Philosophy of Art

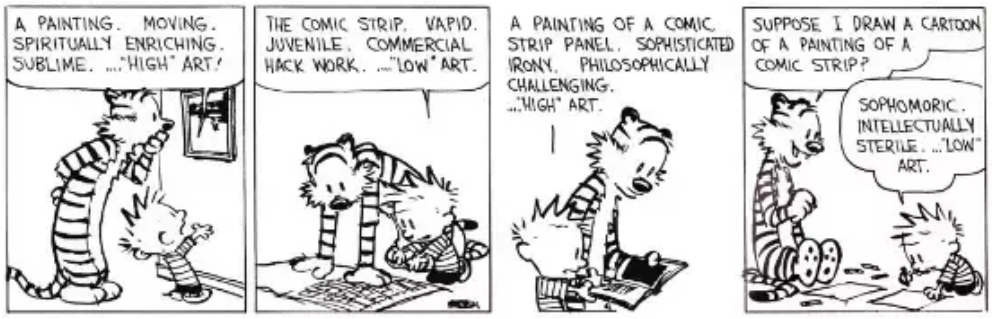
PHIL 1370

Spring 2025

University of Pittsburgh

Class location: 2800 Wesley W Posvar Hall
Meeting times: Mon and Wed, 4:30-5:45pm

Instructor: Dr. Shawn Simpson
Pronouns: he/him/his
Office location: 1029A
Office hours: Tuesdays 1-3pm and by appointment
Email: sms521@pitt.edu



Comics: High or low art? CALVIN AND HOBBES © 1993 Watterson.

Overview:

One of the great wonders of human life is the creation of art. We write poems about love, make paintings of landscapes, express ourselves through song and dance. But what exactly *is* art? What does art *represent* or *express*? Is there anything like a *language* of art? What is the *value* of art? And are we the only creatures that engage in artistic creation? In this course, we'll look at answers from historical and contemporary thinkers such as Plato, Tolstoy, and Danto. We'll consider more recent issues, such as the role of artificial intelligence, the ethics of censorship, and the difference between art and pornography. The aim of this course is to provide students with an introduction to key theories in the history of aesthetics and to guide them through an exploration of art's outer edges. No previous experience with philosophy or the history of art is required.

Texts:

Required: (1) *Art as Communication: Aesthetics, Evolution and Signaling* (2024) by Shawn Simpson and (2) *Classics in Western Philosophy of Art* (2022) by Noël Carroll. All other readings will be made available through the course Canvas page.

Recommended (but not required) texts include Marilynn Johnson's *Adorning Bodies* (2022) and Stephen Davies' *Philosophy of Art* (2006).

Grading:

Attendance/participation	10%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	25%
Essay 3	20%
Essay 4	25%

Essays 1 & 3 will be short, roughly 1-2 pages, double-spaced.

Essays 2 & 4 will be longer, roughly 5-8 pages, double-spaced.

Scale:

A+ = >100%, A = 94%-100%, A- = 90%-93.9%, B+ = 87%-89.9%, B= 84%-87.9%, B- = 80%-83.9%, C+ = 77%-79.9%, C = 73%-76.9%, C- = 70%-72.9%, D+ = 67%-69.9%, D = 63%-66.9%, D- = 60%-62.9%, F = 0%-59.9%

Course Schedule

Students are expected to complete assigned readings before the corresponding class session. Required readings are marked with a star *. Assignments are marked with a triple star ***. Simpson's *Art as Communication* is abbreviated *AaC.* Carroll's *Classics in Western Philosophy of Art* is abbreviated *CWPA.* Davies's *Philosophy of Art* is abbreviated *PoA.* The schedule is revisable and likely to change.

