

THTR 473 : Sketch Comedy in Performance

2 Units

Spring 2020

Mondays 1-3:50pm / Lab Fridays 3-10pm

Location: RZC 108

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment. Please schedule via email.

Email: kqeggers@usc.edu

Phone: (c) 323.898.7388

Course Description

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 is created and rehearsed over the course of the semester – primarily multi-camera filmed comedy sketches, as well as short comedic pre-shot films.

All material will be developed, rehearsed, and produced in conjunction with School of Cinematic Arts courses CTWR 477 "Staff Writing the Sketch Comedy Show" (instructor: John Bowman) and CTPR 464 "Directing the Television Sketch Comedy Show" (instructor: Robert Schiller). Professor David Isaacs is our executive producer.

Welcome to *USC Comedy LIVE!*

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.

The cast will focus on the art of performing sketch comedy, including comedic character creation as a catalyst for sketch development. Using improvisation and discussion, cast members will learn about the freedom that must be present in comedy performance, meanwhile creating and exploring truthful characters that deserve to be the basis of a sketch. Actors will consider the themes and rules already prevalent in the sketch world, and create their 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.

In each class, students will participate in table reads of sketches generated by Writing students, and work with Directing students on sketches chosen to move forward. The cast will discuss and learn experientially how to perform in a multi-cam setting, in relation to cameras, crew and audience.

Students will also be called upon to collaborate with Writing and Directing students in pre-taped comedic sketches ("interstitials").

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.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Reading

You will receive handouts and/or weblinks you are expected to read and retain for discussion.

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

Required Viewing

- *Saturday Night* – documentary directed by James Franco
- 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.
- Attend a live sketch comedy show – suggested comedy theaters include Groundlings, UCB, Second City LA, among others.
- Current/recent television sketch shows including *Saturday Night Live*, *A Black Lady Sketch Show*, *I Think You Should Leave with Tim Robinson*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Alternatino*, *Goatface*, *Netflix Presents: The Characters*, *Key & Peele*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, *Portlandia*, *Kroll Show*, etc.
- Historical sketch shows include *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Chappelle's Show*, *The Kids In The Hall*, *Mr. Show*, *MADtv*, *In Living Color*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, etc.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Participation in Rehearsals, Interstitials, and Shows – Attendance, punctuality, and enthusiastic 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 -- if you find on the day you will be late to any degree, please alert me via text so I can plan accordingly.

As a class, you should establish an information sharing group (platform of your choosing) early in the semester. You must be able to contact each member of your ensemble easily.

Friday Lab attendance is on a contingent basis. The purpose of Friday Lab is to hold the cast's time for all three Friday shows from calltime through strike, and to be available for extra rehearsal, collaboration with writers and directors, and filming the required "Interstitials" on off weeks.

The scheduled Friday shows are February 21, March 27, and April 24. Actors must be present from calltime (specifics may vary) through dismissal after strike. Actors are required to fully participate in strike, as assigned by production staff.

Actors 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). Cast members 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, instructors, TAs and/or producers may send instructional information via email, between classes. It is very important to read every email from *Comedy Live* instructors and staff carefully.

Written Assignments – Actors are asked to set goals at the beginning of the semester, and review each show as soon as tape becomes available, reflect on their work, and set goals for the next show. Unless otherwise specified, written assignments should be emailed to the instructor (kqeggers@usc.edu) before the specified date and time. Prompts will be given in class.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation – Presence, focus, attitude, willingness	15	15
Weekly Rehearsal Assignments – character creation, memorization, preparation (1 point each)	12	12
Interstitial acting work	10	10
Written Self-evaluations/Goal-setting (3 points each)	9	9
Professional level engagement in live filmed sketch show #1	18	18
Professional level engagement in live filmed sketch show #2	18	18
Professional level engagement in live filmed sketch show #3	18	18
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

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

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (April 3).
- I am happy to discuss your work and/or grade with you at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy

Written Assignments (self-evaluations and goal setting) should be emailed to me (kqeggers@usc.edu) before the specified date and time, unless otherwise dictated. Late assignments will not be awarded full points. Do not send links to Google Docs.

Weekly Assignments are presented in class, and copies of written work do not need to be submitted.

Additional Policies

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 and you may be sent home to change shoes.

Eating – Food, drink (except water in a closed container), or gum is not permitted in any SCA studio.

Presence/Breaks – You must be present and easy to find throughout the entirety of our time together. There are many moving parts to production and if you are not where you are supposed to be, you slow down production and may be recast. Check in with instructor and producers often.

