

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Sketch Comedy In Performance

THTR-473 (2 units)

Section 63175

Spring 2019

Mondays 1-3:50pm + Fridays pm Feb 15, Mar 29, Apr 19

Location: RZC Stg D

Kirstin Eggers, Adjunct Faculty

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment. Please email to schedule.

Email: kqeggers@usc.edu

Phone: (c) 323.898.7388

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-477 Staff Writing the Sketch Comedy Show (instructor: John Bowman), CTPR-464 Directing the Television Sketch Comedy Show (instructor: Rob Schiller) and CTPR-409 Television Production a.k.a. Trojan Vision class. 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 television shows, 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

- Attend a live television sitcom taping. Show schedule and reservations can be found on tvtickets.com, among others.
- 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.

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. No absence is excused. **Failure to attend or being late will be reflected in your grade, and will affect participation in the shows. However, should an emergency arise, you must contact your castmates and your instructor as soon as possible.**

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 15, March 29, and April 19. 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.

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.

I am happy to discuss your work or grade at any time.

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)	<u>45 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

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

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 — January 7 — 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 14 – **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 1/14 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.

Week 3 – January 21 – **NO CLASS**

Watch documentary Saturday Night for 1/28.

Week 4 – January 28 – **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 4 – **Rehearsal**

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

Week 6 – February 11 & 15 – **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**

Monday: Entire first live show rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Friday: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

Week 7 – February 18 – **NO CLASS**

Week 8 – February 25 – **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 4 – **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 3/4 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.

– **SPRING BREAK** –

Week 10 – March 18 – **Rehearsal**

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

Week 11 – March 25 & 29 – **Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW**

Monday: Entire second live show rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Friday: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

Week 12 – April 1 – Rehearsal

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

Week 13 – April 8 – Rehearsal

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

Self-evaluation/Goal-setting #3 due by 4/8 at 11:59pm. Prompts given in class or emailed.

Week 14 – April 15 & April 19 – Rehearsal/Run-Through and SHOW

Monday: Entire third live show rehearsed on camera. Actors MUST be off-book. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.

Friday: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of *USC COMEDY LIVE*.

Week 15 – April 23 – Post-mortem. In-class self-evaluation. Learning Experience Evaluations.

FINAL – Wednesday May 1 – 2-4pm – TBA

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. 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>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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. 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. 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. 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: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community.