

Huron University College

Department of English

English 2550F: Heroes and Superheroes

Intersession 2021

Dr. Adrian Mioc

Class: Tue 9:30 AM -12:30 PM, Th 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Office: UC 3314

Office Hours: Thu 12:30-2:30 PM

Email: amioc2@uwo.ca

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.



Although this academic year might be different, Huron University is committed to a **thriving campus**. We encourage you to check out the [Digital Student Experience](#) website to manage your academics and well-being. Additionally, the following link provides available resources to support students on and off campus: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.

Technical Requirements:



Stable internet connection



Laptop or computer



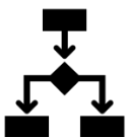
Working microphone



Working webcam

General Course Description

This course aims to explore the figure of the hero and superhero as it evolves and is depicted in contemporary comic books as well as in other forms of popular culture such as movies and TV series. Methodologically, it will combine the study of literature with contemporary popular culture while incorporating a theoretical component as well.



Specific Focus:

In the beginning, we will briefly explore myths that are relevant and will help us understand the figure of the modern day superhero. After a quick historical exploration, which will offer a substantial foundation for the study of the 20th and 21st-century manifestation of the superheroes, the main focus of this course will be placed on the problematic of this figure.

Besides well-known characters (Superman, Batman and Spiderman), we will tackle less-spoken-about figures such as Jessica Jones or Harley Quinn. We will examine the inner transformation and evolution of the superhero from the twentieth-century comic book to today's tent-pole blockbusters and Netflix's exclusive streaming series. Costumes, masks, weapons and other apparel will play an important role in

our analysis. The course will also chart the way in which comic book universes have responded to the development of identity politics of all kinds: we will look at how superheroes deal with issues related to gender, race and sexuality. Has the modern female superhero become something other than an object of an object of masculine desire – of the male gaze? We will engage in questions about femininity through close readings of such characters as Supergirl and Agent Peggy Carter. A course on such extraordinary heroes would not be wide-ranging without a discussion about the Japanese manga series, especially Dragon Ball and at its main character, Goku, a modern avatar of the Monkey King.

Mode	Dates	Duration	Frequency
Virtual synchronous	Tue 9:30-10:30 (Zoom) Thu 9:30-10:30 (Zoom)	±1 hr.	weekly
Virtual asynchronous	N/A	±2 hr.	weekly

Virtual **synchronous** learning refers to the virtual classes that will take place on Zoom during the scheduled class time. All the students enrolled in the course will engage in learning and discussions at the same time.

Virtual **asynchronous** learning refers to the time that students are supposed to work independently. Materials and assignments will be provided for students to study and complete them in a given time frame. Students will access and learn the material at the time and location of their choice.

Note:

Students living in different time zones (or having legitimate grounds) who cannot attend synchronous Zoom sessions will be given an extra assignment for their attendance/participation grade. Even Zoom-shy students will have the opportunity to express their thoughts in the OWL forum. Students who want to share their initial thoughts regarding the topic of their written assignments can do that through the OWL dropbox. All students enrolled in this course will be able to complete it.

All course material will be posted to OWL: <http://owl.uwo.ca>. Any changes will be indicated on the OWL site (OWL>Announcements) and emailed to the class. Check your Western email.

If students need assistance, they can seek support on the [OWL Help page](#). Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#). They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

[Google Chrome](#) or [Mozilla Firefox](#) are the preferred browsers to optimally use OWL; update your browsers frequently. Students interested in evaluating their internet speed, please click [here](#).

Course Learning Objectives:

The students will walk away with a much more effective understanding of how the hero/superhero functions in our own culture and why such figures have been at the center of so many mythologies. Successful students who complete the course will:

- Develop an understanding of the idea of the Hero in some of its most characteristic figures throughout literary and cultural history
- Develop an understanding of the idea of the Superhero as it is depicted in contemporary comic book culture
- Conceive of the ways in which Heroes and Superheroes relate to each other, in theory and in the practices of cultural production
- Become familiar with theoretical concepts such as those that are associated with the study of myth or of gender and race, all of which theories will become instrumental in developing a better understanding of the contemporary superhero phenomenon and in placing it on a higher level of generality.
- Develop an appreciation for the creative production of superhero images and their combination into different kinds of mythological narrative

Description of Class Methods

Classes will consist of (Zoom) lectures on, and discussions of, various theoretical ideas like theories of myth and other related critical themes. Besides these theoretical aspects, there will also be discussions on weekly readings and viewings. Students can expect some improvised group work on 1) specific passages in the readings, 2) scenes in the viewing, or 3) handouts on critical and theoretical perspectives. Thus, they should come to class with their readings in print or digital media, having read the work scheduled for that day, and prepared to participate in lectures and discussions.