Jan 8 What is Art?
Brief overview of the course and syllabus
Introduction to the question "What is Art?"
Optional:
AaC, pp. 1-15
PoA pp. 24-48
Abell, "Art: What It Is and Why It Matters"

Jan 13 What Does Art *Represent* or *Express*?
**AaC,* pp. 1-35
Optional:
PoA, pp. 131-192

Jan 15 What Does Art *Express*?
**AaC,* pp. 35-45

Jan 20 MLK Jr Day (~~No Class~~)

Jan 22 Plato
**Hippias Major* and *Ion,* selections
**CWPA*, pp. 1-26
Optional:
AaC focuses on Plato's views on pp. 1-2, 16-17, 198

Jan 27 Plato
**Republic,* Books 2, 3, and 10, selections
**CWPA*, pp. 26-57

Jan 29 Aristotle
*Aristotle, *Poetics*, selections
**CWPA*, pp. 58-98
Optional:
AaC focuses on Aristotle's views on pp. 1-2, 16-17

Feb 3 Francis Hutcheson
*Hutchenson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty*, selections
**CWPA*, pp. 99-125
******Paper 1 Due******

Feb 5 David Hume
*Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"
**CWPA*, pp. 126-154
Optional:
PoA, pp. 152-153, 199

Feb 10 Immanuel Kant
*Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,* selections
**CWPA*, pp. 155-198
Optional:
PoA, pp. 50, 73, and 199

Feb 12 G. W. F. Hegel
*Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* selections
**CWPA*, pp. 199-226
Optional:
PoA, p. 43

Feb 17 Arthur Schopenhauer
*Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, selections
**CWPA*, pp. 227-245

Feb 19 Leo Tolstoy
*Tolstoy, *What is Art?*
**CWPA*, pp. 246-274
Optional:
AaC, pp. 41, 136.

Feb 24 Clive Bell
*Bell, *Art,* selections
**CWPA*, pp. 275-308

Feb 26 Morris Weitz
*Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"
Optional:
PoA, pp. 27-31
******Paper 2 Due******

Mar 3 & 5 Spring Break (~~No Class~~)

March 10 Arthur Danto
*Danto, "The Artworld"
Optional:
PoA, pp. 65, 87, 176-177

March 12 Modern Theories of Communication
**AaC,* pp. 49-89
Optional:
Godfrey-Smith, "Signs and Symbolic Behavior"

Mar 17 Group Communication & Art
**AaC,* pp. 101-122
Optional:
Tollefsen, "A Dynamic Theory of Shared Intention..."

Mar 19 Art as Communication
**AaC,* pp. 129-176

Mar 24 Artificial Intelligence
*Multiple Authors, "Eight Scholars on Art and Artificial Intelligence," *Aesthetics for Birds*
Optional:
Simpson, "Artificial Intelligence Threatens Disaster for Artists," *Newsweek*

Mar 26 Video Games
*Smuts, "Are Video Games Art?"

Mar 31 Pornography
*Maes, "Who Says Pornography Can't Be Art?"
Optional:
Eaton, "What's Wrong with the Female Nude?"
******Paper 3 Due******

Apr 2 Evil Art
*Card, *Atrocity Paradigm*, selections
*Mary Devereaux, "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl"
Case studies: Yu Buck's *Fish* (2022)

Apr 7 Cancelling & Censorship
*Claire Dederer, "What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?" *The Paris Review*
https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men/
Optional:
Multiple Authors, "Philosophers On The Art of Morally Troubling Artists," *Daily Nous*
https://dailynous.com/2017/11/21/philosophers-art-morally-troubling-artists/

Apr 9 Chinese & Japanese Aesthetics
**Tao Te Ching,* selections
*Japanese Aesthetics: Kenkō & Tanizaki, selections

Apr 14 The Horror!
*Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart*, selections

Apr 16 Does Art Evolve?
** AaC,* pp. 191-199
* Darwin, *The Descent of Man,* P1, Ch 2
Optional: *AB*, Chs 5 & 6

Apr 21 Do Animals Make Art?
*Marilynn Johnson, *Adorning Bodies,* pp. 159-182
**AaC*, pp. 200-209
Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species,* pp. 1-15, 32
Eduardo Mercado III, "The Humpback's New Songs..."

Final Exam Date (TBD)
*****Paper 4 Due*****

Other possible topics for discussion: *Other non-Western Aesthetics Traditions, Philosophy of Film, Philosophy of Dance, The Ethics of Art, Art & Politics, etc.*

Other possible readings:

- Eva Kit Wah Man – "Female Bodily Aesthetics, Politics and Feminine Ideals of Beauty in China"
- Ellen Dissanayake – *What is Art For?*
- George Yancy – "White Embodied Gazing, the Black Body as Disgust, and the Aesthetics of Unsuturing"
- Alia Al-Saji – "Glued to the Image: A Critical Phenomenology of Racialization through Works of Art"
- Michelle Meagher – "Telling Stories about Feminist Art"
- Hilde Hein – "Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective"
- Zoë Cunliffe – "Feminist Philosophy of Film"
- Graham Parkes, SEP article on "Japanese Aesthetics"
- Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*
- Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*: *Paradoxes of the Heart*

Course & University Policies & Services

Academic Integrity
Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the Academic Integrity Guide for an overview of the topic. For hands- on practice, complete the Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial.

