



USCRoski ART 312- Comics Projects

Spring 2022
Tuesday/Thursday 3:00-5:40 PM PST Units: 4
Location: WAH 102B or online

Instructor: Sam Alden
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Office hours by appointment, Saturday and Sunday



COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this class is to provide the space and guidance for each student to produce 10 pages or more of a self-contained comic in a personal and unique voice, drawn to a finished standard representing the student's best effort. Each student will finish the class with a strong understanding of comics storytelling, narrative drawing, panel structure, composition, pacing, and other skills inherent to the comics medium, as well as the confidence to use those tools to make work which is personally significant to them.

COURSE STRUCTURE

We'll begin the semester with lessons on the fundamentals and history of comics, storytelling exercises, and two short, quick comics assignments as practice for the main project. Once we've laid the groundwork for a shared comics vocabulary and you've had a chance to experiment with different ideas and practices, work on the main project will begin and further lessons will be partially determined by your own interests and concerns.

Comics are a weird, beautiful and idiosyncratic medium— there are many formal and informal rules, almost all of which can be broken to incredible effect. This class will work to understand the technical mechanics of the medium, while recognizing experimentation and a willingness to challenge those rules as part of the work. Together, we can provide a space for mutual guidance, learning, criticism and motivation.

CLASS STRUCTURE

We'll begin each class with either a workshop of your in-progress comics, a discussion of assigned reading, or a quick lecture from me. On review days this may take up the entirety of the class, but in general, I'll try to keep this half of the class concise so that you have as much in-class studio time as possible. The second half of the class will be dedicated to quietly working together on an exercise or comic.

Most weeks at least two comics will be assigned as reading. As often as I can, I'll include examples of comics with a comparable length to the main project, so that you can get a sense of what's possible in that amount of space. Although the reading will always be a secondary focus to the progress of the final project, please come to class prepared to discuss that week's comics. I'll try to always give a heads-up about potentially difficult content in the assigned reading and if you have concerns about being able to comfortably contribute to the discussion, just send me an email before our next class meets and you will be excused from the reading and participation for that assignment, no questions asked.

THE PROJECT

OFFICIAL REQUIREMENT: 10 pages or more of a self-contained comic in a personal and unique voice, drawn to a finished standard representing the student's best effort, due in biweekly installments.

It's literally the title of the class, so as you can imagine, the final project makes up the bulk of the semester. The 10 pages is a hard minimum, but almost everything else about the project is up to you, and we will discuss a range of ways to meet that requirement which can accommodate your experience level and schedule.

There are many options for creating final artwork. Traditionally, most cartoonists use graphite pencils to create a rough version of the comic, then trace the final linework in ink, and finally erase the original pencil marks to make a clean, finished image. You're welcome to make your comic this way- it's still the way that most comics in the world get made. However, I welcome experimentation with any other medium that appeals to you. Many cartoonists, particularly independent artists, use charcoal, colored pencils, watercolor, paint or permanent marker to produce their comics- and obviously, many more use Photoshop, Procreate, Manga Studio or an equivalent digital drawing program. If you would like to make your comic using photographs of ceramic figurines, you go with my blessing as long as the artwork is done to a finished degree.

My definition of a "page" is similarly flexible. Most commercial print comics are produced as tall, thin rectangles; the most common print comics page dimensions in Japan are 12.8 cm x 18.2 cm (5.04 in x 7.17 in) and in North America, it's 16.84 x 26.01 cm (6.63" x 10.24"). If you want to produce work that looks like that, use those page ratios (not necessarily those page dimensions! We'll talk more about this later). However, I'm open to many other dimensions. I personally like to use a page shape that's almost square (7.5x9") and a lot of independent comics artists seem to also prefer a shorter page. Some students might want to define a "page" as a horizontal comic strip, and use a very wide, short page dimension to accommodate that. Additionally, you might be interested in creating a comic meant to be published as a webcomic or webtoon.. Webtoons feel like one long scroll, but they're usually produced in "pages" that are so tall and thin that they may be unreproducible in print form. My only hard limit is that all your pages must be the same size and shape to avoid headaches.

Additionally, the content and layout of each page is up to you. You might want to make each page a massive jigsaw puzzle of dozens of interlocking panels in full color, or you might want each page to be a single polished drawing and a caption. As long as you can justify your choices as being in the service of the comic I'm all for it.

Some students may have plans for a larger work and it's perfectly fine to use this class as an opportunity to draw the first 10 pages of a planned 1,000.

"Self-contained" simply means that a reader must be able to understand in broad strokes what's going on in your comic despite knowing no other context, and that they must end the comic with some sense of having seen some arc, idea or narrative brought to an intentional conclusion.

Finally, the project will not necessarily be autobiographical (although it certainly could be), but I do require that in some way it will be personal. Regardless of the

topic, I would like you to create something that reveals something about your perspective, your inner life, or your interests. If there are parts of the comic that are meant to be funny, you should genuinely find them funny. If you are telling a traditional character-based narrative, you should have some sense of your characters as real, multi-dimensional people. I would love for you to use this project to connect not just with the long tradition of comics, but with the world around you. Do something unexpected, find a story only you can tell, show us a little fragment of the world we haven't seen. Nestled somewhere within you is the sensitive, beating heart of a comic that only you can make!!



Find your nestled, beating heart!!!!

