

HSS 404:066 – Monsters: Humanity’s Hidden Face
Spring 2025

Time: Mondays, 8:30—11:20am
Room: FMH 307

Instructor: Dr. Drew Ciccolo
Email: via Canvas or via djc85@njit.edu

Office: Cullimore 115F
(first office on the right once you enter the 115 suite)
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 10am–11am
and by appointment at mutually convenient times

Been chasing people in their dreams
so long I forgot to chase my own



A Note on AI usage

This gets repeated later in the syllabus, but it’s worth foregrounding here: This course follows the 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.” Be aware that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office.

Course Description

This course investigates the ways myths, legends, literature, and other media have presented monsters from antiquity to the present. The content is divided chronologically into three general parts: ancient and medieval monsters, monsters of modernity, and contemporary monsters. We will also read a fair amount of what’s been termed “monster theory.” Over the course of the semester, we will ask questions like: What makes a monster? What do monsters tell us about our fears and desires at different points in history? How do monsters relate to taboos? Ultimately, we will consider the ways monsters allow us to read, analyze, and make sense of cultural values through time using ideas from the fields of history, literary studies, anthropology, and psychology.

Prerequisites: ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

Restrictions: Registration requires senior standing.

Learning Outcomes

During this course you will:

- Become familiar with existing theory on monsters and their relationship to culture(s)
- Learn to navigate scholarly and historical literature on monsters and to think critically about that literature

- Analyze various monsters in fiction, film, and reality and their significance in larger contexts (antiquity, modernity, America, humanity at large, etc.)
- Gain research, writing, and communication experience
- Come away with a more informed, individualized definition of monsters and monstrosity
- Explore your major field from a new perspective (monstrosity)

Required Texts and Materials

All course readings will be provided electronically via Canvas, but you will also be responsible for watching around seven films, and **you must access most of the films assigned on your own** – depending on the streaming services you have access to, most of the films may cost between 3 and 6 dollars to view – the total cost shouldn't be more than \$25 or so – you can also feel free to watch them together with classmates if you like (can split cost that way).

Technology

You will be expected to bring an internet-capable computing device to every class in order to access Canvas, readings, and discussion questions. You must also be able to access the films on your own (see above), as we will not have time to watch them in class (though we may watch significant clips from them in class when we discuss them).

Attendance and Participation

This class meets only once per week, so attendance is that much more important. Show up on time, be prepared, and actively contribute to class discussions. Your engagement with the material will impact how much you take away from the class. Absences can only be excused via the Dean of Students. In terms of unexcused absences, you may miss up to one class without penalty and you may be late to class twice without penalty. Every subsequent unexcused absence and late will affect the attendance and participation grade @ the rates of -1.5 pts./absence and -1 pts./late. Missing more than 3 classes (three weeks of class) can result in failure of the course.

Information about Learning Structure

We will prepare for full-class discussions with readings and by watching select films at home. Be prepared to take notes and participate. You must come to every class having read the text(s) assigned for that class. Please do the reading. All readings are located on Canvas.

We will also, during each class meeting, discover one new monster via PBS's *Monstrum*. We will sometimes (if time allows) begin assignments during the class period to help you master and apply course concepts, and I hope to be able to check in with you individually on a semi-regular basis. Please come to office hours or arrange a meeting with me anytime. If you have questions, contact me via email. I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. Please plan accordingly. Remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence. This means to include an appropriate subject line and your name in all emails, as well as specifying the class (HSS 404).

Please also be aware that we may make small changes during the semester as I gain a deeper understanding of your interests. You will always be alerted to any changes made both in class and via email.

Grading

Attendance and active participation

15%

- For an A (90-100), you will be expected to attend all classes (with no more than one unexcused absence), fully participate in most discussions and any classroom exercises, engage with your fellow students and the teacher throughout the semester, submit discussion questions (when assigned) before class meetings, and submit all assignments on time.
- You may miss up to one class (equivalent to one week of class) without penalty. Every subsequent unexcused absence will result in the deduction of points. **In order for an absence to be excused, I must receive an Absence Excuse Letter from the Dean of Students.** Absences can only be excused via the Dean of Students. In terms of unexcused absences, you may miss up to one class without penalty and you may be late to class twice without penalty. Every subsequent unexcused absence and late will affect the attendance and participation grade @ the rates of -1.5 pts./absence and -1 pt./late. Missing more than 3 classes (three weeks of class) can result in failure of the course.
- Students who expect to miss class for religious observances should contact their instructor about these dates at the beginning of the semester (per university policy).

7 reading tests (one every two weeks)

35%

These are very straightforward tests with time limits to be taken on Canvas. One of the keys to success in this class is to read the material we'll be discussing in class and to be open and pay attention in class, and these simple tests are designed to help ensure that you do that. All due dates are on Canvas.

5 writing assignments, some w/ multimedia options

50%

These 5 assignments consist of: an investigation into a medieval monster of your choice drawing on course materials and outside research (5%), an essay and presentation on a monster of your choice that we haven't covered in class drawing on course materials and outside research (15%), an essay relating monstrosity to your major field drawing on course materials and outside research (10%), an assignment that will demonstrate the evolution of your understanding of monsters and monstrosity drawing on course materials (15%), and, finally, a very simple assignment asking for your feedback and designed to help this class evolve in future semesters (5%). All due dates are on Canvas.

Final Grade Calculations

Because all unsubmitted work eventually receives a 0, while all good-faith, original attempted work cannot receive a lower grade than 50%, it is in your best interest to submit every assignment on time, or at least close to on time, even if your submissions are flawed.

All assignments and other required work will be graded using the following scale:

A = 90— 100	B+ = 87— 89.99	B = 80— 86.99	C+ = 77— 79.99	C = 70— 76.99	F = 0 -- 69.99
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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. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Chat GPT

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TurnItIn evaluates all sorts of academic integrity violations. This tool detects unauthorized use of quotes and repurposed text (including borrowing of papers). **TurnItIn also flags AI-generated text and use of "grammar" assistants that actually rewrite sentences.** None of these tools are acceptable in this course. Students in violation of the rules of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean of Students who will follow up with a meeting and a final determination of grade and status in the course.

Accessibility Needs

If you need accommodations due to disability, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources & Services (OARS), Kupfrian Hall 201, to discuss your specific needs. A Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the OARS authorizing your accommodations will be required.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center (in the basement of Central King Building and online) is available for one-hour individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can 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 (add/drop, withdrawal, etc.): <https://www.njit.edu/registrar/spring-2025-academic-calendar>

Course Schedule

- **It is important to note that this schedule is subject to change – if it does change, you will always be alerted in class and/or via announcement/email. (TBA = to be announced.)**

Week 1 (Jan. 27th)

Introduction(s). First day questions about monsters (discussion board). Go over syllabus together, discuss semester to come. Introductory PowerPoint. Monstrum: Chimera. Monstrum: Tiamat. Read together: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)."

Week 2 (Feb. 3rd)

Have read: "The Slender Man and the Emergence of a Legend Cycle in the Digital Age."
Monstrum: The Origins of Medusa. Monstrum: Slender Man. **Week 2 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, Feb. 7th at midnight.**

Week 3 (Feb. 10th)

Have watched: *The Wolfman* (1941). Have read: Petronius's Satyricon Sec. 62 (werewolf antecedent), Introduction to the (Freudian) Concept of Repression, and "Why We Crave Horror Movies" by Stephen King. Monstrum: The Killer Origins of the Werewolf. Monstrum: Taotie. **Medieval monster investigation assignment introduced.**

Week 4 (Feb. 17th)

Have watched: *Dracula* (1992). Have read: "Why Dracula Still Matters," Brian Burns's synopsis of *Danse Macabre* by Stephen King, and short excerpt from *Danse Macabre* (1981) by Stephen King. Monstrum: TBA. **Week 4 test must also be taken by Friday, Feb. 21st at midnight. Medieval monster investigation assignment due Sunday, Feb. 23rd at midnight.**

Week 5 (Feb. 24th)

Have read: “Chac Mool” (1954) by Carlos Fuentes. Monstrum: TBA. Essay and Presentation on a Monster of Your Choice assignment introduced.

Week 6 (Mar. 3rd)

Have watched: “White Zombie” (1932). Have read: “Legacy of the Dead: History of the Zombie” and “The Thing on the Doorstep” by H.P. Lovecraft. Monstrum: TBA. Week 6 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, March 7th at midnight.

Week 7 (Mar. 10th)

Have watched over the weekend: *Frankenstein* (1994). Have read: *Frankenstein* (1818) Chapters 5, 17, and 20. Monstrum: Frankenstein’s Monster. Essay and Presentation on a Monster of Your Choice assignment due Sunday, Mar. 16th at midnight.

Week 8: Spring Break!

Week 8 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, March 21st at midnight.

Week 9 (Mar. 24th)

Have watched “Eye of the Beholder” (Twilight Zone episode) and “It’s a Good Life” (Twilight Zone episode). Have read: “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” (1967) by Harlan Ellison and “How Monsters Came to Define Us.” Monstrum: Cyborgs.

Week 10 (Mar. 31st)

Have watched: the original Japanese version of *Godzilla* (1954). Monstrum: TBA. Week 10 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, April 4th at midnight. Essay relating monstrosity to your major field due Sunday, April 6th at midnight.

Week 11 (Apr. 7th)

Have watched: *Nightmare on Elm Street*. Have read: TBA. Monstrum: TBA.

Week 12 (Apr. 14th)

Have watched: TBA. Have read: “The Mostly Unseen World of Cryptids.” Monstrum: TBA. Week 12 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, April 18th at midnight.

Week 13 (Apr. 21st)

Have watched: TBA. Have read: TBA. **Monstrum: TBA.** Answering your own question(s) assignment due Sunday, April 27th at midnight.

Week 14 (Apr. 28th)

Have watched: TBA (vote from selections). Have read: “Humanism, Transhumanism, and Posthumanism.” **Monstrum: TBA.** Week 14 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Friday, May 2nd at midnight.

Week 15 (May 5th – last class of semester)

Have watched over weekend: TBA (vote). Wrapping up: What have we learned? What does the future have in store? Last Monstrum: chosen by class vote. **Help the course evolve assignment due by the end of class on Monday, May 5th at midnight (we will also spend some time on these during our last class meeting).** I hope you all have peaceful and happy summers!



NEED HELP?

KNOW WHO TO CALL

Please note following important numbers that will come in handy in case of emergency:

EXTERNAL RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
Suicide Prevention	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 623-2323 (University Hospital-Newark)
Drug/ Alcohol Addiction	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 630-8262
Crime Victim Compensation Office	Monday – Friday 8 AM – 8 PM	(877) 658-2221
Rape Care Center	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 733-2273 (Essex County)
Sexual Assault Hotline	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(800) 656-HOPE (National)
Psychiatric Emergency	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 924-7416 (Newark Beth Israel Hospital)
NJIT RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
NJIT Public Safety	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 596-3111 (Emergency) (973) 596-3120 (Non-Emergency)
Dean of Students (TITLE IX – Sexual Misconduct Report/Response)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3466
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 5 PM	(973) 596-3414
Student Health Services (SHS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3621