

COM 325 – Visual Storytelling and Graphic Media

Section: 004

Time: Monday and Wednesday 1:00 – 2:20

Room: FMH 412

Spring 2025

Instructor: Jake Slovis

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Office: Cullimore 115 D

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30 – 4:30 and by appointment

Prerequisites:

ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher. The precise topics to be covered, along with prerequisites, are announced in the semester prior to the offering of the course. This course satisfies the three credit 300 GER in History and Humanities

Course Description:

This is a process-based course that addresses the relationship between text and image in contemporary visual narratives and asks students to reflect on visual culture by evaluating advertisements, sequential art, prose, poetry, and film. To demonstrate their learning, students will develop compositions in graphic and written mediums and analyze how graphic narratives serve as powerful tools for both aesthetic-based and academic arguments. In addition, students will reflect on how their compositions reshape their ideas about authorship, digital communications, narrative, and consider the ways in which visual composition transfers to other disciplines and professions. The course is built on the idea that composing graphic narratives improves our rhetorical awareness, media fluency, and likewise provides opportunities to reevaluate our writing processes.

Learning Outcomes:

Conceptually, students should:

- Analyze the relationship between text and image in graphic media.
- Compose narratives using written and graphic mediums as an act of revision.
- Demonstrate rhetorical awareness and media fluency through written critiques.
- Practice the writing process by using prewriting, brainstorming, and exploratory exercises.
- Define how visual rhetoric and storytelling influences culture.
- Explain how visual literacy and media fluency transfers to other academic disciplines and professions.
- Practice writing critically about visual and graphic media.

Required Texts and Materials:

- PDFs and links posted to Canvas
- I encourage you to bring a sketchpad, notebook, pens, and pencils to class.

Participation and Low-Stakes Writing Assignments:

Participation will be evaluated based on your active involvement in class discussions and your submission of low-stakes writing assignments. Low-stakes writing assignments will not receive a formal letter grade. Instead, they will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- *Satisfactory* work demonstrates a thoughtful response to writing prompts and is turned in on time. You will receive full credit for satisfactory work.
- Work that is *Marginal* is submitted on time but is either seriously underdeveloped or only responds to part of the prompts. You will receive half credit for Marginal work.
- *Unacceptable* work ignores instruction or is submitted well after the due date of the assignment.

Please be aware that these low-stakes assignments and participation combine to make up 10% of your final grade. It is therefore imperative that you demonstrate consistency in these assignments and submit them on time. Late assignments will be assessed as follows:

- Work submitted within one week of the due date will be evaluated for partial credit.
- Work submitted over a week late will receive no credit.

Attendance and Excused Absences:

Attendance is critical to your success in this class. Participation in in-class activities, discussions, and workshops will contribute to your knowledge, ability, and performance. At a minimum, this means showing up on time, being prepared, and contributing to class discussions. Your level of engagement with the material will subsequently impact how much you get from the class.

You are permitted three absences—for each additional absence you may be penalized a half letter grade. Six or more absences may result in a failing grade. Classes will start on time. Two late arrivals (more than ten minutes late) will count as one absence. Arrivals more than twenty minutes late will be marked as an absence.

If you require an excused absence due to illness or other extenuating circumstances, you must contact the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will verify your documentation and notify instructors. Accommodations for making up missed classes and assignments will be at the discretion of the instructor. You will not receive an excused absence without verification from the Dean of Students Office.

Students who expect to miss class for religious observances must submit a written list of dates that will be missed by the end of our second week of class.

Projects and Process:

The semester is built around a sequence of projects that explore the relationship between written and graphic narratives. We'll begin by developing an understanding of how narrative functions by composing a brief written narrative. After completing this project, you will revise your work in three graphic mediums.

Your first graphic narrative will integrate sequential art, iconography, infographics, or collage to create either a comic, iconotext, or mixed-media narrative. We'll look at various short comics and other graphic media to help generate new perspectives about your work. The second revision will ask you to integrate photography or test a new form of graphic media that you did not implement in your first revision. Your final graphic narrative will be brief, asking you to create stories or arguments in the form of memes or advertisements. You will produce three of these images to create an "ad campaign."

