Sketch Comedy In Performance  
THTR-473 (2 units)  
Spring 2015  
Mondays — 1 to 3:50pm (+ 3 selected Fridays)  
Location: RZC 111

Kirstin Eggers, Adjunct Instructor  
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Course Description  
A workshop in the techniques of performing comedic sketches, in collaboration with writers, directors, producers and technicians in the production of a live sketch comedy show.

Learning Objectives and Overview  
This course is designed to educate students on the techniques of performing comedic sketches as well as working in collaborative relations with writers, directors, and technicians in the production of a successful live filmed sketch comedy show.

This is a 15- instructional week course. Maximum enrollment is 12 performers.

Following the first week auditions, this course will meet Mondays from 1 to 3:50pm.

In addition, there are three Friday afternoon/night sessions: February 27, March 27, April 24 (SUBJECT TO CHANGE), during which material that has been created and rehearsed over the course of the semester will be filmed live in front of a studio audience. The material will be multi-camera filmed sketches, and possibly short comedic pre-shot films. All material will be developed and rehearsed in conjunction with CTWR-499 “Staff Writing the Sketch Comedy Show” and CTPR-499 “Directing the Comedy Sketch Show.” The Trojan Vision class CTPR-409 will take on the technical and producing duties for the three dress rehearsals and three live shows.

The first four weeks of this course will focus on the art of performing in sketch comedy, including comedic character creation as a catalyst for sketch development. Using improvisation and discussion, we will learn about the freedom that must be present in sketch performance, meanwhile creating and exploring truthful characters that deserve to be the basis of a sketch. We will consider the themes and rules already prevalent in the sketch world, and create our own rules and themes to simplify and stop from pushing the need to Be Funny, instead focusing on how to create truthful emotions/reactions in absurd situations, thereby creating the most satisfying comedy. Students will also work with Directing students on classic sketches, as a practical for acting within a sketch, and receiving direction. Acting will often be on-camera, with playback to analyze. We will also be presenting a workshop of improvised characters and scenarios for the benefit of the Writing and Directing students during this time.

The remaining eleven weeks of the course will involve rehearsing and producing three LIVE sketch comedy half-hours, in direct collaboration with the SCA Writing, Directing, and Production students and faculty, modeling the actor/writer/director/producer interaction on network television sketch shows.

Acting students will also collaborate on appropriate costume/make-up/prop decisions and contributions.
Required and Supplementary Materials

Assigned Reading:
Bossypants by Tina Fey

Recommended Reading:
Live From New York: An Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live by Tom Shales and James Andrew Miller

Vanity Fair: The Comedy Issue, December 2012
http://www.vanityfair.com/archive/comedy-issue

Assigned Viewing:
Saturday Night, available on Hulu

Recommended Viewing:
Watch and analyze current television sketch shows such as: Saturday Night Live, Key & Peele, Inside Amy Schumer, Kroll Show, etc.
as well as historical sketch shows (many found online) such as: The Carol Burnett Show, Chappelle’s Show, The Kids In The Hall, various Tracey Ullman shows, MADtv, In Living Color, Monty Python's Flying Circus, The Catherine Tate Show, etc.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments
Your grade is based on your creativity and storytelling abilities as an actor, including ability to work with a professional demeanor as part of an ensemble of artists.

Grading Scale for SDA: A indicates work of excellent quality; B of good quality; C of average quality; D of below average quality; and F indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown
• 30% for classwork on sketch elements and character building, and practical application with Directing students: Classes 2 through 5.
• 30% for rehearsal and sketch run-throughs: Classes 6 through 14. This includes your script preparation, your presence and focus in working on-set, and your creative willingness.
• 40% for completing your assigned roles in the dress rehearsals and live shows.

The completion of the three sketch comedy shows are the equivalent of a FINAL EXAM.

Attendance and punctuality is critical for actors, as member of an ensemble, and the weekly rehearsal process. NO actor may miss more than one class for this reason. This scheduling MUST be coordinated with the instructor. Failure to attend or being late will be reflected in your grade. Penalty for unexcused absence is a full grade point. Penalty for three (3) unexcused tardies is a full grade point.

Missing a project, incomplete: The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take Incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 — January 12 — Audition
Students will audition for the class by presenting characters based on improv of the instructor’s choosing. Proficiency in truthful character work, freedom in performance, comedic timing will
all be considered in casting the ensemble. Selected students will be informed of their inclusion in the class within the week.

Week 2 — January 19 — **MLK JR DAY — NO CLASS**

Week 3 — January 26 — **Introduction & Getting Started**
Intro to class, sketch comedy definition, syllabus, structure and goals. What is a sketch? What is parody? How to get started in performance? Ensemble improvisation work, with some collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material.

*Reading Assignment:* *Bossypants* by Tina Fey, pgs. 19-101

Week 4 — February 2 — **Creating Character**
Creating a comedic character with an original point of view. Additional collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. At the end of class, we will perform an improv/character workshop for the Writing and Directing classes.

*Reading Assignment:* *Bossypants* by Tina Fey, pgs. 119-196

Week 5 — February 9 — **Sketch Comedy Structure & Character Continuation**
What is the rhythm of a sketch? When is a sketch complete? Review types of sketches and how to execute them: Character, Impersonation, Parody. Continue to create and explore characters. Additional collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. Possible table read, with instruction on how to execute a successful table read/cold read.

*Assigned Reading:* *Bossypants* by Tina Fey, pgs. 197-260

Week 6 — February 16 — **PRESIDENT'S DAY — NO CLASS**

Week 7 — February 23 & 27 — **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**
Tuesday: Entire first live show will be rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes. Friday: Set, light and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *LIVE at SCA*.

Week 8 — March 2 — **Original Sketches**
Rehash of Show #1. Table read and rehearsal of original sketches for Shows #2 and #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Week 9 — March 9 — **Rehearsal of Original Sketches**
Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #2. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes. Viewing all submitted material from outside sources for roll-in consideration.

**SPRING BREAK**

Week 10 — March 23 & 27 — **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**
Tuesday: Entire second live show will be rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes. Friday: Set, light and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *LIVE at SCA*.

Week 11 — March 30 — **Rehearsal of Original Sketches**
Rehash Show #2. Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Week 12 — April 6 — **Rehearsal of Original Sketches**
Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.
Week 13 — April 13 — **Rehearsal of Original Sketches**  
Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Week 14 — April 20 & 24 — **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**  
Tuesday: Entire third live show will be rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes. Friday: Set, light and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *LIVE at SCA*.

Week 15 — April 27 — **Wrap**  
Viewing and post-mortem discussion of all shows.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**  
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. **SCampus**, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or [http://scampus.usc.edu](http://scampus.usc.edu)) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/). Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: [http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html](http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html).

**Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**  
In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

**Disruptive Student Behavior**  
Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.