Comics and Medicine
Professor Lisa Diedrich

Your Faculty Director: Prof. Marvin O'Neal
Your UGC Advisor: Ann Ohkawa
Your Quad Director: Richard Sigal

(SSO) 102.01
Undergraduate College Seminar
Spring 2018

Course Meeting Day/Time: W 4-5:20
Location: Roth café 103

Special Meeting Pattern: This class meets for 1 hour 20 minutes for 10 weeks

Course description

In recent years, comics and graphic narratives have become a popular and innovative form for telling auto/biographical stories in a medium that artfully combines words and images. Our course will focus on one exciting sub-field of the form known as graphic medicine, which explores the conjuncture between comics and clinical medicine. We will discuss how comics and graphic narratives have become important resources for communicating a range of ethical and clinical issues related to the experience of illness, and how this hybrid verbal/visual form helps medical practitioners, patients, families, and caregivers creatively reimagine the boundaries of “health,” “illness,” “life,” and “death.” We will investigate the ways that graphic medicine/illness narratives can be read as symptomatic texts of our time in at least two respects: as texts that literally describe symptoms (and struggle with finding a form to describe the affective and physical experience of symptoms), and as texts that describe illness as an event that goes beyond any particular individual's experience and account of it, reflecting wider cultural categories, including race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Course goals

The first three describe the goals of the freshman seminar in general and the next three relate to this seminar in particular.

- Improve critical thinking by developing evaluative, problem-solving, and expressive skills.
- Enhance group communication skills through discussions, small-group work, presentations or debates.

1 Image from 7 Miles a Second by David Wojnarowicz, James Romberger, and Marguerite van Cook
- Develop intellectual curiosity and better understand the role of a student in an academic community.
- Engage with a range of ethical and clinical issues related to the experiences of illness and the practices of medicine.
- Demonstrate analytical skills in reading, textual interpretation and visual analysis.
- Discuss different factors that impact the experience of illness and its diagnosis and treatment, including race, class, gender, and sexuality.

**Course texts**

- Gabriel Ba and Fabio Moon, *Daytripper* (New York: DC Comics, 2010).

Students are required to have copies of the readings for every class. We will be doing close readings of these texts in class, and it is not possible to do this if students haven’t done the readings prior to the discussion and if they do not have the texts to consult as we discuss them. If you cannot afford to buy all of the texts, you may want to utilize the copies of the books that I have placed on reserve at the main library.

**Blackboard:** This class is on Blackboard ([http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu](http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu)), and students are expected to consult Blackboard regularly for updates on readings and assignments. The blogging assignment will require students to post blogs on Blackboard, comment on the blogs of classmates, and share materials. I will post questions on the readings on Blackboard, and will also email students through Blackboard with reminders and follow up from class discussions. Make sure that the email listed for you on Blackboard is the one you actually use.

**Classroom etiquette:** A good classroom atmosphere depends on the behavior of both the instructor and the students. So, we need to respect each other and be courteous to each other. This means all of us should come to class on time, not leave early, answer cell phones, write emails or texts on phones or laptops, or talk
when others are talking. Concentration and participation are necessary for good thinking!

I permit the use of laptops for note-taking and to consult electronic versions of reading materials. Using your laptop for other things during class time is not allowed—searching the web, checking social media, etc. is distracting to you and others!

**Email:** It is your responsibility to make sure that you read your email in your official University email account. For most students that is Google Apps for Education (http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud), but you may verify your official Electronic Post Office (EPO) address at http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/checking-or-changing-your-mail-forwarding-address-in-the-epo. If you choose to forward your official University email to another off-campus account, faculty are not responsible for any undeliverable messages to your alternative personal accounts. You can set up Google Mail forwarding using these DoIT-provided instructions found at http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/setting-up-mail-forwarding-in-google-mail. If you need technical assistance, please contact Client Support at (631) 632-9800 or supportteam@stonybrook.edu.

