

**Instructor:** Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges

**Class:** MW, 12:30 -2:20 p.m.

**Location:** Odegaard 136

**Office:** Padelford A-305

**Phone:** 543-4892

**Email:** kgb@uw.edu

**Office Hours:** MW, 10:30-11:30 p.m., and by appointment

**Class Canvas Site:** <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1187074>

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## Description

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*My Favorite Thing is Monsters* (Ferris, 2017)

English 368 examines short- and long-form autobiographical, nonfiction and fiction comics produced by female artists. What distinguishes the work of women comics writers and artists? How does an investigation of women comics creators alter our conception of the genre, its history and its readers?

To aid our study of comics' visual style and narrative structure, we will draw upon Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, asking how female authors' words and art complement, expand, and critique McCloud's paradigm. As we analyze female comics creators' diverse subject matter, we will pay attention to historical, cultural, biographical and industrial contexts. We will begin with a selection of 1970s and 80s underground and alternative comics by writer/artists including Diane Noomin, Trina Robbins, Roberta Gregory, Lee Marrs, and Aline Kominsky-Crumb. We will then explore the recent boom in graphic autobiography via the works of

Alison Bechdel, Ellen Forney, and Thi Bui before turning to fiction (Leela Corman, Emil Ferris, Marjorie Liu) and superhero comics (Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel, and Ms. Marvel).

English 368 fulfills the University's VLP and DIV requirements and counts toward the English major elective requirement.

## Goals and Methodology

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Students in the course work toward several goals:

- Analyzing comics' visual style and narrative structure in the vocabulary of comics scholars,
- Explaining the relationship between select female-authored comics and the industrial, social, political and cultural contexts of their production,
- Identifying connections among works produced by female comics artists/writers, and
- Developing as critical thinkers who can formulate substantive arguments and explore those arguments with evidence.

Course activities promote active learning, with most class sessions incorporating a mix of mini-lectures, discussion, and group work. The course design—which includes frequent non-graded and graded writing—reflects the importance of writing as a means of learning. My role is to provide the tools and resources you will need to advance your own thinking. I will pose questions, design activities to help you think through these questions, and respond to your ideas. Your role is to do the hard work—the close reading, discussion, and writing. You will analyze texts, present your interpretations via class discussion and written assignments, and critically respond to others' readings.

## Requirements

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I WAS SPARTAN TO MY FATHER'S ATHENIAN.



*Fun Home* (Bechdel, 2007)

### Class Participation

Class discussion constitutes one key method for developing your analytical skills. Thus, I expect prompt, regular attendance and active participation in discussions of texts. You should come prepared for each class session, with required reading and electronic responses completed. During class discussions, students should plan to ask questions, make comments, summarize their electronic postings, interpret panel sequences, or contribute to and share findings of small-group exchanges. Students should also expect me to call on them, as I want everyone to earn full points for class participation. Like all skills, speaking in class becomes easier with practice. I do not expect fully polished analyses in class discussion; rather, your contributions represent ideas for further development.

Because students will have multiple, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of course texts, we will establish norms for maintaining a respectful classroom environment early in the quarter. Also note that selected course texts depict painful subjects, including rape, sexual exploitation of children, domestic violence, workplace harassment, miscarriage, and intense verbal denigration. Students need not ask permission to briefly leave class if necessary.

Our active learning classroom allows both instructor and students to share electronic materials. Therefore, I ask that you bring a laptop to class if possible. Because the presence of student laptops and wireless internet access present the temptation of email and the web, students must follow basic ground rules:

- Students should switch off and stow their cell phones before class begins.
- Students may use laptops to take notes, share content generated during small-group exercises and research questions posed in class discussion; however, they should not check email, electronically chat, update their social networking status or surf the web during class unless asked to do so.

Lack of engagement in class activities, inadequate preparation, and failure to adhere to classroom rules will substantially lower your participation grade for the course.

### Electronic Reading Responses

Students will use the class posting board to respond to readings or final project drafts. Each week, I will pose questions about course texts. In a 250- to 300-word response, you may address one of my questions or introduce another point. Feel free to engage your classmates' ideas as you write. The electronic postings allow us to extend class conversations, raise issues for in-class discussions, and develop ideas for the annotation assignment and exams. Your postings receive points on a credit/no credit basis, with full points granted to on-time postings that meet the length requirement and demonstrate serious engagement with the questions provided.