No Use of Generative AI Permitted
Intellectual integrity is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. All work completed and/or submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the University's Guidelines on Academic Integrity. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or any other generative AI applications at any time.

Disability Services
If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Classroom Conduct
I expect you to complete the assigned readings before the corresponding class session. Some of the topics we'll be covering will be somewhat controversial and some of your fellow students will hold wildly differing views from you. I expect everyone in this class to treat each other with dignity and respect at all times in class. The purpose of this course is to provide a safe space for each of us to learn and explore ideas with each other – not to simply demean or put each other down.

Content Warning and Class Climate Statement
Our course readings and classroom discussions will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging topics. As with any course in ethics, course topics are often political and personal. Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings – anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

Devil's Advocate
Part of my job as a philosophy instructor is to play the "devil's advocate". That is, it is my job to question your views and your reasons for holding those views, to question the views of the authors we're reading, and to try my best to defend or argue for views – silly or absurd as they may seem – that contradict yours. Just know that when I take up this role, I am not trying to make you look bad or look stupid. I am also not questioning your intelligence. It is simply my job to dig as deep as I can and see what your real foundational reasons are for holding the views you do. It's worth noting also that just because I argue for (or against) some view, doesn't mean that I really believe it (or don't). Again, this is simply a philosophical method for getting you to think about these issues more deeply and more clearly.

Class Participation
Lack of participation during in-lecture discussions will not lower your grade. I understand that each of us have different degrees of comfort when it comes to talking in large groups and I do not believe in punishing shyness. However, active participation in lecture can affect your grade positively. Discussion during office hours may positively affect your grade too. Also, attendance is a part of your grade. Arriving to a session 10 minutes or more past start time will count as an unexcused absence (unless given prior permission).

Democracy in the Classroom
This course is meant to benefit you. As much as I will try to remain aware of how you all are doing and what is working and not working, *you* – more than I – know what is working and what isn't, what you are interested in or not, or what you need more time on or not. To the end of making this course work for you, I give you a say in just about all matters of course content (within University policy limits). Students may propose changes to and vote on when topics are discussed (earlier or later in the schedule), which topics are discussed (within thematic reason), and which readings are focused on during each section. Students may also propose and vote on changes to the general structure of in-class sessions (whether they want primarily lectures or group work or want to change things up for just one class in particular). If you have a proposal, either bring it up at the end of a class session or email me and I'll be happy to consider it. We'll discuss and vote on proposed changes through Canvas.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, visit the Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance web page.

I ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that other members of this class can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be filed online. You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of

Diversity and Inclusion. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).

Gender Inclusive Language
Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Just as sexist language excludes women's experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of individuals whose identities may not fit the gender binary, and/or who may not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Identities including trans, intersex, and genderqueer reflect personal descriptions, expressions, and experiences. Gender-inclusive/non-sexist language acknowledges people of any gender (for example, first year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman, humankind versus mankind, etc.). It also affirms non-binary gender identifications, and recognizes the difference between biological sex and gender expression. Students, faculty, and staff may share their preferred pronouns and names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored.

Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, and Title IX
The University is committed to combating sexual misconduct. As a result, you should know that University faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including harassment and sexual violence, to the University's Title IX office. What this means is that as your professor, I am required to report any incidents of sexual misconduct that are directly reported to me, or of which I am somehow made aware. After a report is made, you will be contacted by the Title IX Office for opportunities for support and options for proceeding.

There are two important exceptions to this requirement about which you should be aware:

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here: https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix-compliance/make-report/information-responsible-employees

An important exception to the reporting requirement exists for academic work and advocacy. Disclosures about sexual misconduct that are shared as part of an academic project, classroom discussion, course assignment or public awareness event, are not required to be disclosed to the University's Title IX office.