Reading List

Heroes, Gods And Monsters In Ancient Greek Mythology (Cherished Library) Michael Ford, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

James Kakalios: *The Physics of Superheroes*, Avery Publishing, 2005.

Lillian Robinson *Wonder Women – Feminisms and Superheroes*, Psychology Press, 2004.

Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and their Fans*, Univ. Of Mississippi Press, 2001.

Mark D. White, William Irwin. *Watchmen and Philosophy_ A Rorschach Test*, The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series, 2009.

All readings, both comic books and theoretical readings will be provided in electronic form via the OWL website.

Assignment	Due	Weight
Character Study (500 words)	May 20	15%
Event Analysis (500 words)	June 3	15%
Term Essay (1000 words, argument and 3 references)	June 17	25%
Final Exam	Scheduled by Registrar	30%
Attendance & Participation	Ongoing	15%

Brief Description Of Assignments:

Character Study: The figure of the hero/heroine is expressed through his/her character. Using close-reading skills, students will write a short 500-word analysis of one of their favourite heroic characters.

Event Analysis: Certain events trigger the transformation of ordinary people into heroes/superheroes. Students are asked to explain the contexts (and/or controversies) surrounding a particular event. An event analysis may examine the causes of the event, the activities during the event, the circumstances surrounding the event, or the consequences of the event. The focal point is always the particular event and the parties involved.

The Term Essay is a formal, extended discussion of at least one character or a general theme pertaining to the Heroic or Superheroic genre. For characters not discussed in class please send me a brief description before you start writing. The essay should go beyond a mere description and provide an in-depth discussion. You should focus on articulating a position and its relative meaning. Students who are unsure and would like to share the topic of their paper before they start writing can email me a short description. Secondary research is required (at least 3 materials –essays/articles from books/academic journals). MLA citation style is required.

Late Policy

All assignments are due by the end of class on the due date and should be handed to the instructor personally. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the instructor receives the essay.

Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 2 marks per calendar day until the instructor receives the essay. Normally, late assignments will receive a grade but no detailed commentary. After 7 days, the assignment will not be accepted and a mark of O/F will be awarded.

Students must pass both term work and the final examination in order to pass the course. Students who fail the term work are not allowed to take the final examination. Students who fail the final examination (regardless of their term work) automatically fail the course.

Schedule of Readings and Lectures:

Week 1

May 11: Introduction

May 13. Ancient Mythology and Modern Myths

Axis Mundi: An Introduction to Mythology and Folklore (presentation on OWL)

Jesus, A Copy of Pagan Myths? (presentation on OWL)

Additional reading: Philippe Walter *Christian Mythology. Revelations of Pagan Origins*. ch. 2. Samhain, the Night of Passage, Halloween. ch. 4. Masks. Saint Valentine's Day.

(additional showing scenes from Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (TV-series, 2017) examples of African Gods see also Patricia Ann Lynch *African Mythology A to Z*)

Week 2: Greece and Rome

May 18: Greek Gods: Zeus and Prometheus (*Gods Heroes and Monsters* Introduction p. 1-23)

May 20: Greek Heroes, Heroines: Heracles (*Heroes, Gods and Monsters* ch. IV) Amazons (Lesley Bolton, *The Everything Classical Mythology Book* p.127-129)

(movie scenes from *Wonder Woman* dir. Patty Jenkins) (additional reading: Carl Gustav Jung, *On the Concept of the Archetype*)

Week 3: Comic Books and its Characters

May 25: The comic book as a genre, the physics of the superhero universe: time and space, superpowers, different categories of superheroes; gods, meta-humans, humans.

(readings: James Kakalios: *The Physics of Superheroes* and/or Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*)

May 27: Godlike Superheroes: Superman - The Death of Superman (1993)

Godlike Superheroines: Supergirl, Dark Phoenix, Power Girl (or Wonder Woman, Storm) (topics: more powerful than male superheroes?)

(additional reading: Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, ch. *Overman and Eternal Recurrence*)

Lillian Robinson *Wonder Women – Feminisms and Superheroes*, ch. *Chronicles: Generations of Super-Girls*) (additional reading: Michel Foucault *Subject and Power*)

Week 4 Superheroes

June 1: Transformed Superheroes: Hulk, Captain America, Flash, Spider-Man, Swamp Thing) (topics: accidents in a dangerous world or becoming who one is) (scenes from *Spider-Man: Into the Spider Verse* (2018))

Transformed Superheroines: Invisible Girl in *Fantastic Four Visionaries* – John Byrne, Volume 1 (2001) (other examples: Catwoman, Hawkgirl) (topics: the science of superheroes) (additional reading: George Kovacs (ed.), *Classics and Comics*, ch. *Coming up to Code: Ancient Divinities Revisited*)

June 3: Human Superheroes/heroines: Batman, Daredevil, Iron Man, The Punisher, (topics: still “all too human”?) (scenes from *Logan* (2017) *Watchmen* (2009) and *Watchmen* (HBO - TV series), Black Widow, Elektra, (topics: de-objectifying women in comics, “male gaze” etc.