### Presentation

Groups of 3-4 students will give a short presentation on a segment from one course text, applying concepts from *Understanding Comics* to analyze visuals, narrative and panel structure.

### Projects

Students will compose three projects on assigned topics. The first will take the form of an essay with integrated visuals. The second and third may take essay, comics, video, or other multimodal formats. Students may discuss ideas-in-progress and drafts with me during office hours. They may also seek feedback from consultants at the CLUE Writing Center in the Mary Gates Commons; the Odegaard Writing and Research Center in Odegaard Undergraduate Library, or the Interdisciplinary Writing Studio.

### Extra Credit

Students may receive extra credit for attending events related to class topics, texts and writers/artists. To earn points, students must first discuss the event with me. Within one week of attending the event, students should write a 300- to 350-word analysis that briefly describes the event, explaining how the ideas and materials encountered contributes to our class conversation. Each extra-credit piece is worth eight points; students may do a maximum of two extra-credit activities.



## Email and Access to Course Web Site

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You must have a UW Net ID, a working email account and a way to access the course Canvas site. I will frequently upload course materials to Canvas, and you will submit class work using the platform's assignment and discussion features.

## Texts

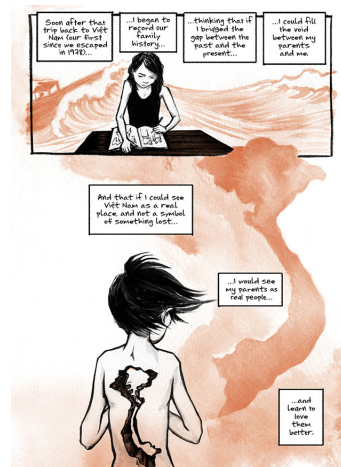
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With the exception of Simone's *Wonder Woman*, which you will need to purchase in electronic format, copies of all required course texts are available at the UW Bookstore. Scanned pages from selected women's underground comix will be posted to or linked from the course web site.

- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Mariner Books, 2007. ISBN: 0618871713
- Bui, Thi. *The Best We Could Do*. Abrams Comicarts, 2017. ISBN: 1419718770
- Corman, Leela. *Unterzakhn*. Schoken, 2012. ISBN: 0805242597
- DeConnick, Kelly and David Lopez. *Captain Marvel Volume 1: Higher, Further, Faster, More*. Marvel, 2014. ISBN: 0785190139
- Ferris, Emil. *My Favorite Thing is Monsters, Book One*. Fantagraphics Books, 2017. ISBN: 1606999591
- Forney, Ellen. *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir*. Gotham Books, 2012. ISBN: 1592407323
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. William Morrow Paperbacks, 1994. ISBN: 006097625X
- Liu, Marjorie and Sana Takeda. *Monstress, Volume One: Awakening*. Image Comics, 2016. ISBN: 1632157098
- Noomin, Diane. *Glitz-2-Go*. Fantagraphics, 2012. ISBN: 1606994816
- Simone, Gail. *Wonder Woman: The Circle*. DC Comics, 2008. ASIN: B075QN9JJS
- Wilson, G. Willow and Adrian Alphona. *Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal*. Marvel, 2014. ISBN: 078519021X

## Grading

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*The Best We Could Do* (Bui, 2017)

Grades in English 368 will be computed by points, with 400 points equaling a 4.0, 300 points a 3.0, and so on. If your total falls between grades, I will round up if you score one to five points below the higher grade and round down if you score one to four points above the lower grade. For example, 274 points equals a 2.7 and 275 points a 2.8. Students who score less than 65 points total will receive a 0 for the course, as the UW grading system does not scale grades lower than 0.7.

Apart from postings, which are graded on a credit/no credit basis, points for each assignment will be awarded based on quality of work

submitted. I will distribute grading criteria with all assignments. Each component of the course is worth the following number of points:

- Class participation: 60
- Postings: 80
- Presentation: 40
- Projects: 220