The project makes up 80% of your grade.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

Please show up for class on time- I prefer to wait for everyone to arrive before moving the show along, so it eats into everyone else's schedule when people are late. If you are unable to make it to class because of extenuating circumstances- including mental health and any number of things that can go wrong- just send me an email before class begins saying that you won't be able to make it. You won't be marked absent as long as you email me before the class begins! I don't need to hear your reasons and won't ask for them- I trust that if you need that time off, you need it. I'll do the best I can to follow up with you and make sure you have the resources you need, but you will ultimately be responsible for catching up on reading or assignments that may have missed that day.



Anna Haifisch, The Artist

If you start to fall behind on assignments– please just come talk to me about it! My whole job is helping you to finish the project, and I'll be best at that job if you let me know what's going on. Comics are a lot of work, and there's no shame in struggling.

This class is meant to be a welcoming and respectful environment, so please keep all criticism constructive, respectful, and not personal. Everyone's correct names and pronouns will be respected. Racist, homophobic, sexist, ableist, transphobic or otherwise discriminatory remarks or work will not be allowed. If you behave in a way I judge to be rude or harmful I'll assume good faith, but we'll have a talk, and I reserve the right to call a situation as I see it. Repeated, willful hurtful actions will be considered fair grounds for expulsion from the class. **BE COOL.**

Plagiarism is obviously forbidden. I'll be encouraging everyone to use visual reference, but if you are tracing photos, or turning in someone else's artwork as your own, it's plagiarism and will affect your grade. If you're in doubt– just ask!

Here's USC's official language:

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems
Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Unless otherwise indicated, all comic assignments are due in the appropriate Google Drive folder at the beginning of class. This is an important deadline and each time you miss it without getting clearance from me first, 3% will be docked from your final grade. Incomplete but on-time work will only cost you 1%, so if it’s 9:45pm and you’re panicking, it’s better to send in whatever you have. Late work won’t be discussed in class.

When turning in work for review, a clean, legible photo is perfectly acceptable (although a scan is preferable if you have the equipment). **For final artwork, a clean scan at 300dpi or higher is required.** Final art must be TIFFs, PNGs or equivalent (smaller formats like JPEG end up very lossy, especially when turning in high-contrast ink artwork). If you will need help scanning your work or finding access to a scanner, reach out– we can figure out a solution!

When turning in rough or final pages for your final project, please follow this format:

SamRough01.tiff
SamFinal01.tiff

GRADING

I will be grading based on personal growth and effort, rather than comparing your performance to others in the class. If you can demonstrate that you’re trying your best, you’ll be fine.

Grading Breakdown:
80% Final project
10% Other assignments
10% Participation

Grading scale:
A Minimum 95%
A- Minimum 90%
B+ Minimum 87%
B Minimum 83%
B- Minimum 80%
C+ Minimum 77%
C Minimum 73%
C- Minimum 70%
D+ Minimum 67%
D Minimum 60%
F Below 60%

RESOURCES

I'm including a list of links and resources provided by either USC or another organization, which I mostly copied from Keith Mayerson's syllabus. Please also feel free to send me an email if there's anything that I can do to help manage the class.

Counseling and Mental Health

(213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services

(RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)

(213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment

(213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

(213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC

(213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency

UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

Crisis Text Line (USA-only)

Text HOME to 741741

Crisistextline.org

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Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States, anytime. Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. The volunteer Crisis Counselor will help you move from a hot moment to a cool moment.

The Warmline (California-only)

(855)845-7415 (call)

www.mentalhealthsf.org/peer-run-warmline

The Peer-Run Warm Line is a non-emergency resource for anyone in California seeking mental and emotional support. We provide assistance via phone and web chat on a nondiscriminatory basis to anyone in need. Some concerns callers share are challenges with interpersonal relationships, anxiety, pain, depression, finances, alcohol/drug use, Etc.

SCHEDULE

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| Week 1 T 1/11 Th 1/13 | Introductions, overview Tiny Comic #1 due |
| Week 2 T 1/18 Th 1/20 | NO CLASS - MLK DAY Tiny Comic #2 due |
| Week 3 T 2/1 Th 2/3 | Workday Pages 1&2 Roughts Due |
| Week 4 T 2/8 Th 2/10 | Workday Pages 1&2 Finals Due |
| Week 5 T 2/15 Th 2/17 | Workday Pages 3&4 Roughts Due |
| Week 6 T 2/22 Th 2/24 | NO CLASS - PRESIDENTS DAY Page 3&4 Finals Due |
| Week 7 T 2/29 Th 3/3 | Workday Pages 5&6 Roughts Due |
| Week 8 T 3/9 Th 3/10 | Work day Pages 5&6 Finals Due |

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| Week 9 T 3/15 Th 3/17 | NO CLASS - SPRING RECESS |
| Week 10 T 3/22 Th 3/24 | Work day Pages 7&8 Roughs Due |
| Week 11 T 3/29 Th 3/31 | Work day Pages 7&8 Finals Due |
| Week 12 T 4/5 Th 4/7 | Work day Pages 9&10 Roughs Due |
| Week 13 T 4/12 Th 4/14 | Work day Pages 9&10 Roughs Due |
| Week 14 T 4/19 Th 4/21 | Work day Pages 9&10 Finals Due |
| Week 15 T 4/25 Th 4/27 | Final steps: cover, binding, printing, self-publishing |
| FINAL Date and time TBD | A special all-class presentation of your finished comics B) |