

**Texas A&M University—San Antonio**  
**English 5380: Visual Studies (spring 2026)**  
**In-person class sessions: M 5:30 – 8:15 pm (Classroom Hall 204)**

Instructor: Dr. Jackson Ayres  
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 Student Hours: Mon, 3:00-4:00; Wed, 1:00-2:00pm; and f2f or virtual meetings by appointment

### **Course Description for Spring 2026**

This course introduces students to the study of contemporary popular culture. Our preoccupations will be visual media, franchises, corporate authorship, adaptation, and the relationships between culture with commerce, consumption, and communities. We will consider how specific texts and practices interact with the conditions of production and consumption of those texts and practices.

Our entry point into this examination is Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' landmark graphic novel, *Watchmen*. Despite beginning its serialization forty years ago, *Watchmen* remains relevant and visible: in 2012, DC Comics, the owners of *Watchmen*, published a number of prequels under the banner title *Before Watchmen*. More recently, DC published sequels and spin-offs, such as *Doomsday Clock* and *Rorschach*. These official extensions of the *Watchmen* franchise sit alongside countless comic book homages, ripoffs, and inheritors. *Watchmen* is also a transmedia brand. Zack Snyder directed a live action film adaptation in 2009; HBO's 2019 television series *Watchmen* won eleven Emmy Awards; and the past year saw the release of a two-part animated film adaptation. One can also purchase *Watchmen* merchandise, from toys to tees. *Watchmen*, as Will Brooker writes, “now signifies not a single text but an intertextual network … [and] *Watchmen* now refers to a sprawling cross-media matrix of contradictory stories with multiple authors”. This course takes *Watchmen* as a case study for a wider popular culture increasingly dominated by brands, “universes,” and networks of adaptations.

The course reads *Watchmen* for its formal experimentation, genre revisionism, themes, and sources of influence. From attention to Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen*, we turn to the live-action and animated film adaptations as well as the television series, attending to how the comic translates to different media and contexts. The class sits at the intersection of adaptation, media, and comics studies.

### **Course Goals**

On completion of this course, students will:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of genre, visual media, adaptation, and contemporary commercial cultural production; and
- critically read and analyze a range of visual texts, making note of the relationships between the texts and their theoretical, historical, and cultural contexts.

### **Required Texts**

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*  
*Watchmen* film and television adaptations (available streaming on HBO Max)  
 Additional readings linked within our Blackboard page and/or available at the Library

## Assignments

- Collaborative Google document contributions
- In-class discussions
- Capsule reviews
- Conference paper drafts and workshopping
- Learning plan
- Process letters (2)
- Mid-Semester Reflection
- Final self-assessment
- Transmedia / franchise presentation
- Discussion-leading session
- Conference Paper

## Late Papers

Assignments are due by the date designated on the syllabus. While I prefer we adhere to the course schedule as closely as possible, I also recognize that at times presentations need to be rescheduled or a submission needs a grace period of 24-48 hours. I also know that significant disruptions for individual students can necessitate longer extensions. Therefore, I ask that you strive to maintain the designated schedule; at the same time, I proceed with common sense, compassion, and a sense of reasonable fairness. Communicate with me and, when appropriate, request an extension in advance.

## Artificial Intelligence Statement (subject to change)

ENGL 4394 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

## Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center:

The Center provides writing support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges. Writing tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Students can schedule appointments with the Center in JagWire under the student services tab. The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center can be reached by emailing [wldcc@tamusa.edu](mailto:wldcc@tamusa.edu). Students can also make appointments with the Writing, Language, and Digital Composing under the Student Services tab in JagWire.

## JAGS

Additional academic skill resources can be found in The JAGS (Jaguar Academic Guides to Success) Program. JAGS offers academic skill building strategies and can assist you in developing an effective academic success plan. If you are interested in the JAGS program, please contact the Student Academic Success Center at (210) 784-1352.

### Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disability. If you believe you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the coordination of services. DSS is located at the Main Campus on the 2nd floor of the Central Academic Building in room 210. The phone number for DSS is (210) 784-1335 and email is [dsupport@tamusa.edu](mailto:dsupport@tamusa.edu).

### Counseling Resources

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you or someone you know is experiencing life stressors, emotional difficulties, or mental health concerns at Texas A&M University – San Antonio, please contact the Student Counseling Center (SCC) located in Modular C, Room 166 (Rear entrance) or call 210-784-1331 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday – Friday. After-hours crisis support is available by calling 210-784-1331. Please contact UPD at 911 if harm to self or harm to others is imminent.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free, confidential (to the extent permitted by law), and are not part of a student's academic or university record. SCC provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information, please visit [www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling)

### Safer Spaces

We will work together to create a safer classroom for every student enrolled in this course. We will treat each other with common decency and respect. Derogatory or abusive comments made regarding race, class, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, size, appearance, age, religion, ethnicity, political orientation, or nationality are grounds for dismissal from the classroom community. I expect online civility. If you experience discomfort, please contact me and we will redress it.

### Childcare Statement

Please note that if lack or an interruption to childcare occurs, I welcome children (or other family members and dependents) to join you in our classroom. I ask only that you prepare the guest in order to ensure that you may still fulfill typical course expectations.

### Meeting Essential Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

### Student Misconduct

Appropriate conduct is essential to the effective functioning of the University. University policy defines unacceptable conduct, both academic and non-academic misconduct, and penalties for such behavior in [The Student Handbook](#) and The Student Code of Conduct.

## Academic Rights and Responsibilities

As a member in an academic community, students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education, be mature, be self-directed and be able to manage their own affairs. Students who are unwilling to abide by these basic expectations will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Students are expected to share in the responsibility and authority with faculty and staff to challenge and make known acts that violate the Texas A&M University-San Antonio Code of Conduct. For more information please [this site](#), which includes information on policies for the use of AI tools. Students, moreover, are expected to contend with the content of the course and the academic field from which that content emerges. Please refer to [the Student Handbook](#) for more information.

## Texas SB17

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance

According to the following federal regulation, [34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education \(DoE\) Title IV regulation](#), a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which includes class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving Federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have his/her aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may need to return a portion of his/her federal aid.

## University Email Policy and Course Communications

All correspondence between professors and students must occur via University email accounts. You must have Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at [sahelp@tamusa.edu](mailto:sahelp@tamusa.edu) or at 210-784-4357.

## The Six-Drop Rule

Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.