All graphic work will be evaluated less on your artistic merit and more on the proficiency with which you implement the rhetorical techniques we discuss in class. In addition, they need to demonstrate competency of the rhetorical dimensions of the genre and medium, as well as explore how text and image can be used in tandem to create both explicit and implicit arguments.

The course culminates in the creation of a portfolio and critical self-assessment. For this assignment, you will create an appendix of your graphic narratives and write an evaluation of your work, explaining how each revision presented rhetorical challenges, asked you to reevaluate your process, expanded your ideas about authorship and authorial identities, and created opportunities for further revision. This project will also need to show your capacity to write analytically about visual rhetoric by using your own work as evidence. Finally, using your self-evaluation, you will revise one of your graphic narratives and develop a short presentation about your experience in the course.

Grade Breakdown:

Written Narrative – 10 %

Graphic Narrative 1 – Sequential Art, Collage, Iconotext – 10 %
 Graphic Narrative 2 – Photography, Photo-text –10 %
 Graphic Narrative 3 – Meme or Advertisement Campaign– 10 %
 Project Portfolio and Critical Self-Assessment – 30 %
 Portfolio Presentation – 10 %
 Revision – 10 %
 Low-Stakes Assignments, Attendance and Participation – 10%

Final grades are evaluated according to the following grading scale:

A = 100-90.00	B+ = 89.99-87.00	B = 86.99-80.00	C+ = 79.99-77.00	C = 76.99-70.00	D = 69.99-60.00	F = 59.99-0
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All work must be submitted by the last day of class. Makeup work will not be accepted after final grades have been submitted.

Please Note: I do not give extra credit, particularly for those who have failed to fulfill the participation aspect of this course. Regular participation is essential to academic growth.

Midterm and Final: There is no scheduled midterm or final exam for this class.

NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:
<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. Written and visual works are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Artificial Intelligence:

This class follows the following guidelines from the NJIT University Code of Academic Integrity:

“Artificial intelligence usage is not permitted in this course. The expectation of this course is for students to work through the course without assistance from any type of artificial intelligence to better develop their own skills in this content area. As such, artificial intelligence usage is not permitted throughout this course.”

While we may use AI for in-class experiments, the class operates under the assumption that producing work without AI allows you to grapple more directly with the challenges that graphic media artists encounter. Thus, you are not permitted to use AI on graded assignments unless stated otherwise in the prompt.

Student Accommodations:

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student in need of accommodations contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center (Central King Building G17) is available for individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors both onsite and online. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. For more information, please visit <http://humanities.njit.edu/writingcenter>.

Important Dates:

January	20	Monday	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
January	21	Tuesday	First Day of Classes
January	25	Saturday	Saturday Classes Begin
January	27	Monday	Last Day to Add/Drop a Class
January	27	Monday	Last Day for 100% Refund, Full or Partial Withdrawal
January	28	Tuesday	W Grades Posted for Course Withdrawals
February	3	Monday	Last Day for 90% Refund, Full or Partial Withdrawal, No Refund for Partial Withdrawal after this date
February	17	Monday	Last Day for 50% Refund, Full Withdrawal
March	10	Monday	Last Day for 25% Refund, Full Withdrawal
March	16	Sunday	Spring Recess Begins - No Classes Scheduled - Univ Open
March	22	Saturday	Spring Recess Ends
April	3	Thursday	Wellness Day - No Classes Scheduled - University Open
April	7	Monday	Last Day to Withdraw
April	18	Friday	Good Friday - No Classes Scheduled - University Closed
April	20	Sunday	Easter Sunday - No Classes Scheduled - University Closed
May	6	Tuesday	Thursday Classes Meet

May	7	Wednesday	Friday Classes Meet
May	7	Wednesday	Last Day of Classes

Course Schedule:

Please note: All readings and low-stakes assignments will be posted to Canvas. This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Please rely on Canvas for updates on these materials.

Week	
1	<p>Topic: What is a story? Where do we encounter visual compositions?</p> <p>1/22: Review Syllabus and Assignment Sequence</p> <p>Scott McCloud, “The Carl Stories”: https://www.scottmccloud.com/1-webcomics/carl/3a/02.html</p>
2	<p>Topic: What is a medium? What is a genre? The Shape of Stories</p> <p>1/27: Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message,” pages 1-10: https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf</p> <p>Scott McCloud, Excerpt from <i>Understanding Comics</i>: https://ccrma.stanford.edu/courses/32n/Comics_p152-61.PDF</p> <p>1/29: Douglas Wolk, “What Comics Are and What they Aren’t?” (Canvas)</p> <p>Aidan Koch, “Environmental Comics”: https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2022/04/20/environmental-comics-aidan-koch/</p>
3	<p>Topic: Graphic Poems, Collage, Visual Essay</p> <p>2/3: To be reviewed in class:</p> <p>Graphic Poems, Text Collage by Naoko Fujimoto and others: https://www.naokofujimoto.com/gallery-of-graphic-poems.html</p> <p>“Wheel Well Stowaway Survivors,” Parisa Karami: https://anmly.org/ap37/parisa-karami/</p> <p>Philip Doke, “Darker”: https://anmly.org/ap35/phillip-dokes/</p> <p>2/5: To be reviewed in class:</p> <p>Kelcey Parker Ervick, “The Habit of Art: Another Year of Daily Painting”: https://therumpus.net/2019/12/31/the-habit-of-art-another-year-of-daily-painting/</p>

	<p>Melissa Kirkpatrick, “Mental Wellbeing and the Architecture Student”: https://absnet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Dissertation-Melissa-KirkpatrickV3.pdf</p> <p>Ronald Shusterman, “Philosophy Through Pictures”: https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/12334?lang=en</p> <p>Submit Written Narrative Draft</p>
4	<p>Topic: Comics, Graphic Literature, Iconotext – Character Design</p> <p>2/10: A Hunger Artist – Short Story vs. Comic (Canvas)</p> <p>2/12: Scott McCloud Picture Plane and “The Visual Magic of Comics” TED: https://www.ted.com/talks/scott_mccloud_the_visual_magic_of_comics?language=en</p> <p>Submit Written Narrative</p>
5	<p>Topic: Comics, Graphic Literature, Iconotext - Sensory Data and Story</p> <p>2/17: Storyboarding exercises</p> <p>2/19: Graphic Narrative 1 Draft Due</p>
6	<p>Topic: Photography and Photo-text – Writing an Image</p> <p>2/24: Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” (Canvas)</p> <p>2/26: Roland Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida</i> excerpts (Canvas)</p> <p>Submit Graphic Narrative 1</p>
7	<p>Topic: Photography and Photo-text – Subject and Observation</p> <p>3/3: Writing with photography</p> <p>3/5: Photo essays, reporting, and collaboration</p> <p>Kamil Kotarba, "Hide and Seek": https://www.kamilkotarba.com/collection/hide-and-seeK</p> <p>“Here’s Where Subway Riders Have Returned. And Where They Haven’t.”: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/17/nyregion/nyc-subway-ridership.html</p>
8	<p>Topic: Photography and Photo-text – Creating Cohesive Narratives</p> <p>3/10: Exploring collections. Creating and identifying patterns</p> <p>3/12: Submit Graphic Narrative 2</p>

	Spring Break
9	Topic: Advertisements – Brand Identity 3/24: Steven Craig, “Men’s Men and Women’s Women” (Canvas) 3/26: Naomi Klein, “New Branded World” (Canvas)
10	Topic: Advertisements – Explicit vs. Implicit Arguments 3/31: Review Ad Campaign Examples 4/2: Submit Graphic Narrative 3
11	Topic: Self-reflection, portfolio development, revision 4/7: Richard McGuire, “Here” – comparing original and book length comic: https://from-dusk-till-drawn.com/2016/05/03/here-by-richard-mcguire-usa-1989/ 4/9: Exploring critical writing and self-assessment. Discussion of authorship and authorial identities.
12	Topic: Portfolio Conferences 4/14 – Conferences 4/16 - Conferences
13	Topic: Presentations 4/21 - TBD 4/23 - Presentations
14	Topic: Presentations 4/28 - Presentations 4/30 - Presentations
15	Topic: Revision 5/5: Submit Portfolio and Revision.