

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## Sketch Comedy In Performance

THTR-473 (2 units)

Section 63175

Spring 2018

Mondays 1-4pm + Fridays pm 2/16, 3/23, 4/20

Location: RZC Stg D

Kirstin Eggers, Adjunct Faculty

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment. Please email to schedule.

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Phone: (c) [REDACTED]

### Course Description and Overview

In this experiential workshop course, we will learn techniques of performing comedic sketches and acting in a multi-camera television studio, by actively collaborating with sketch comedy writers, directors, producers and technicians in the production of three live sketch comedy shows, filmed in front of live studio audiences.

The shows will consist of material that has been created and rehearsed over the course of the semester – primarily multi-camera filmed comedy sketches, and possibly short comedic pre-shot films. You may be asked to participate in these films outside of class, depending on casting and schedules.

All material will be developed, rehearsed, and produced in conjunction with CTWR-473 Staff Writing the Sketch Comedy Show (instructor: John Bowman), CTPR-464 Directing the Television Sketch Comedy Show (instructor: A. Laura James) and CTPR-409 Television Production a.k.a. Trojan Vision class (instructor: Joel Parker). Professor Jack Epps is our executive producer.

### Learning Objectives

This course is designed to educate students on the techniques of performing comedic sketches, especially within the format of a multi-camera set-up, as well as working in collaboration with writers, directors, and technicians in the production of successful live filmed sketch comedy shows. By the end of the course, students should have a better sense of a professional television working environment, a body of characters and sketch comedy work, and a positive mindset for the collaborative and creative process.

This class will focus on the art of performing 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, creating the most satisfying comedy.

Students will also participate in table reads of writing class-generated sketches, and begin work with Directing students on sketches chosen to move forward.

We will discuss and learn experientially how to perform in a multi-cam setting, in relation to cameras, crew and audience.

Above all, 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 be responsible for collaborating on and providing appropriate costume/attire as needed.

This class is often, by its nature, very fluid and demanding, due to the combination of creativity and production (art and commerce, if you will). You are asked to be extremely flexible, focused and good-natured about changes that may arise, as would be the case on any professional television set.

Because class periods are usually so full with rehearsal, I will often send more instructional information via email, between classes. It is very important to read every email from me carefully.

## **Required and Supplementary Materials**

### **Required Viewing**

- *Saturday Night* – documentary directed by James Franco  
<http://cinemamega.net/movie/ox1jpwGN-saturday-night.html>
- Current *Saturday Night Live* episodes throughout the semester

### **Recommended Viewing**

- Television sketch shows, both current and historical: *Saturday Night Live*, *Key & Peele*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, *Kroll Show*, *Portlandia*, *The Big Gay Sketch Show*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Chappelle's Show*, *The Kids In The Hall*, *MADtv*, *In Living Color*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, etc.
- Attend a live sketch comedy show – suggested comedy theaters include Groundlings, UCB, Second City LA, among others.
- Attend a live television sitcom taping. Show schedule and reservations can be found on [tvtickets.com](http://tvtickets.com), among others.

### **Recommended Reading**

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy* by Judd Apatow
- *Live From New York: An Uncensored History of SNL* by Tom Shales & James Andrew Miller

You will also receive handouts you are expected to read and retain for discussion.

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

**Participation:** Attendance, punctuality, and participation is critical, as a respectful member of an ensemble, and the weekly rehearsal process. There may be no unexcused absences. This scheduling MUST be coordinated with the instructor, via email. **Failure to attend or being late will be reflected in your grade, and will affect participation in the shows.**

In addition to class time, you must be present and participating at the three Friday PM rehearsal/shows from calltime through strike, exact times TBA. The scheduled Fridays are February 16, March 23, and April 20. Actors are required to fully participate in strike.

If you find on the day, you will be late to class or rehearsal to any degree, please alert me via text so I can plan accordingly.

**Written Assignments:** Unless otherwise specified, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqegggers@usc.edu) before the specified date and time. Late assignments will not be accepted.

**Devices:** When in class, you must be focused and mentally, physically and emotionally present. Cell phones and other electronic devices often impede this. Cell phones should be put away completely unless you are called upon to use it (scripts, watching videos for reference, etc.) You should never have cell phones out during any lecture/lesson/active rehearsal, or when watching others perform in any way.

**Attire:** Please wear appropriate rehearsal clothing and shoes to every class, in which you are not inhibited in any way. Shoes must be closed-toed – this is a SCA studio rule.

**Eating:** Food and drink is not permitted in any studio. Absolutely no gum.

**Stage:** Please help restore the rooms/studios to neutral at the end of each class.

### USC SDA GRADING CRITERIA:

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade, determined using the following scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Below Average</u>	<u>Inadequate</u>
A = 95-100 pts	B+ = 87-89 pts	C+ = 77-79 pts	D+ = 67-69 pts	F = 59 or below
A- = 90-94 pts	B = 83-86 pts	C = 73-76 pts	D = 63-66 pts	
	B- = 80-82 pts	C- = 70-72 pts	D- = 60-62 pts	

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade. The grade is translated into a GPA using the following scale: 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

Class Participation – attendance, focus, attitude, willingness	15 points
Weekly Assignments – character creation, memorization, preparation (2 points each)	32 points
Self-evaluations/Goal-setting – written and emailed (2 points each)	8 points
Professional level participation in live filmed sketch shows (15 points each)	45 points

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

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

### Week 1 – January 8 – **Introduction & Getting Started**

Intro to class, sketch comedy definition, syllabus, structure and goals. What is a sketch? How to get started in performance? Ensemble improvisation work, with focus on character. Possible improv/character workshop for the Writing and Directing classes.

### Week 2 – January 15 – **MLK JR DAY – NO CLASS**

#### **Watch documentary Saturday Night.**

### Week 3 – January 22 – **Creating Character**

Creating a comedic character with an original point of view. Bring original characters, and at least two impressions of famous folk. Possible table read. Possible collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. Possible additional improv/character workshop for the Writing and Directing classes.

#### **Self-evaluation/Goal-setting #1 due by 1/22 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.**

### Week 4 – January 29 – **Original Sketches**

Collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. Possible table read, with instruction on how to execute a successful table read/cold read.

### Week 5 – February 5 – **Rehearsal**

Extensive rehearsal with directors. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

### Week 6 – February 12 & 16 – **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**

Monday: 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 *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

### Week 7 – February 19 – **PRESIDENTS' DAY – NO CLASS**

### Week 8 – February 26 – **Original Sketches/Rehearsal**

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 5 – Rehearsal**

Table read and rehearsal of original sketches for Shows #2 and #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

***Self-evaluation/Goal-setting #2 due by 3/5 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.***

– SPRING BREAK –

**Week 10 – March 19 & 23 – Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**

Monday: 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 *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

**Week 11 – March 26 – Rehearsal**

Rehash Show #2. Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

**Week 12 – April 2 – Rehearsal**

Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

**Week 13 – April 9 – Rehearsal**

Extensive rehearsal with directors. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

***Self-evaluation/Goal-setting #3 due by 4/9 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.***

**Week 14 – April 16 & April 20 – Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**

Monday: 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 *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

**Week 15 – April 23 – TBA**

***Self-evaluation/Goal-setting #4 due by 4/23 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.***

**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>) 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/>. Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: <http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html>.

**Statement on Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism - presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://>

[scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/](http://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departement/departement-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

### **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.

### **Support Systems**

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance - (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student, ex: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>