Strike – You are expected to help restore the stages to neutral at the end of each class.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure will change to accommodate the needs of production. You are asked to remain flexible, and you will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
1	Mon Jan 13	Welcome/Introductions. Syllabus and expectations review. Ensemble improvisation work, with focus on character. Possible improv/character workshop for the Writing and Directing classes.		Self-reflection/goal-setting due Jan 27. Prompts given via email/in-class. Prepare two original characters and two impressions, for presentation.
	Fri Jan 17	Lab: HOLD.		
2	Mon Jan 20	NO CLASS — Martin Luther King Jr. Day		
	Fri Jan 24	Lab: HOLD.		
3	Mon Jan 27	Creating a comedic character with an original point of view. Possible table read. Possible collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. Possible additional improv/character workshop for the Writing and Directing classes.	Self-reflection/goal setting #1 due before 1pm. Two original character ideas and two impressions, for presentation.	Watch documentary <i>Saturday Night</i> for Feb 3.
	Fri Jan 31	Lab: HOLD.		
4	Mon Feb 3	Collaboration with Directing students on rehearsal sketch material. Possible table read, with instruction on how to execute a successful table read/cold read.	Watch <i>Saturday Night</i> for discussion.	
	Fri Feb 7	Lab: HOLD.		
5	Mon Feb 10	Entire first live show rehearsed on camera. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.	Actors off-book and rehearsed.	Prepare for show.
	Fri Feb 14	Lab: HOLD.		
6	Mon Feb 17	NO CLASS — President's Day		
	Fri Feb 21	SHOW #1: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of USC COMEDY LIVE.	Actors off-book and rehearsed. Wardrobe options. FULLY PREPARED FOR SHOW.	
7	Mon Feb 24	Rehash of Show #1. Table read and rehearsal of original sketches for Shows #2 and #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.		View Show #1 when available. Self-reflection/goal-setting due Mar 9 before 1pm. Prompts given via email/in-class.
	Fri Feb 28	Lab: HOLD.		

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
8	Mon Mar 2	Table read and rehearsal of original sketches for Shows #2 and #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.		
	Fri Mar 6	Lab: HOLD.		
9	Mon Mar 9	Table read and rehearsal of original sketches for Shows #2 and #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.	Self-reflection/goal-setting due before 1pm. Prompts given via email/in-class.	
	Fri Mar 13	Lab: HOLD.		
SPRING BREAK — NO CLASS — MARCH 16-20				
10	Mon Mar 23	Entire second live show rehearsed on camera. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.	Actors off-book and rehearsed.	Prepare for show.
	Fri Mar 27	SHOW #2: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of USC COMEDY LIVE.	Actors off-book and rehearsed. Wardrobe options. FULLY PREPARED FOR SHOW.	
11	Mon Mar 30	Rehash Show #2. Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.		View Show #2 when available. Self-reflection/goal-setting due Apr 13 before 1pm. Prompts given via email/in-class.
	Fri Apr 3	Lab: HOLD.		
12	Mon Apr 6	Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.		
	Fri Apr 10	Lab: HOLD.		
13	Mon Apr 13	Reading and rehearsing of original sketches for Show #3. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.	Self-reflection/goal-setting due before 1pm. Prompts given via email/in-class.	
	Fri Apr 17	Lab: HOLD.		
14	Mon Apr 20	Entire third live show rehearsed on camera. Writing notes, directing notes, acting notes.	Actors off-book and rehearsed.	Prepare for show.
	Fri Apr 24	SHOW #3: Tech and dress rehearsal, followed by filmed live performance of USC COMEDY LIVE.	Actors off-book and rehearsed. Wardrobe options. FULLY PREPARED FOR SHOW.	
15	Mon Apr 27	Full production post-mortem. Learning Experience Evaluations.		
	Fri May 1	NO LAB		
FINAL	WEDNESDAY MAY 6 — 2-4pm	Cast post-mortem. Location TBD.		Happy Summer!

Extra-Curricular Commitments and ISPs

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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, 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 engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.
- Sexual Assault Resource Center sarc.usc.edu
Visit website for information about how to get help, help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources.
- Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance - (213) 740-5086 equity.usc.edu
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.
- Bias Assessment Response and Support studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response.
- The Office of Disability Services and Programs dsp.usc.edu
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations.
- Student Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710 studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic.
- Diversity at USC diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.
- USC Emergency Information emergency.usc.edu
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.
- USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-4321 community.dps.usc.edu
24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC.