GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2026-2027

Comics and Graphic Novels (A005565)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 1)	English	Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Van de Wiele, Eva	LW07	lecturer-in-charge
Busi Rizzi, Giorgio	LW07	co-lecturer
Chu, Kin Wai	LW07	co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027	crdts	offering
Master of Arts in Comparative Modern Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

comics and graphic novels, children's and comics magazines, word-image relationships, intermediality

Position of the course

This course introduces advanced students to historical and theoretical tools for analyzing and contextualizing different kinds of comics (strips, periodicals, comic books, graphic novels), with a special focus on graphic novels and comics magazines.

Contents

The graphic novel has become a staple of the literary scene. It also continues to mystify: is it a work of literature, of visual art? Is it a novel or an art book? What is the difference between comics and graphic novels? Understanding comics as a medium - thus, seeing graphic novels, albums, comic strips as different manifestations of the medium - this course seeks to examine comics in all their diversity.

The course hence

- interrogates the polarities of popular/genre fiction and literary fiction
- investigates the differences between literary and cultural products for children and adults and the grey areas where they overlap
- reflects on the relation between materiality and mediality, what it implied in the evolution of comics formats, and what has changed after the digital turn
- examines the politics of representation of the medium, considering its historical unfolding and medium-specific characteristics
- equips students with historical and theoretical tools for analyzing visual and thematic features in different kinds of comics (strips, periodicals, graphic novels)
- comprises a creative research project developed by the students

Initial competences

Proof of conducting small research projects and writing research papers: ability to formulate research questions and hypotheses, select and apply appropriate methodologies, distill and evaluate results.

Final competences

1 Acquire insight into comics histories and methodologies from comics studies,

visual semiotics and periodical studies that allow to navigate visual culture and critically read different kinds of comics (graphic novels, comics magazines, comic books)

2 Be able to position and apply the methodological tools coming from their literary/linguistics background in analyzing visual culture, combining formal (visual semiotics and narratology) and ideological perspectives (critical theory/cultural studies and the like)

3 Incorporate and give feedback on presentations and group work.

4 Be able to design and conduct a comics-related research project by selecting, combining and applying relevant methodologies for the study of comics and collectively crafting a graphic essay/fanzine

5 Effectively communicate results through different academic formats.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Lecture, Independent work, Peer teaching

Extra information on the teaching methods

Sessions will combine lecture and seminar methods, with opportunities for students to participate in class discussions. Students are expected to come to class prepared and to conduct individual and group work. They are encouraged to take notes, ask questions during class, discuss and answer each other's questions, and think actively.
There are no lecture recordings available.

Study material

Type: Slides

Name: Slides
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Handouts

Name: various essays
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : intensive
Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : one-time
Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : occasionally

Type: Other

Name: The final reading list will be shared during the first class.
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Additional information: Price depends on reading list

References

Maaheen Ahmed, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Comics*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.
Maaheen Ahmed, Rikke Platz Cortsen, and Julia Round, *Comics and Graphic Novels*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.
Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*. Cambridge

University Press 2014.
Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo, *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time: Symbolic Capital and the Field of American Comic Books*. Palgrave 2016.
Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2007.
Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2009.
Charles Hatfield and Bart Beaty, eds. *Comics Studies: A Guidebook*. Rutgers University Press, 2020.
Barbara Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments*. RIT Press, 2013.
Thierry Smolderen, *The Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay*. University Press of Mississippi 2014.

Course content-related study coaching

Possibility of feedback and counselling on an individual basis.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

The assessment for attending students will take into account attendance and participation in class.
In addition, each week, one or two students will be asked to introduce the work on which the lesson will focus and answer any preliminary questions from their classmates.
One lesson will be dedicated to explaining and providing assistance with the collective graphic essays/fanzines. Students will have formed groups in advance and decided on a topic to focus on.
The written exam will take place in January, and consist of open questions and multiple-choice questions.
Non-attending students take the written exam and an oral exam, consisting of a short presentation followed by a Q&A.

Calculation of the examination mark

Attending students:
1 Participation: 20% (attendance 5%, participation in class 5%, individual presentation of the weekly reading 10%)
2 Collective graphic essay/fanzine: 30%
3 Written exam: 50%
Non-attending students:
1 Oral exam: 50% (short presentation 20%, Q&A 30%)
2 Written exam: 50%

Facilities for Working Students

- Exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance
- Feedback can be given by the lecturers via e-mail or by appointment