If you are the victim of sexual misconduct, Pitt encourages you to reach out to these resources:

Title IX Office: 412-648-7860
University Counseling Center: 412-648-7930 (8:30 A.M. TO 5 P.M. M-F) and 412-648-7856 (AFTER BUSINESS HOURS). This is a confidential resource.

If you have a safety concern, please contact the University of Pittsburgh Police, 412-624-2121.

Your Well-being Matters
College/Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to maintain your well-being and seek appropriate support can help you achieve your goals and lead a fulfilling life. It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. You are encouraged to visit Thrive@Pitt to learn more about well-being and the many campus resources available to help you thrive.

If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources.

The University Counseling Center is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226. If the situation is life threatening, call Pitt Police at 412-624-2121 or dial 911.

Substance Use Services

If you need immediate help in a substance use emergency, please call 911 or the resolve crisis network at 1-888-796-8226.

College brings a number of unique challenges that can becoming overwhelming. Some students turn to alcohol, drugs or food as a way to cope with a variety of issues. Unfortunately, regular use of substances can create more problems. The UCC offers a safe, non-judgmental and confidential place to share and explore questions, struggles and concerns about our relationship with chemicals, food or any habitual practice that consumes your time and risks your goals and well-being.

While the UCC cannot provide full service rehab, we can support you in better understanding the causes of your use; healthy, alternative, effective ways to cope; and if desired, connect you with recovery sources and programs.

The University of Pittsburgh's resource page on substance use related issues: https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cc/substanceabuse/

And addiction recover facility near Pittsburgh: https://recovery.org/drug-alcohol-rehab/pittsburgh-pa/

LGBTQIA Services
The University Student Affairs has resources for LGBTQIA students at their website: https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/lgbtqia/resources/
There are also non-university affiliated local organizations: Persad Center: https://www.persadcenter.org/ (5301 Butler St #100, Pittsburgh, PA 15201), PGH Equality Center: https://pghequalitycenter.org/ (5401 Centre Ave Suite 103, Pittsburgh, PA 15232), Allies

for Health and Wellbeing (5913 Penn Ave 2nd Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15206): https://www.alliespgh.org/).

Writing Center
You are strongly encouraged to trade drafts of your writing assignments with your classmates for editing and to make use of the Writing Center.

Location: 317B O'Hara Student Center — Phone: 412-624-6556
Webpage: https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu — Email: writecen@pitt.edu

Study Lab
A good resource for helping you plan your semester coursework.

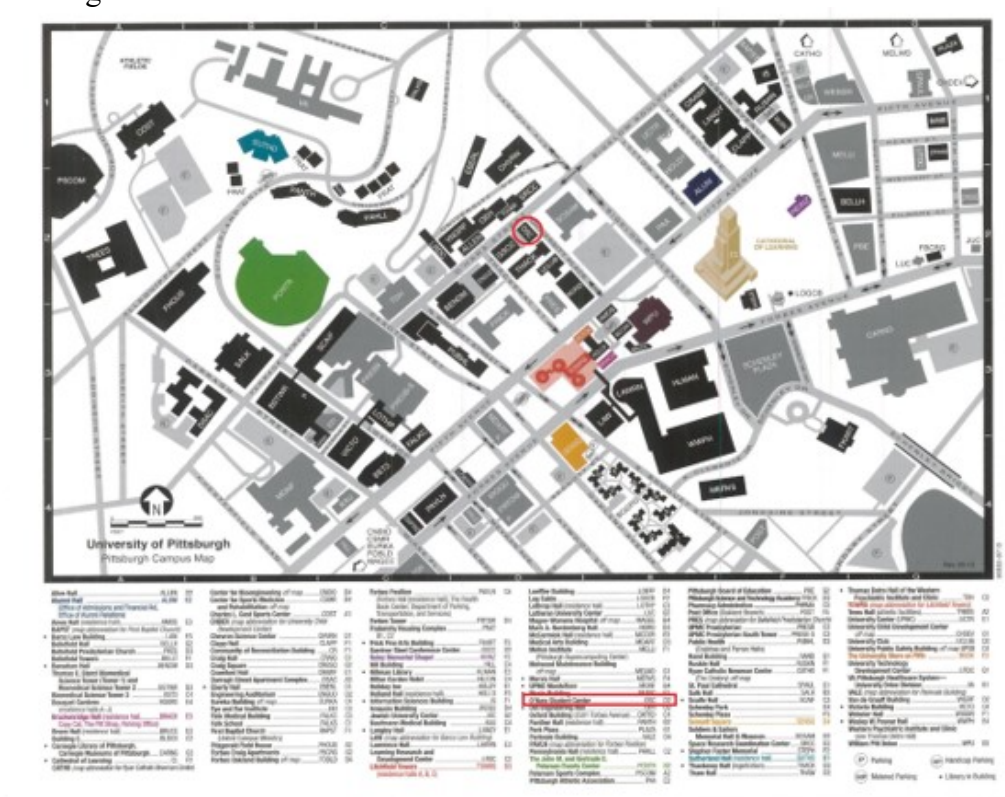
Location: Gardner Steel Conference Center. — Phone: 412-648-7920
website: asundergrad.pitt.edu/study-lab. — Email: study.lab@pitt.edu

