PURPOSE:
Comics have been one of the most important mediums of communication and culture for over a century. In this course, we will explore the formal system of comics, engage with comics critiques, trace the cultural and industrial history of comics in American culture, and compare adaptations of comics works with their original versions. By the end of this course, you should have a solid grounding in comics concepts, history, and criticism.

OBJECTIVES:
• To understand how comics work as a formal system of communication.
• To understand and utilize critical terms and concepts relating to comics and culture.
• To understand the basic history of American comics and comics culture.
• To understand the economics of comics publishing, distribution, and retailing.
• To understand the relationships between comics and mainstream popular culture.

BOOKS:
Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics
Douglas Wolk, Reading Comics
Bradford W. Wright, Comic Book Nation

COMICS:
Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley, Ultimate Spider-Man (New York: Marvel Comics, 2000-01)
Bob Kane and Bill Finger, Batman (New York: DC Comics, 1940)
Frank Miller, The Dark Knight Returns (New York: DC Comics, 1986)
Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, Watchmen (New York: DC Comics, 1986)
Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely, All-Star Superman (New York: DC Comics, 2006-07)
Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis (New York: Pantheon, 2003)
Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman (New York: DC Comics, 1938-40)
Art Spiegelman, Maus: A Survivor’s Tale (New York: Pantheon, 1992)
NOTE: Additional readings and online screenings may be assigned as the semester progresses.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Midterm Exam (October 6) 25%
- Final Exam (December 16) 25%
- Paper (December 8) 25%
- Mini-Comic (October 1) 10%
- Participation 15%

Exams will feature short and long-essay questions. Possible topics and long-essay questions will be made available prior to each exam. The goal of the exams is to gauge how well you understand and use the concepts and texts covered in the class to that point. The Final Exam will be cumulative, but focuses primarily on the material in the second half of the course.

The paper will be a 2400-3600 word (grad students: 3600-6000 words) analysis of a comics-related text or issue. Choose from one of the following options:

- Analysis of a comic or graphic novel – Analyze a comics series or graphic novel that we have not analyzed in depth in class. The work should be at least five “pamphlet” issues, or 128 pgs long.

- Analysis of a comics adaptation – Analyze an adaptation of a comics series or graphic novel in another medium (film, television, video game, prose, etc.). The work must have originated as a comic strip, book, or graphic novel.

- Analysis of a comics-related topic – Analyze a topic pertinent to comics. This could be historical or contemporary. Examples of topics include (but are not limited to):
  - Digital distribution
  - Non-fiction
  - Fandom
  - Sexism
  - Censorship
  - Manga
  - Narrative style

In addition, each paper must be:

- typed/word-processed in a 12 pt font (like this one)
- double-spaced
- have 1" margins all around
- Use an appropriate citation format (either MLA or Chicago)
I encourage you to e-mail your paper to me as an attached Word, OpenOffice, or Pages-compatible document, at dkompare@smu.edu. Acceptable file formats: .doc, .docx, .rtf, .odt or .pages. The file must be sent by class time (3:30 pm on the due date), and I must be able to open it the first time; if I cannot, your paper will be penalized.

The mini-comic, done in pairs, is a one- or two-page original work you create for this course. It should be either biographical or autobiographical, based on something from your life, or from someone close to you. It may be hand-drawn, composed from original photos, composed collage-style from existing materials, or assembled digitally (using sites like BitStrip, Pixton, or StripGenerator). It is due online (via BlackBoard) on Thursday, October 1.

The overall success of this class also entails your participation in discussion. Your contributed thoughts will help shape our overall discussion of key topics, readings, and screenings. I’ve structured the course to have copious discussion time on most days, but I’ve also created a discussion forum in our BlackBoard course to facilitate talk outside class, and will occasionally offer up questions and statements for comment there. Please note that simply attending (and never contributing to discussion) will earn a C- for your participation grade.

NOTE: There will be NO extra credit opportunities beyond the assignments listed here.

GRADING STANDARDS:
A range work fulfills all the requirements of the assignment with exceptional quality. The writing is clear, precise, and engaging throughout, and has no significant issues of grammar, spelling, and style. Most importantly, A-range writing goes beyond the essentials of the assignment in its insight and originality; in other words, it displays effective “outside the box” thought and composition.

B range work fulfills all the requirements of the assignment with good quality. The writing is mostly clear, precise, and engaging, though it may have a few significant issues of grammar, spelling, and style. Work that relies too heavily on formula, no matter how well intentioned, often falls in this range.

C range work fulfills some to most of the requirements of the assignment with fair quality. The writing has a bit of clarity or interest, but relies heavily on the obvious or cliche, and is also bogged down with some significant issues of grammar, spelling, and style.

