

HSS 404:049 – Monsters: Humanity’s Hidden Face
Spring 2025

Time: WF, 8:30—9:50am

Room: CKB 317

Instructor: 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 Thursdays by appt.

in-person and via Zoom at mutually convenient times.

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



Course Description

This course investigates the ways myths, legends, literature, and other media have presented monsters from antiquity to the present. The content, with a few exceptions, is mostly ordered chronologically: ancient and medieval monsters, monsters of modernity, and contemporary (or postwar) monsters. We will also read a fair amount of what's 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 visual and oral presentation experience
- Come away with a more informed, individualized definition of the terms monster 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 six to seven movies, and **you must access the assigned movies on your own –**

depending on the streaming services you have access to, most of the films will cost between three and six 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 (thereby splitting the cost).

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

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 two classes 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. Missing more than six 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 in class. You must come to every class having read the text(s) and/or having watched the films assigned for that class. All readings are located on Canvas.

We will also, during most class meetings, discover one new monster via PBS's *Monstrum*. We will occasionally (when time allows) begin assignments during the class period to help you master and apply course concepts. Please always feel free to make an appointment with me during office hours or arrange a meeting with me at a mutually convenient time. If you have questions, contact me via email. I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. Please plan accordingly – in other words, if an assignment is due Sunday night, don't wait until Saturday or Sunday to ask me a question about it. Remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence. 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 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 two unexcused absences), 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), and submit all assignments on time.

- You may miss up to two classes (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. Missing more than six 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. They're 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 an ancient or medieval monster of your choice drawing on course materials and outside research (5%), a 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.

Generative AI (Chat GPT, etc.)

I find the rise of AI and generative AI to be incredibly interesting phenomena, and we'll talk about them plenty in class. **Using GenAI to generate writing and passing it off as your own, however, is not permitted in this course, and will be treated as an academic integrity violation.** (If you're particularly interested in AI in the context of monstrosity and you have an idea that you'd like to explore that involves using GenAI, ask me about it.)

It's also important to note that all submitted assignment are run thought **TurnItIn**, which evaluates all sorts of potential academic integrity violations. It detects unauthorized use of quotations and repurposed text (including borrowing of papers). **TurnItIn also flags AI-generated text and use of grammar assistants that actually rewrite sentences – students are able to view the general TurnItIn report generated for each assignment, but you won't be able to see the AI detection report – only the instructor sees this. Please do not commit academic integrity violations – if you're unsure about whether you're in danger of violating academic integrity, ask me. 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/calendars>

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 (Sept. 3rd & 5th)

Introduction(s). Complete: Academic Engagement: Fall 2025 in Canvas. First day questions about monsters (discussion board). Go over syllabus together, discuss semester to come. Introductory PowerPoint. Monstrum: Chimera. Monstrum: Tiamat. Watch together: parts of “Eye of the Beholder” (Twilight Zone episode). Begin reading together: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).”

Week 2 (Sept. 10th & 12th)

Have read: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” and “The Slender Man and the Emergence of a Legend Cycle in the Digital Age.” Monstrum: The Origins of Medusa. Monstrum: Slender Man. Ancient or medieval monster or legendary creature investigation assignment introduced. **Week 2 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Sept. 13th at midnight.**

Week 3 (Sept. 17th & 19th)

Have watched: *The Wolfman* (1941). Have read: short excerpt from *Danse Macabre* (1981) by Stephen King and Petronius’s *Satyricon* Sec. 62 (werewolf antecedent). Monstrum: Taotie. Monstrum: The Killer Origins of the Werewolf.

Week 4 (Sept. 24th & 26th)

Have watched: *Let the Right One In* (2008) (unless we decide on another vampire movie). Have read: Brian Burns’s synopsis of *Danse Macabre* by Stephen King and “Why Dracula Still Matters.” Monstrum: Jiangshi. Monstrum: TBA. **Week 4 reading test must be taken by Saturday, Sept. 27th at midnight. Ancient or medieval monster or legendary creature investigation assignment due Sunday, Sept. 28th at midnight.**

Week 5 (Oct. 1st & 3rd)

Have read: “Chac Mool” (1954) by Carlos Fuentes. Monstrum: TBA. Revisit any significant material cut for time over the first four weeks. **Essay and Presentation on a Monster of Your Choice assignment introduced.** Begin researching in class.

Week 6 (Oct. 8th & 10th)

Have watched: *28 Days Later* (2002). Have read: “Legacy of the Dead: History of the Zombie” and “The Thing on the Doorstep” by H.P. Lovecraft. Monstrum: Some mixture of The Origins of the Zombie, from Haiti to the U.S.; Why George Romero Changed Zombies Forever; and Modern Zombies: The Rebirth of the Undead. **Week 6 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Oct. 11th at midnight.**

Week 7 (Oct. 15th & 17th)

Have watched over the weekend: *Frankenstein* (1994). Have read: *Frankenstein* (1818) Chapters 5, 17, and 20. Monstrum: Frankenstein’s Monster. **Presentation on a Monster of Your Choice assignment due by Sunday, Oct. 19th at midnight.**

Week 8 (Oct. 22nd & 24th)

Presentations for Monster of Your Choice assignment. **Week 8 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Oct. 25th at midnight.** Essay relating monstrosity to your major field assignment introduced.

Week 9 (Oct. 29th & 31st)

Have read: “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” (1967) by Harlan Ellison and “How Monsters Came to Define Us.” Have watched: *Halloween* (1978). Monstrum: Cyborgs. Monstrum: Slasher Lore is Way Deeper than you Think.

Week 10 (Nov. 5th & Nov. 7th)

Have watched: the original Japanese version of *Godzilla* (1954). Monstrum: TBA. **Week 10 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Nov. 8th at midnight.** Essay relating monstrosity to your major field due Sunday, Nov. 9th at midnight.

Week 11 (Nov. 12th & Nov. 14th)

Have watched: *Silence of the Lambs*. Have read: TBA. Monstrum: TBA.

Week 12 (Nov. 19th & 21st)

Have watched: TBA. Have read: “The Mostly Unseen World of Cryptids,” “The Windigo as Monster”, and “Peruvian Fat Stealers (the Pishtaco).” Monstrum: Windigo. Monstrum: Mothman. Revisit any significant material cut for time over the first four weeks. **Week 12** reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Nov. 22nd at midnight.

Week 13 (Nov. 26th)

Have watched: TBA (vote from selections). Have read: “Humanism, Transhumanism, and Posthumanism.” Monstrum: TBA. **Answering your own question(s)** assignment due Sunday, Nov. 30th at midnight.

Week 14 (Dec. 3rd & Dec. 5th)

Have watched/read over weekend: TBA. Week 14 reading test must be taken on Canvas by Saturday, Dec. 6th at midnight.

Week 15 (Dec. 10th – last class of semester)

Have watched/read 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 Wednesday, Dec. 10th at midnight (we can also spend some time on these during our last class meeting).



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