Statement on Classroom Recording
To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

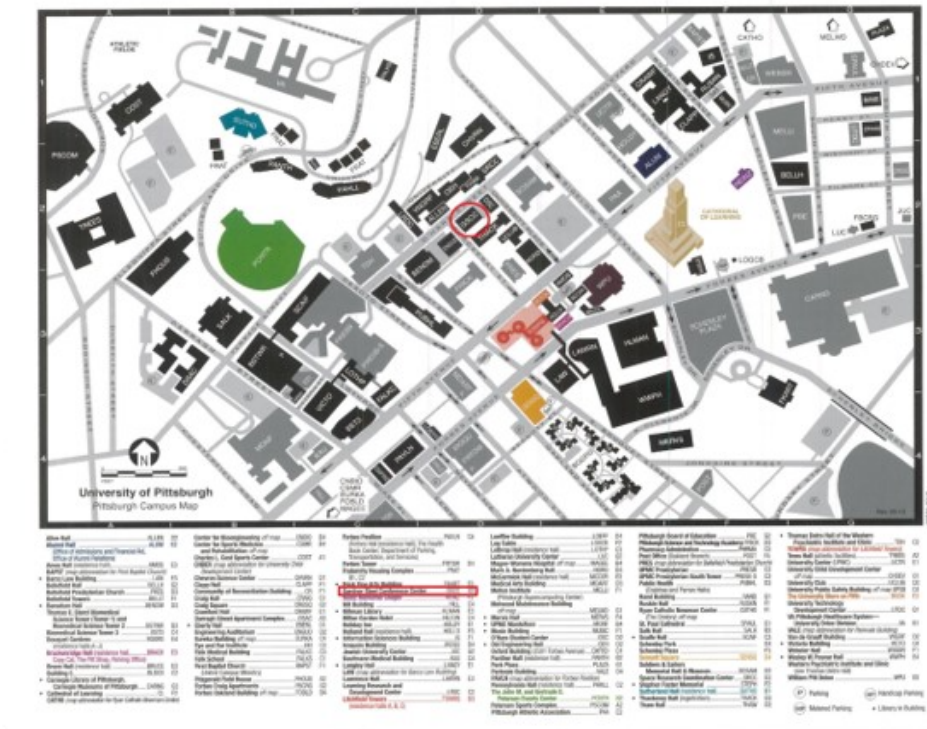
Contacting the Instructor
Please touch base with me about any issues that you might have that could potentially impact your success in the course. Visit me during my office hours or e-mail me with any questions you might have. I am a resource to help you learn. If you are confused about the readings or my expectations from you, please reach out. You can also reach out to the teaching assistants.

Copyright Notice
Materials provided for the course may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See Library of Congress Copyright Office and the University Copyright Policy.

Writing Center:



Study Lab:



