

Comedy and Performance THTR 197g

4 Units

Fall Semester 2020 - Tue,Thu – 2-350pm PST

Location: [Zoom Link](#)

Instructor: Zach Steel

Office: email instructor for zoom link

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1230-130pm

Please email for zoom appointments. If you can't meet during this office hour, we can schedule an alternate time.

Contact Info: zsteel@usc.edu

Teaching Assistant: Adam Lebowitz-Lockard

Office:

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Teaching Assistant: Juliana Sabo

Office:

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IT Help: ITS

Hours of Service: 7am-10pm PST

Contact Info: 213-740-5555 or consult@usc.edu

Course Description

This GE course will provide students with an overview and understanding of the history and performance of comedy. Using examples from as far back as Greek Theatre and as current as *Black-ish*, students will be encouraged to identify and understand the distinctive features, techniques and themes of comedy performance. Through many manifestations including the Commedia dell'Arte of the Renaissance, the great age of silent comedy in cinema, standup, and the advent of television, comedy in performance has evolved in multiple forms as a response to prevailing conditions while maintaining many primary functions, including satire, celebration, and social commentary. The course explores in depth many of the most important and influential periods and differing strains of comic performance, addressing the discipline in terms of creation and execution as envisaged by writers, actors, clowns, comedians, and directors.

Learning Objectives

1. To distinguish between comedic forms, theories, techniques, and styles.
2. To compare the comedy of different periods, identifying the social, political and cultural contexts in which the work was created and performed.
3. To analyze the various forms and content of comic material across a range of historic periods.
4. To evaluate the purpose of comedy and the role it plays in our various cultures and societies.

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Co-Requisite(s): N/A

Concurrent Enrollment: N/A

Recommended Preparation: N/A

Course Notes

This is an ONLINE course taught synchronously on the Zoom platform and asynchronously on Blackboard.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Please visit [this site](#) for technology info and assistance.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

For required reading and viewing please see breakdown of class schedule. All viewing and reading should be carried out **PRIOR** to the class for which is it indicated.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Each assignment will receive a grade out of 100.

Grading Scale for SDA:

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94 A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86 B (3) = 85-84 B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76 C (2) = 75-74 C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D (.7-1.3) = 60's

Failing: F (0) = 59 and below

A = work of excellent quality; clear understanding of class material coupled with original and creative insight

B = good quality; class material has been understood clearly

C = average quality; class material generally understood, gaps in understanding remain

D = below average quality; identifiable gaps in the understanding of class material

F = inadequate work; gaps in completion of work, poor understanding of class material

Further Grading Notes:

When the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been excellent or good and toward the negative end of the scale for those with average or poor attendance and participation.

If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy: All assignments to be submitted via Blackboard. Due dates are as follows:

Assignment 1 (Multiple Choice Test): In-Class, Sept 10th at 2pm

Assignment 2 (Performance Analysis): October 1st at 11.59pm

Midterm (Annotated Bibliography): October 20th at 11.59pm

Assignment 3 (Critical Paper): October 29th at 11.59pm

Assignment 4 (**Final – Critical Paper**): November 17th at 4pm (**note the earlier time**)

Participation –

Synchronous - Your participation grade is the effort you put into actively being a part of class discussions and activities. This means commenting, asking questions relevant to the discussion, writing relevant comments in the chat, etc.

Asynchronous – You currently have three asynchronous learning opportunities through discussion boards on blackboard for this class. Each discussion board is worth 5 points out of the 100 total participation points. You must create your own thread – a post with specific instructions found on blackboard – and you must make a short comment (one sentence or so) on two other threads. These are complete or incomplete, in other words 5 points or zero points.

Alternate Assignments – If you are unable to attend class because the class falls outside of 7am-10pm in your timezone, you are required to watch the class recording (available on Blackboard) and contribute to the discussion board for that particular class. This will go toward your participation grade (see below).

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation/Attendance	100	15
Assignment 1 (Multiple Choice Test)	100	15
Assignment 2 (Performance Analysis)	100	20
Midterm (Annotated Bibliography)	100	5
Assignment 3 (Critical Paper)	100	20
Assignment 4 (Final – Critical Paper)	100	25
TOTAL	600	100

Assignment Rubrics

Please see Blackboard for assignment rubrics.

Grading Timeline

Please allow one week after the due date for assignment grades and feedback to be submitted.

Additional Policies

- Please arrive promptly for class. Late arrivals disturb the learning of the whole class.
- There will be no unexcused absences. You are required to be in attendance for each class period unless you are attending class from a time zone where the class falls outside of the hours 7am-10pm. If that is the case, it is required that you watch the recording of the class (available on Blackboard), complete the “Alternate Assignments” and keep up with all course materials.
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*
- No social media posting about class.

Zoom etiquette:

- ***Please refer to the netiquette doc on Blackboard under Syllabus for further considerations.**
- Please find as private and quiet a setting in your house as you possibly can. Keep in mind that as important as it is to not have any interruptions, it is also important to feel comfortable making sound and not be too concerned with disrupting others who are sharing a living/working space with you.
- Zoom camera should be on unless there is a specific reason for them to be turned off. Virtual backgrounds are ok.

