

COMM 648.01 Winter Quarter 2005  
History of American Newspaper Comic Strips; call number 11691-2  
Time: M W 10:30 am-12:18 pm. Credits: 5  
Professor Lucy Shelton Caswell.  
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Office Hours/9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. M W or by appointment

### **Course objectives**

To provide an introductory survey of the history of American newspaper comic strips.  
To examine the role and functions of comic strips in newspapers.  
To evaluate the impact of comic strips on readers.  
To discuss styles and techniques of cartooning.  
To consider the cartoonist's worldview and its relationship to his or her art.  
To develop critical judgment and analytical skills.  
To strengthen research competence.

648.01 is a seminar for upper level undergraduates and graduate students who are expected to read all assignments and be prepared to discuss them during each class meeting. The professor assumes that all students enrolled in the class are familiar with and interested in American newspaper comic strips. Students are expected to read current newspaper comic strips in order to discuss them in class. Editorial cartoons, comic books, graphic novels, magazine cartoons and animation will not be discussed in this class except as they relate to newspaper comic strips.

### **Reading assignments**

All of the readings listed in this syllabus are required. 648.01 has two textbooks: *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud (either the Tundra or Harper 1993 editions are acceptable) and *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* by Robert C. Harvey (University Press of Mississippi, 1994). Both are available at bookstores. All of the other assignments are in a course packet that is available at Tuttle Cop-ez or they will be distributed in class.

If you do not have access to daily newspapers, you may read current comic strips on-line at the following syndicate sites:

Copley (<https://www.copleynews.com/>)  
Creators (<http://www.creators.com/comics.html>)  
King Features (<http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/comics/comics.htm>)  
United Media (<http://www.comics.com/>)  
Universal Press Syndicate (<http://www.ucomics.com/comics/>)  
Tribune Media Services (<http://www.comicspage.com/>)  
Washington Post Writers Group (<http://www.postwritersgroup.com/comics.htm>)

Students are required to read each assignment prior to class on the day it is listed. Questions are given in the syllabus with each assignment to assist students as they read. Participation in the discussion of reading assignments is required.

Each day when readings are assigned, class members must hand in one written question

about some part of the assigned readings. If more than one reading is assigned, you may write your question about any of the assignments for that day. Questions are due at the beginning of each class and must not duplicate the questions in the syllabus. Each student must be prepared to ask her/his question in class and lead discussion related to it.

## **Grading**

Course grades will be weighted as follows:

Class participation and oral presentations	20%
Tests (2)	30%
Papers (2)	20%
Research paper	30%

There are two optional extra credit assignments. See January 19 and March 2 for details.

## **Course requirements**

Students are required to attend class, read assignments, participate in discussions, and meet deadlines for handing in assigned work. Late assignments will have one letter grade deducted from the grade of the paper for each day the assignment is overdue. Assignments are due on the date they are listed.

Chronic late arrivals and/or absences will result in lowering your grade one-half letter grade (for example, from a B to B-).

Two short papers are assigned. Each is to be a maximum length of two pages. The two optional extra credit papers may be no longer than two pages. Papers may not be submitted by e-mail or e-mail attachments. Paper copies are due on the day stated in this syllabus. Late papers will result in a grade one letter lower for each day the paper is late.

Each test will consist of ten objective questions and one essay question. Each test will cover the ideas presented in reading assignments, slide lectures and class discussions. Thirty minutes of class time will be allowed for each test. Make-up tests are not offered except in extenuating circumstances.

Research papers may be written on any topic related to the history of American newspaper comic strips. Research papers may not be submitted by e-mail or e-mail attachments. Specific instructions are given in the handout "COMM 648.01 Research Papers." Recommended lengths are 10-12 pages for undergraduates and 20 pages for graduate students. After the submission of the required outline, the topic of the paper may not be changed without the permission of the professor. Graduate students are required to use primary source materials for their research. Research papers may be re-written to improve a grade. The graded version must be returned to the professor when the revised version is handed in. Revised research papers will not be given a lower grade than the initial paper.

Students are responsible for being aware of and obeying the University's rules regarding academic misconduct and the Code of Student Conduct. Please talk with the professor if you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism. All written work must include documentation of your sources.

## **Week 1/M, January 3**

Introduction to COMM 648.01

Course objectives and requirements

Discussion of "COMM 648.01 Research Papers: A Guide to Their Preparation"

Reading in class: A Study Finds Comics Read by 113 Million" by David Astor, *Editor & Publisher* (January 30, 1993), 34.

Why do American newspaper comic strips merit study?

What does it mean to read comic strips?

### **Week 1/W, January 5**

Assigned readings:

\*"Practices of Looking," Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: 2001), 11-44.