**Students with disabilities:** If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128 (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students requiring emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information, go to the following web site: http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/fire/disabilities/asp

**Critical Incident Management:** Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.
Plagiarism: Do not plagiarize, which is defined as "to take and use as one's own the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another" (The Oxford English Dictionary). This means you have plagiarized if, for example: you copy part or all of another student's paper, or use another student's paper from another class or semester, or if you download part or all of your paper from the internet and claim it as your own, or if you copy from a book and do not quote or cite the author. I take plagiarism very seriously. If you plagiarize, you will be turned in to Academic Judiciary. If you are confused about what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to me about it.

University statement on Academic Integrity: Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

Course Evaluation: Each semester Stony Brook University asks students to provide feedback on their courses and instructors through an online course evaluation system. The course evaluation results are used by the individual faculty, department chairs and deans to help the faculty enhance their teaching skills and are used as part of the personnel decision for faculty promotion and tenure. No individually identifiable data are ever reported back to the university or instructor. Students who have completed previous evaluations can view all faculty ratings at: https://classie-evals.stonybrook.edu/

Academic Success and Tutoring Center (ASTC): The ASTC provides free academic support services for all undergraduate students, including one-on-one tutoring, small group tutoring, academic success coaching, and public speaking seminars. Learn more about these services and additional campus resources at www.stonybrook.edu/tutoring.

UGC Events and Programs: Getting involved and participating in campus life is an essential part of being a successful college student. As part of your 101 seminar, attending events and submitting reflection papers about those events was/is part of required course assignments. Although you will not have the same event requirements and assignments in this 102 seminar, you are expected to continue
participating in events offered by your Undergraduate College as part of your Undergraduate College affiliation. If you are involved in an event on campus that you think other students might be interested in, feel free to share information about the event on the sharing forum on Blackboard.

**Questions?** Feel free to contact me to discuss the course at any point during the semester. Come to office hours, make an appointment with me, send me an email, or see me after class.

**Course Schedule**

**Jan 24:** Drawing a link: Why comics and medicine?
I. Introductions
II. Some tips on how to read comics
III. Excerpt from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*: drawing of a painting of a pipe with the words *ceci n'est pas une pipe* painted underneath (Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*)

**Jan 31:** What is graphic medicine?
I. Read and explore the Graphic Medicine webpage: [https://www.graphicmedicine.org](https://www.graphicmedicine.org)
II. Write a one-page reaction paper (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) to your exploration
III. Come to class with something from the webpage that interested you and that you are prepared to talk about (this could be a podcast, review, or link to another comic site or blog).
Feb 7: “See how understanding math helps?”
Read Brian Fies’s *Mom’s Cancer*

Feb 14: “So what’s it like, a seizure?”
Read David B.’s *Epileptic*

Feb 21: Finish *Epileptic*

Feb 28: “I’m acutely aware of myself alive and witnessing.”
Read David Wojnarowicz’s *7 Miles a Second*
Mar 7
Read MK Czerwiec’s *Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371*

Mar 14: Spring Break—No class

Mar 21: “Words do not express thoughts very well…”
Read Glyn Dillon’s *The Nao of Brown*

Mar 28: “...and read the story until the end.”
Read Gabriel Ba and Fabio Moon’s *Daytripper*

Apr 4: Wrap-up and Showcase Charrette! We will work together to create a display for the annual Showcase held on Wednesday, April 18 at 1pm in SAC Ballroom A

Assignments
Attendance and participation (20%): We are all in this together! Therefore, weekly attendance and participation/collaboration are required for the successful completion of this course. You may miss one class without consequence; more than one will affect your grade.
This class is a seminar, which means each of you are expected to contribute to the many conversations we have about comics and medicine. If you are new to this format and feel a little intimidated by it, I offer these tips from my experiences of seminars as both a teacher and student:

- **Do the reading!** Keep in mind that there many interpretations of the materials we will read. You will want to think about both the form (how the story/information is presented) and content (what is presented). But if you don't read the whole thing, then you might miss a key element of the story.

- **Annotate** (which means write in the margins of the books) or jot down questions/comments in your notebook about things that interested, intrigued, excited, disturbed you in the readings.