- While we are in class, no applications should be in use on any device besides Zoom, unless otherwise instructed.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

-This is subject to change based on the specific pace and needs of the class.

-All class recordings available on Blackboard.

		Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Block 1 – What is Comedy?				
Week 1	Tuesday 8/17	Introduction – What is comedy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you already know about it? • How do you already think about it? • How this course works 		
	Thursday 8/19	ASYNCHRONOUS	Reading, Available Online: Robert Newman in The Guardian	Discussion Board: Participation required by end of week
Week 2	Tuesday 8/25	The Psychology of Humor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jokes • Forms of humor • History of humor 	Reading: The Psychology of Humor, pgs. 1-30 (ARES)	
	Thursday 8/27	Comic Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language use • Mistaken identity • Structural elements: anticipation/repetition/variation/inversion • Slapstick 	Reading: Eric Weitz, Chapter 3 Comic Devices in The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy, pages 63 – 92 (ARES)	
Week 3	Tuesday 9/1	The Building Blocks of Comedy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tropes • Narratives • Jokes 	Reading: Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale, Chapters 1-3 from <i>Popular Film and Television Comedy</i> (ARES)	
	Thursday 9/3	ASYNCHRONOUS		Discussion Board: Participation required by end of week
Week 4	Tuesday 9/8	Comic Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superiority Theory • Incongruity Theory • Relief Theory 	Reading: John Morreall, Comic Relief pages 1 – 26 (ARES)	
	Thursday 9/10	In-Class Multiple Choice Test		

Week 5	Tuesday 9/15	How to Analyze Comedic Performance	Reading: Louise Peacock, Joan Rivers – Reading the Meaning (on Blackboard)	
	Thursday 9/17	In-Class analysis activity		
Block 2 – Comedy, Identity, and Ethics				
Week 6	Tuesday 9/22	The Ethics of Comedy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can comedy cause more harm than good? • What can/should comedy do? 	Reading: Michael Pickering: <i>Ethics</i> . (PDF on Blackboard)	
	Thursday 9/24	Comedy and Offense	Reading, available Online here: When the Truth Hurts Research task: Find and read an article which deals with comedians being criticized for offensive material. Your example should be as recent as possible.	
Week 7	Tuesday 9/29	Comedy and Gender	Reading: Nothing Suits me like a suit: Performing Masculinity in <i>How I met your Mother</i> (PDF on Blackboard)	
	Thursday 10/1	Comedy and Sexuality	Reading: Parody as Subversive performance: Denaturalising gender and reconstituting desire in Ellen in Text and Performance Quarterly vol 21 isee 2 2001 (ARES)	DUE: Performance Analysis Assignment @11:59pm PST
Week 8	Tuesday 10/6	Comedy and Religion	Reading: Is it ok for comedians to joke about religion? Available at: CNN Article and When God and Comedy meet: Stephen Colbert on Christianity. Available at: Vulture Article	
	Thursday 10/8	Comedy and Race	Reading: The Hidden Truths in Contemporary Black Sitcoms from <i>The Sitcom Reader: America Re-viewed, still skewed</i> . (ARES)	
Block 3 – The Comic Tradition				
Week 9	Tuesday 10/13	Silent Comedy	Viewing: On YouTube, Charlie Chaplin's The Kid and Buster Keaton's Steamboat Bill Jr	

			Reading: Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale, Hollywood Comedy and the case of Silent Slapstick from <i>Popular Film and Television Comedy</i> (ARES)	
	Thursday 10/15	Clown and Commedia dell'Arte		
Week 10	Tuesday 10/20	Shakespeare's Comic Devices	Reading: Twelfth Night (available online)	DUE: Midterm (Annotated Bibliography) @ 11:59pm PST
	Thursday 10/22	Shakespeare's Comic Devices		
Week 11	Tuesday 10/27	Satire: Social and Political	Reading: Nicholas Holm, 'The Political (un)consciousness of American Satire' (on Ares)	
	Thursday 10/29	ASYNCHRONOUS		DUE @ 11:59 PM PST: Critical Paper
Week 12	Tuesday 11/3	The Contemporary Sitcom	Reading: Christina Vecchia, Of Peerenting, Trophy Wives, and Effeminate Men: Modern Family's Surprisingly Conservative Remediation of the Family Sitcom Genre (available online) Viewing: Modern Family	
	Thursday 11/5	ASYNCHRONOUS		Discussion Board: Participation required by end of week
Week 13	Tuesday 11/10	The Contemporary Film: Bridesmaids	Reading: Bridesmaids, Trainwreck, and the Regressive Role of Women in Romantic Comedies (ARES)	
	Thursday 11/12	Review and Preview		
FINAL				DUE 11/17 @ 4PM PST FINAL PAPER

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 GFS 120 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) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (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:

Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411

Campus Support & Intervention is an office within Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention. We are a team of professionals here to assist students, faculty, and staff in navigating complex issues. Whether you are here seeking support for yourself or someone else, we are available to help you problem solve, understand options, and connect with resources. <https://uscса.usc.edu>

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: <https://titleix.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. <https://titleix.usc.edu/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

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. dps.usc.edu