\*"The Lineage of the Newspaper Comic Strip from Hogarth to Howarth," Jenny E. Robb in the exhibition catalogue *Before the Yellow Kid* (distributed in class on January 3).

How and why did comic strips begin?

Which cartoonists led in their development?

Why do newspapers print comic strips?

How is the term "comic strip" defined?

### **Week 2/M, January 10**

Assigned readings:

\*N.C. Christopher Couch, "The Yellow Kid and the Comic Page," *The Language of Comics: Word and Image*, Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons, eds. (University Press of Mississippi: 2001), 60-74.

\*Mark D. Winchester, "Hully Gee, It's a War!!! The Yellow Kid and the Coining of 'Yellow Journalism,'" *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 2:3 (November 1995) 23-37.

\*Harvey, chapter 1.

Who is the Yellow Kid and why is he important?

What are the origins of the term "yellow journalism"?

What is visual-verbal interdependence?

What is narrative breakdown and how can it be evaluated?

What are the various types of comic strips described by Harvey?

Slide presentation in class on newspaper comic strips.

Introduction to the Cartoon Research Library

### **Week 3/W, January 12**

Assigned readings:

\*McCloud, chapters 1, 2, 3

\*"The Story of How Comics Are Created" by Heckler & Lane (distributed in class January 10).

What is McCloud's definition of "cartoon"?

What is the "language of the comics"?

What is "closure"?

How are transitions made in comics?

Do comics have cultural attributes?

### **Week 3/M, January 17**

Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. No class.

### **Week 4/W, January 19**

Assignment: Write a brief paper (maximum length two pages) on the “language” of comic strips. How does it function? Why is it effective? Does it have limitations? If so, what are these limitations? Additional sources you may want to read are *The Lexicon of Comicana* by Mort Walker (NC1767.W25) and *Comics and Sequential Art* by Will Eisner (NC1320.E35 1985 or NC1320.E35 1990).

Assigned reading:

\*McCloud, chapters 4, 5, 6

Why and how are time and motion related in comics?

How do art and language converge in comics?

What types of word/picture combinations are described by McCloud?

FOR EXTRA CREDIT: Write a brief review essay (maximum length of two pages) about the exhibition *Drawing Fire: Controversial Comics by Milton Caniff*. Please note that this exhibit closes Friday, January 14.

### **Week 4/M, January 24**

Assigned reading:

\*McCloud, chapters 7, 8, 9

Why and how are time and motion related in comics?

How do art and language converge in comics?

In McCloud=s view, are comics art?

What is the impact of color upon comics?

### **Week 4/W, January 26**

Assigned reading:

\*Alan Gowans, "America's Best ..." *1983 Festival of Cartoon Art* (OSU Libraries, 1983) 4-9.

\*Kathleen J. Turner, "Comic Strips: A Rhetorical Perspective," *Central States Speech Journal* 28 (Spring 1977), 24-35.

What are the historic functions of art as defined by Gowans?

What is rhetoric and how does it relate to comic strips?

What is an enthematic approach and how is it used in comic strips?

### **Week 5/M, January 31**

Assignment: Write a brief (maximum length two pages) paper analyzing Gowans' approach to comic art. Is his approach valid? Why or why not? How do his ideas differ from those of Harvey and/or McCloud?

Assigned reading:

\*M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (University Press of Mississippi, 1990), xi-xxi and 17-27.

\* Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 80-105 plus notes.

### **Week 5/M, January 31-continued**

How does Inge relate comics to culture?

How does Gordon relate comics to culture?

What are the differences and similarities between Inge=s and Gordon=s analysis?  
What are the forms of creative expression within comics that Inge describes?  
What impact has the comic strip had on language in America?

Women and comic strips: *Funny Ladies* video in class

### **Week 5/W, February 2**

QUIZ: 30-minute exam with ten objective questions and one essay question. The test will cover classroom activities plus all reading assignments and presentations (including slide lecture) through January 31, 2005.

Assigned reading:

\*Harvey, chapters 2, 3

Why is Winsor McCay an important early cartoonist?

Name at least three ways that Bud Fisher shaped the early newspaper comic strip.

Why does Harvey describe *Bringing Up Father* as a "Masterwork"?

Review "COMM 648.01 Research Papers: A Guide to Their Preparation"

### **Week 6/M, February 7**

Assignment: Prepare a one-page outline of your research paper. You must cite at least three sources (other than the texts for this course) in correct bibliographic format.

Assigned reading:

\*Harvey, chapters 4, 5, 6

What are newspaper syndicates and how do they influence comic strips?

What made *Wash Tubbs* unique on the comics page?

Describe the impact of Captain Joseph Medill Patterson on newspaper comic strips.

Sign-up for oral presentation on a cartoonist on February 14.