(additional reading: Lillian Robinson *Wonder Women – Feminisms and Superheroes*, ch. *The Book of Lilith*

Mark D. White, William Irwin. *Watchmen and Philosophy. A Rorschach Test*, The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series, Wiley, 2009.

Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, ch. Gay Rights, Civil Rights, and Nazism in the X-Men Universe)

Week 5: The Bad and the Ugly

June 8: Male Supervillains: The Joker (Alan Moore *The Killing Joke*) (scenes *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Joker* (2019) Doctor Doom, Magneto, Thanos, Loki, Galactus, Ultron, Kingpin (topics: Is evil eternal? The Arch-nemesis or -enemy of the superhero? Does the villain complete the superhero?)

(additional reading: Lois H. Gresh and Rbert Weinberg, *The Science of Supervillains*, ch. *The Original Dr. Evil: Lex Luthor*)

June 10: Female Supervillains: Mystique (in *X-Men Legends*, Volume 2 – The Dark Phoenix Saga (2003) (Harley Quinn, Talia al Ghul) (topics: worse than masculine evil? stronger sex appeal?)

(additional reading: Chris Gavaler, *The Origin of Superheroes*, ch. *The Superhero Guide to Love and Sex*)

Week 6: Race and Gender in the Superhero Culture

June 15: Black Superheroes/heroines: Black Panther – The Man Without Fear # 518 (or Luke Cage, War Machine, Patriot, Nick Fury) (topics: race and superpowers) (reading: Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and their Fans* ch. *Reading Race and Gender*), scenes from *Black Panther* (2018) and *Hancock* (2008)

(additional reading: Ismahan Soukeyna Diop, *African Mythology, Femininity, and Maternity* (2019)

June 17: Gay, Lesbian, Transsexual Superheroes: Xena - Warrior Princess (1997) (or Northstar, Apollo and Midnighter, Shatterstar and Rictor, Danielle Bapryste) (topics: gender politics in superhero comics, superheroes and sexuality)

(additional reading: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* ch. *Identity Sex and the Metaphysics of Substance*)



Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations 2021 - 2022

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity

and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at:

<https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. The appeals process is also outlined in this policy as well as more generally at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Turnitin.com

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems (“Clickers”)

Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

Students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester may submit a self-reported absence form online provided that the absence is **48 hours or less** and the other conditions specified in the Senate policy at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf are met.

Students whose absences are expected to last **longer than 48 hours**, or where the other conditions detailed in the policy are not met (e.g., work is worth more than 30% of the final grade, the student has already used 2 self-reported absences, the absence is during the final exam period), may receive academic consideration by submitting a Student Medical Certificate (for illness) or other appropriate documentation (for compassionate grounds).

The Student Medical Certificate is available online at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf .

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. **Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.**

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

Policy on Academic Consideration for a Medical/ Non-Medical Absence

(a) Consideration on Medical Grounds for assignments worth *less than 10%* of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly and Contact Academic Advising

When seeking consideration on **medical grounds** for assignments worth *less than 10%* of the final course grade, and if the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported absences, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. If documentation is requested, the student will need to complete and submit the [Student Medical Certificate](#). The instructor may not collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation.

(b) Consideration on Non-Medical Grounds: Consult Huron Support Services/Academic Advising, or email huronsss@uwo.ca.

Students seeking academic consideration for a **non-medical** absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) will be required to provide appropriate

documentation where the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence have not been met, including where the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported. All consideration requests must include a completed [Consideration Request Form](#). Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf. Consult [Huron Academic Advising](#) at huronsss@uwo.ca for any further questions or information.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should email an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services at huronsss@uwo.ca. An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Department Chairs, Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about individual programs. Contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/contact/faculty-staff-directory/>.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please refer to the Advising website,

<https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/> or review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here:

<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>

Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>

Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1>

Learning Development and Success: <https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>

Accessible Education: <http://academicssupport.uwo.ca/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Mental Health & Wellness Support at Huron and Western

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. Please visit

<https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services: huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca

Community Safety Office: safety@huron.uwo.ca

Chaplaincy: gthorne@huron.uwo.ca

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through, <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.