside of this course. Please see the [PSU Student Code of Conduct and Responsibility](#) for more information.

SUBMITTING WORK ONLINE: It is your responsibility to verify that (1) all files are submitted in Canvas prior to the deadline and (2) all submitted files are those that you intended to be graded for the assignment. Acceptable file formats are Word or PDF or JPEG files, unless otherwise noted. Please be sure that scanned images are clearly labeled, in order, and of sufficient quality.

TECHNOLOGY ACCESS: The use of Canvas, PSU email, and other computer tools such as Google Drive/Docs are required for this course. Please let me know if you have concerns about accessing technology (internet/computer) for this course.

Access & Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

PSU values diversity and inclusion. Our goal is to create a learning environment that is accessible, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. We are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify us. Additionally, the Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. The DRC works with students who have physical, learning, cognitive, mental health, sensory, and other disabilities. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations.

If you already have accommodations, we have likely already received notification from the DRC and we will be in touch (or you can touch base with us) to discuss any details, questions, or concerns. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, Suite 116. You can also contact the DRC at 503-725-4150 or drc@pdx.edu. Visit the DRC online at <https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/>

Title IX Mandatory Reporting

As instructors, students frequently come to us for assistance in matters that are not related to the course material. Please be aware that PSU's policies require instructors to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about these experiences with an employee who does not have these reporting responsibilities and can keep the information confidential, please contact one of the following campus resources (or visit this link):

- Confidential Advocates: 503.894.7982, or by scheduling on-line (psuwrc.youcanbook.me) (for matters regarding sexual harassment and interpersonal/sexual violence)
- PSU Sexual Misconduct Response information
- Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC): 1880 SW 6th Ave, 503.725.2800
- Student Legal Services: 1825 SW Broadway, (SMSU) M343, 503.725.4556
- For more information, please complete the required student module: Understanding Sexual Misconduct & Resources in your Canvas.

PSU Cultural Resource Centers:

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. We honor diversity, explore social justice issues, celebrate cultural traditions, and foster student identities, success, and leadership. Our centers include the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, and Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian

American Student Center and the Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian Initiative. We provide students with employment, volunteer, and leadership opportunities. Along with extensive programming, our spaces offer resources such as computer labs, lounge areas, and study spaces. All are welcome! Website:

<https://www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers/>

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to be ethical not only in the online and physical classrooms, but also out of the classroom. It is in all students' interest to avoid committing acts of academic dishonesty and to discourage others from committing such acts. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- engages in any form of academic deceit;
- refers to materials, sources or uses devices not authorized by instructor for use on an assignment;
- provides inappropriate aid to another person in connection with any assignment;
- engages in Plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the act of claiming someone's work as your own through copying it without giving the creator of the work credit. Plagiarism can also include using another person's theories, ideas, or phrases without proper attribution. The simplest way to avoid plagiarizing is to always cite the sources from which you gather information or develop arguments – just cite anything you use from someone else (it actually makes your work stronger!). Plagiarism is a serious issue and is a violation of the PSU Student Conduct Code. University policy requires instructors to report all instances of plagiarism and penalize the perpetrator(s) according to guidelines set. We will discuss strategies for citing sources in your work and please see me and/or consult library resources with questions about how to avoid plagiarism. *I proactively monitor for academic dishonesty. Any plagiarism results in a zero on the assignment or activity and reporting to the Dean of Student Life Office.*

Additional Resources - In addition to the resources mentioned here is a list of many important resources available to students at PSU:

- **Advising & Career Services:** helps students choose a major or career, provides workshops and classes. <https://www.pdx.edu/advising/> and <https://www.pdx.edu/careers/>
- **Campus Directory:** contact information of faculty and staff. <https://www.pdx.edu/faculty-staff-directory>
- **Emergency Funds:** list of funds available through various colleges, schools, and resource centers to students experiencing hardships <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/emergency-funds>
- **International Student Services:** immigration advising, life advising, programming and support for international students. <https://www.pdx.edu/international-students/>
- **The Learning Center:** offers support with current coursework and helps develop effective learning strategies. <https://www.pdx.edu/learning-center/>
- **Queer Resource Center:** provides students along the sexuality and gender spectrum with the support they need to persist to graduation. <https://www.pdx.edu/queer-resource-center/>

- **Resource Center for Students with Children:** offers integrated services that support students' goals to be effective parents while succeeding in their academic pursuits. <https://www.pdx.edu/students-with-children/>
- **Student Activities & Leadership Programs:** enrich and integrate students' leadership and academic experiences to educate students to be ethical, socially just, and civically engaged leaders. <https://www.pdx.edu/student-leadership/>
- **Student Legal Services:** provides legal advice, legal representation, mentorship, community partnerships, education designed to empower. <https://www.pdx.edu/student-legal-services/>
- **Student Sustainability Center:** offers transformational hands-on learning experience in an effort to integrate sustainability with student life. <https://www.pdx.edu/student-sustainability-center/>
- **University Success:** facilitates academic engagement, intellectual connection, and collaborative learning among Portland State University students through student living communities and campus community building. <https://www.pdx.edu/housing/usuccess>
- **Veterans Resource Center:** provides comprehensive support to student veterans and service members to meet their unique needs. <https://www.pdx.edu/veterans-resource-center/>
- **Women's Resource Center:** advocates for the best educational and campus experience for the entire community by advancing social justice, ensuring access to personal empowerment, and working toward a safe, healthy campus. <https://www.pdx.edu/womens-resource-center/>
- **The Writing Center:** help writers at any stage of writing process and with all varieties of projects: class assignments, resumes, application essays, presentations, creative writing. <https://www.pdx.edu/writing-center/>

Basic Needs at Portland State - It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like safe shelter, sleep, and nutrition. Resource centers across campus are here to provide assistance, referrals, and support. Here is a list of contacts for assistance:

- Basic Needs Hub: basicneedshub@pdx.edu
- Emergency Housing: PSU Landing at FUMC: <https://fumcpdx.org/landing/>
- Free Food Market: <https://www.pdx.edu/student-access-center/free-food-market>
- C.A.R.E. Team: askdos@pdx.edu; (503) 725-4422; <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/care-program>
- Student Health and Counseling: askshac@pdx.edu; (503) 725-2800; <https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/>