### **Week 6/W, February 9**

Assigned reading:

\*Harvey, chapters 7, 8

What was the final stage of development of the comic strip?

How did Milton Caniff redefine the newspaper comic strip?

### **Week 7/M, February 14**

Assignment: Prepare an informal five-minute oral presentation on one of the cartoonists in the list that follows. *Please do not speak longer than five minutes.* Your presentation should cover basic biographical information and a summary of the importance of his/her work. You can find enough for your presentation in the biographical files and books in the Cartoon Research Library. Do not rely only on Web sources because many are inaccurate. If you prefer to learn about

### **Week 7/M, February 14-continued**

someone who is not on the list, talk with the professor. To avoid duplicate presentations, you must sign up in advance for the cartoonist you want to study. You may not choose a cartoonist

whose work is covered in your research paper. You may not change the cartoonist you are studying without permission from the professor. Please choose from the following list: Scott Adams; Lalo Alcaraz; Bill Amend; Robb Armstrong; Gus Arriola; Lynda Barry; Tom Batiuk; Berkeley Breathed; Al Capp; Darby Conley; Greg Evans; Bill Griffith; Rube Goldberg; Chester Gould; Cathy Guisewite; Harry Hirshfield; Nicole Hollander; Lynn Johnston; Bil Keane; Gary Larson; Patrick McDonnell; Aaron McGruder; Dale Messick; Dan Piraro; Hilary Price; Jerry Scott; Hilda Terry; Morrie Turner; Bill Watterson; Chic Young.

Assigned reading:

\*Harvey, chapters 9, 10

What does Harvey describe as Elzie Segar's Asignal achievement?≡

What are the differences and similarities between *Krazy Kat* and *Pogo*?

Are there any current strips similar to the comic strips covered in this assignment?

### **Week 7/W, February 16**

Assigned readings:

\*Harvey, chapter 11

\*Future of the Funnies: ASyndicates Making Bids to Reach Kids;≡ AWhat Goes Online and What Doesn't;≡ AThe Mail Prerogative Is Losing Popularity,≡ *Editor & Publisher*, December 7, 14, 21, 1996 (9 pages).

What two post World War II comic strips had the most impact on the genre? Why?

What impact will online comics have on newspaper comic strips?

### **Week 8/M, February 21**

Assigned readings:

\* Roger A. Fischer, "Aliens," *Them Damned Pictures* (Archon: 1996), 70-100 plus notes.

\*Ethnic stereotyping: "'Gasoline Alley' strip criticized for stereotyping Asian Americans" from *Seattle Times* plus related materials (12 pages).

Must comic strips use stereotypes?

How has the use of racial and gender stereotypes in comic strips changed over the past one hundred years?

Why have these changes occurred?

Slide presentation in class on ethnicity and comic strips.

### **Week 8/W, February 23**

Assigned reading:

\*Censorship and comic strips: "Political 'Cathy' temporarily removed"; "Paper pulls 'Kudzu' comics satirizing Jesse Helms"; "About 25 clients pull 'Doonesbury' strips"; "Some Papers Reject Gay-Themed Comic Strip;" AFrank Language in Comics: OK or #\*&+%!<@>#?≡ (6 pages)

### **Week 8/W, February 23-continued**

What or who should determine if a comic strip is printed or edited prior to printing?

Are there any comic strip themes that are inappropriate for newspapers?

Are comic strips a AG-rated medium in an X-rated world?≡

Sign up for oral presentations on research papers.

**Week 9/M, February 28**

No class.

**Week 9/W, March 2**

No class.

**Research papers due by 5 p.m. at the professor=s office.**

FOR EXTRA CREDIT: Attend the lecture by Richard Samuel West for the opening of the exhibit *The Sting of The Wasp* (reception at 5:30 p.m.; lecture at 6 p.m. March 3, 2005, 021L Wexner) and write a one-page summary of his presentation.

**Week10 /M, March 7**

Oral presentations on research papers.

**Week 10/W, March 9**

QUIZ: 30-minute exam with objective questions and one essay question. The test will cover classroom activities and all reading assignments and classroom presentations (including the slide lecture) since the last quiz.

Oral presentations on research papers. Graded research papers returned.

**Exam Week/M, March 14**

Graded March 9 quizzes may be picked up at the Cartoon Research Library desk anytime after 9 a.m.

**ExamWeek/W, March 16**

**Revised research papers and the first (graded) version are due by 5 p.m. at the professor's office.** Graded revised papers may be picked up at the Cartoon Research Library desk anytime after 9 a.m. on Monday, March 28, 2005.

This syllabus can be made available upon request to students who need it in alternative formats. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the professor, and for seeking available assistance in a timely manner. The Office for Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall; 292-3307; 292-0901 TDD) verifies the need for accommodations and assists in the development of accommodation strategies.