D range work does not fulfill most of the requirements of the assignment. The writing is generally poor, with little clarity, precision, organization, or interest, and suffers from significant issues of grammar, spelling, and style.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Like all of your professors, I assume you'll approach every aspect of your life at SMU conscientiously. Nevertheless, some of you may be tempted to cut corners and cheat, particularly in the classroom. If you are caught cheating on any assignment (e.g., copying test answers or plagiarizing sources), we will follow the guidelines in the SMU Honor Code (found online at http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_05_HC.asp). Depending on the situation, penalties may range from an F for the assignment to expulsion from the course. If you are unaware of what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the Honor Code, or the Academic Honesty course on BlackBoard.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
I will take attendance each class meeting, via a sign-in sheet passed around. Consistent tardies will also be factored into your participation grade, at half the penalty of absences; if you come in late, see me after class for the sign-in sheet.

You are allowed five unexcused absences (for whatever reason); after that I will deduct three points from your overall grade for each additional absence. I will only grant excused absences as detailed in the 2009-10 SMU Student Handbook for allowed religious observances and school-sanctioned activities (see below). Please note that illnesses and “family emergencies” fall under the five unexcused absences you are already granted. The only exceptions to this policy are for more extreme situations, and if you have a highly contagious illness (e.g., the flu). All excused absences must be accompanied by written documentation.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AND ATTENDANCE:
Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with me, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

UNIVERSITY EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ATTENDANCE:
Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity may make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:
Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Ms. Rebecca Marin, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities (214-768-4557) to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4.)
ONLINE CONTACT:
My e-mail address is dkompare@smu.edu. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have about the course or CTV curriculum, or even areas beyond that scope. That said, I cannot monitor my e-mail at all times, but endeavor to reply as needed as soon as possible. Please allow at least 24 hours for me to get back to you. Any e-mail I receive after 2:30 pm on Friday will not be replied to until Monday morning, at the earliest.

I am also available on Twitter (@profkompare), and you may follow me there. Please use the hashtag #ctv1302 if you ask a course-related question (or make a course-related comment) via Twitter.

OTHER:
While in class...
• Do not bring in any food or drink, except for bottles with lids or caps.
• Please be respectful of your classmates and myself: put away your phones during class time, and keep conversations to a minimum (length and volume).
• You may use laptops, smart phones, and WiFi for taking notes or engaging with class-related material, but please stay on task. You’ve plenty of time outside class to surf the net.

Outside class...
• Absorb media in as much variety as is possible
• Keep connected to others and the world in general
• Take care of yourself (physically, mentally, spiritually); you’re the only you you’ve got.

SCHEDULE:
All readings and assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated. Late work is ONLY accepted if it’s the result of an excused absence, or medical or family emergency, and only if notified in advance. Any other conflict on your time (including jobs and work for other classes) does NOT constitute an acceptable excuse.

August
27 Course Introduction: How To Read Comics

September
1 Understanding Comics 1
READ: McCloud, Understanding Comics 2-117

3 Understanding Comics 2
READ: McCloud, Understanding Comics 118-215
8  **Comics Criticism 1**
READ: Wolk, *Reading Comics* 1-59

10 **Comics Criticism 2**
READ: Wolk, *Reading Comics* 60-79; 118-34

15-17 **Maus**
READ: Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*
READ: Versaci, “Remaustering The Past” (PDF)

22-24 **Persepolis**
READ: Satrapi, *Persepolis*

29 **American Splendor**
READ: Pekar et al, *American Splendor* (pages TBA)

October
1  **American Splendor (cont’d)**
DUE: Mini-Comic

6  **MIDTERM EXAM**

8  **Superheroes**
READ: Wright, *Comic Book Nation* xiii-55
READ: Wolk, *Reading Comics* 89-117

13  **NO CLASS (Fall Break)**

15  **Comics Under Fire**
READ: Wright, *Comic Book Nation* 56-179

20  **Comics Grow Up (sort of)**
READ: Wright, *Comic Book Nation* 180-285

22  **Comics Publishing Today**
READ: TBA
27-29 Superman
READ: Siegel and Shuster, Superman Chronicles Vol. 1 (pages TBA)
READ: Morrison and Quitely, All-Star Superman Volume 1

November
3-5 Batman
SCREENING: The Dark Knight (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2008)
READ: Kane and Finger, Batman Chronicles Vol. 1 (3-9; 137-90)
READ: Miller, The Dark Knight Returns; Wolk, 166-80

10-12 Spider-Man
SCREENING: Spider-Man (dir. Sam Raimi, 2002)
READ: Lee and Ditko, Amazing Spider-Man (pages TBA); Wolk 156-65
READ: Bendis and Bagley, Ultimate Spider-Man

17-19 Watchmen
SCREENING: Watchmen (dir. Zach Snyder, 2009)
READ: Moore and Gibbons, Watchmen; Wolk, 258-67

24 NO CLASS
Meet with me to discuss your paper.

26 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

December
1-3 The Business of Comics
READ: TBA

8 The Final Panel
DUE: Papers

16 FINAL EXAM
3-6 pm