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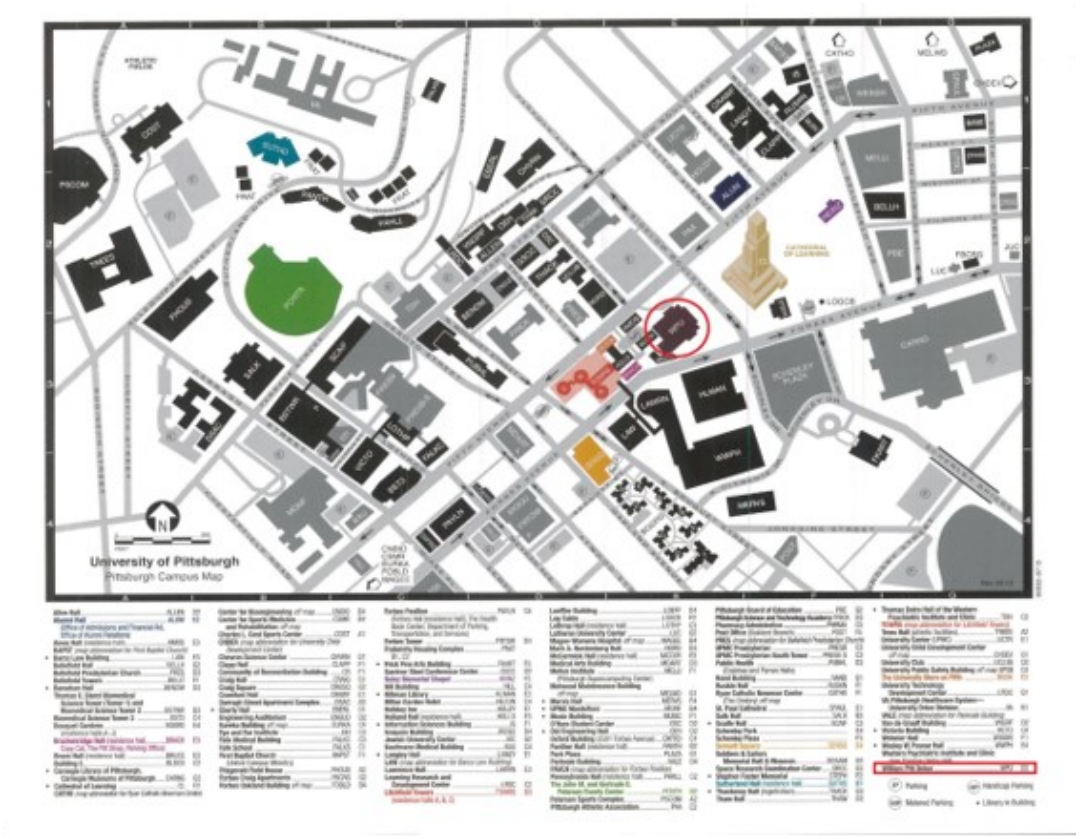
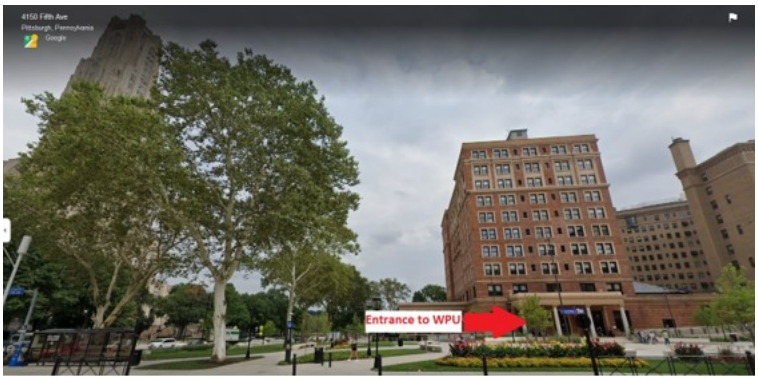
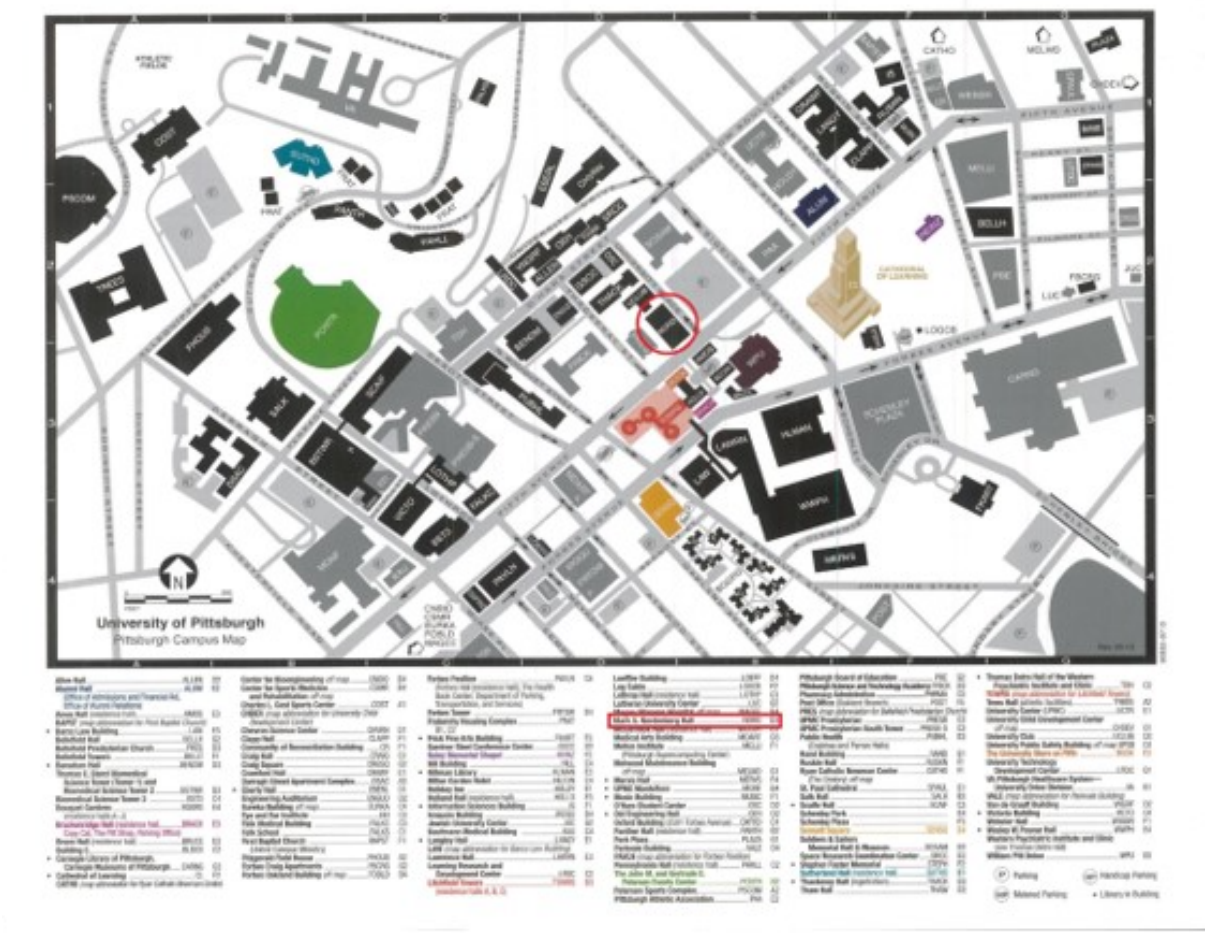