- **We will do a lot of in-class writing and round-robin presentations,** which will provide a structure that allows everyone to share and contribute. I know that quiet students are often very engaged with the material and discussions, but aren't as comfortable jumping into a conversation as others. Use in-class writing to help you formulate your thoughts and join the conversation.

**Blogging, commenting, sharing (30%)**: This assignment is multi-faceted and has 3 components: a blog analyzing a single page or panel, commenting, and sharing. Students will write and post one blog entry (200-250 words each—posted on the Discussion Board site on Blackboard), in which you discuss the reading assigned for the week ahead (you should post no later than Tuesday at 6pm, so that people will have a chance to see your post before class). Students will also comment at least once on a post by a classmate and share at least once an item they have come across outside the class that relates to the themes of the class.

**Page/panel blogging (20 points):**

1) Choose a single page or panel from one of the graphic narratives we are reading this semester. Analyze the page. Tell us what is happening. Describe the page/panel in detail (emphasizing what it shows and how it shows it). Interpret the significance of the page/panel in relation to the text as a whole. Is it a continuation of a theme? Does it do something different formally? Is it similar or different from another text we have read or discussed this semester?

2) Provide two discussion questions that will help generate a conversation about the reading.
Comments (5 points): In addition to your blog entry, you are expected to post a comment (50-100 words) on a posting by a classmate. (This is the minimum requirement. You should feel free to engage more!) Your comments should be analytical and thoughtful, not simply “I agree with so and so” but why you agree/disagree. You should also try to read as many blog entries by your classmates as possible—this will help you understand the readings better—different people notice and focus on different things. We learn more from each other than we do on our own.

Shares (5 points): Please share with the class an item of relevance to the themes of the class (e.g., comic, graphic narrative, animated film, a news story, feature article, academic article, review, hashtag or conversation on social media, etc.). Since we will be discussing many illnesses (epilepsy, cancer, HIV/AIDS, mental illness, etc.), what you share might relate to these illnesses more generally rather than be specifically about comics and medicine. You will briefly summarize what you share (50-100 words): tell the class how this connects with our readings and discussions (be specific).

Create your own graphic medicine comic or a comic commonplace book (50%): This assignment gives you a choice to either make your own comic or create a comic commonplace book. We will work together on the last day of classes to create a display of our projects for the Showcase on April 18.

**Graphic medicine comic:** This option allows you to create your own comic on a topic related to the themes of the class. For content there are many possibilities. You could create a comic about:
- a personal experience of illness or disability or the experience of a family member or simply about an everyday encounter with healthcare
- someone you know who is a health professional (you might interview them about this, as MK Czerwiec does in her book *Taking Turns*)
- providing care for someone either formally as a care worker or informally as a friend or family member
- your work towards becoming a doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider (this could show why you want to do this or the steps you plan to take on the way to this career). You could think of this as a comic version of a medical school statement of purpose.
- health activism or advocacy that you or someone you know has participated in
In terms of form and style, there is also flexibility. I understand that you are most likely not a trained artist; don’t let that stop you! The minimum requirement is one 4-panel page cartoon that tells a story (if you want to do more, I won’t stop you!!).

**Comic commonplace book:** This option allows you to create a book of comic quotations, that is, panels from comics and graphic narratives that you particularly like and that speak to you about a particular topic, idea, or feeling. On a single page, you will include the image of the panel and a 100-200 word annotation of the panel (this can be hand-written or typed). Your commonplace book will include at least 5 such pages. Be creative. You may want to experiment with how you annotate the panel depending on the images/feelings/ideas you want to convey. You can use color, collage, or other means to elucidate, decorate, embellish, and/or transform the image.

**Evaluation and grading**
The First-Year Seminar (102) is a 1-credit course for which students will receive a grade between A-F.

The following grading scale applies for this seminar:

- 93-100 (A)
- 90-92 (A-)
- 87-89 (B+)
- 83-86 (B)
- 80-82 (B-)
- 77-79 (C+)
- 73-76 (C)
- 70-72 (C-)
- 67-69 (D+)
- 60-66 (D)
- 59-0 (F)