

Comedy and Performance THTR 197g

4 Units

Fall Semester 2021 - Tue,Thu – 2-350pm PST

Location: [ZHS](#) 352

Instructor: Zach Steel

Office: JEF 209

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.

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USC Slack: @Zachary Steel

Teaching Assistant: Adam Lebowitz-Lockard

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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

Although this is a lecture style course, group and full class discussion will be heavily leaned on as modes to share and analyze the material. I will also set up Slack or some alternative as a live chat room to participate in during class.

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:

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	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 14th at 2pm

Assignment 2 (Performance Analysis): October 7th at 11.59pm

Midterm (Annotated Bibliography): October 19th at 11.59pm

Assignment 3 (Satire Group Project): November 16th at 2pm

Assignment 4 (**Final – Critical Paper**): December 9th at 4pm (**note the earlier time**)

Participation –

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.

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 (Satire Project)	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.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

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.
- *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.
- You may use your computers in class for note taking and quick, relevant research. This is mostly on the honors system but every so often, I will run up the center aisle to see if I can catch people surfing the web willy-nilly.
- If you are required to quarantine, we will come up with a solution so your educational experience will continue until you return to class.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

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

EDI @SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, some workshops will be offered to faculty and staff and to students. Competencies that will be included: Anti-Racism (Faculty/Staff) and Equity Mindedness (Faculty/Staff), and then Theater Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent (Students, Faculty/Staff). More details will follow. NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.

		Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Block 1 – What is Comedy?				
Week 1	Tuesday 8/24	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 8/26	Comedy Share <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general discussion on forms of comedy, comedy terms... 	Reading, Available Online: Robert Newman in The Guardian	Be ready with links to your favorite comedy bits.
Week 2	Tuesday 8/31	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 9/2	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 9/7	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 9/9	Comic Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superiority Theory • Incongruity Theory • Relief Theory 	Reading: John Morreall, Comic Relief pages 1 – 26 (ARES)	
Week 4	Tuesday 9/14	In-Class Multiple Choice Test Comedy Share Part 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A less general discussion on forms of comedy, comedy terms, theories... 		Be ready with links to your favorite comedy bits.
	Thursday 9/16	How to Analyze Comedic Performance	Reading: Louise Peacock, Joan Rivers – Reading the Meaning (on Blackboard)	
Week 5	Tuesday 9/21	In-Class analysis activity		
	Thursday 9/23	In-Class analysis activity		DUE: Analysis written component to be posted on Blackboard at the end of class.
Block 2 – Comedy, Identity, and Ethics				
Week 6	Tuesday 9/28	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 9/30	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 10/5	Comedy and Gender	Reading: Nothing Suits me like a suit: Performing Masculinity in <i>How I met your Mother</i> (PDF on Blackboard)	
	Thursday 10/7	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 10/12	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 10/14	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 10/19	Clown and Commedia dell'Arte		DUE: Midterm (Annotated Bibliography) @ 11:59pm PST
	Thursday 10/21	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)	
Week 10	Tuesday 10/26	Shakespeare's Comic Devices		
	Thursday 10/38	Shakespeare's Comic Devices	Reading: Twelfth Night (available online)	
Week 11	Tuesday 11/2	The Importance of Being Earnest	Viewing: Omnibus: Oscar	
	Thursday 11/4	The Importance of Being Earnest	Reading: The Importance of Being Earnest, full text available here: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm	
Week 12	Tuesday 11/9	Satire: Social and Political	Reading: Nicholas Holm, 'The Political (un)consciousness of American Satire' (on Ares)	
	Thursday 11/11	Comedy Share Part 3 An even less general discussion on forms of comedy, comedy terms, theories, this time with a focus on SATIRE		Be ready with links to your favorite comedy bits.
Week 13	Tuesday 11/16	SATIRE Group Project Share		DUE: SATIRE Group Project
	Thursday 11/18	SATIRE Group Project Share		
Week 14	Tuesday 11/23	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 11/25	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving		
Week 15	Tuesday 11/30	The Contemporary Film: Bridesmaids	Viewing: Bridesmaids	
	Thursday 12/2	Comedy Share Part 4 Review and Preview		Be ready with links to your favorite comedy bits.
FINAL 12/9				DUE 12/9 @ 4PM PST FINAL PAPER

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

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 (Vidoe 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.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling

ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.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 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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 Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, 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) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.