Street view:



Counseling Services:



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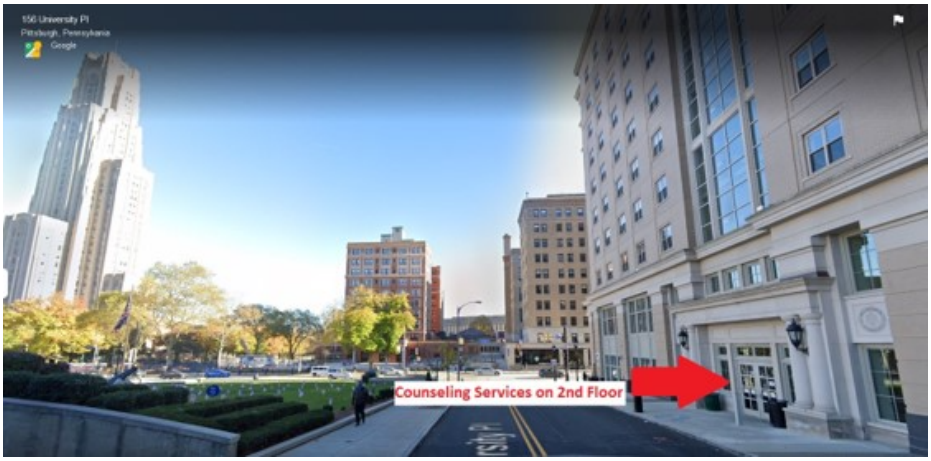

Sources:

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