

**THTR 474 Intro to Standup Comedy**  
Fall 2021—Fridays (63087)—10am to 12:50pm  
Location: MCC 111  
Units: 2

**Instructor: Judith Shelton**

**Office:** TBD

**Office Hours:** By appointment, Tuesdays – Thursdays only

**Contact Info:** You may contact me Tues. – Thurs., 9am-5pm

Email preferred [judiths@usc.edu](mailto:judiths@usc.edu)

I teach all day Friday and will not respond until Tuesday

On Fridays, in an emergency only, text 626.390.3678

### **Course Description**

This course will offer a specific look at the art of Standup Comedy and serve as a laboratory for creating original standup material: jokes, bits, chunks, sets, while discovering your truth and your voice. Students will practice bringing themselves to the stage with complete abandon and unashamed commitment to their own, unique sense of humor. We will explore the “rules” that facilitate a healthy standup dynamic and delight in the human connection through comedy. Students will draw on anything and everything to prepare and perform a three-to-four-minute set in front of a live audience.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Implement the comic’s tools: notebook, mic, stand, “the light”, and recording device
- List the elements of a joke and numerous joke styles
- Execute the stages of standup: write, “get up”, record, evaluate, re-write, get back up
- Identify style, structure, point of view, and persona in the work we admire
- Demonstrate their own point of view and comedy persona (or character)
- Differentiate audience feedback (including heckling) using sight and sound
- Use improvisation, crowd work, and editing as needed
- Demonstrate being an active listener, offering “pitches” and support
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of their work
- Create a three to four minute standup act

### **Required Reading**

*I Can’t Make This Up: Life Lessons* by Kevin Hart (Audiobook encouraged)

*Born Standing Up: A Comic’s Life* by Steve Martin (Audiobook encouraged)

### **Recommended Reading**

*The History of Stand-Up* by Wayne Federman

*The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels and the History of American Comedy* by Kliph Nesteroff (Audiobook available)

*Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* by Mason Currey

*Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy* by Judd Apatow

*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying* by Carol Leifer

### **Auditing Student Policy**

Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and will not participate.

### **Recommended Preparation**

STAY HEALTHY, wear your mask, wash your hands. Stay home and attend remotely if you are sick. Come to each class, on time and prepared to perform.

Come willing to take risks, be honest, inquisitive, and supportive.

We will take a 10-minute break midway through the class so you can chat, go outside, etc.

### **Course Notes on Attendance**

This is a performance class, all “the good stuff” happens in class. Missing class means missing points for the in-class exercises and discussions, which will impact your grade. Also, being late or leaving early will cost you a participation point. If you are sick you may participate, live during class, remotely. You may also make up 15 points if the need to miss class completely/arrive late/leave early arises. Use those missed classes wisely. We are in a pandemic and things might come up. Fifteen points is all I offer, so make the effort to stay healthy and be present in class.

### **Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment:**

***Grades are not dictated by*** the success of comedy presentations or the instructor’s subjective opinion of talent, intellect, or sense of humor.

#### ***Grades are dictated by:***

Points. Each aspect of class has a point value: participation, in-class exercises and assignments, Midterm, Show, and Final. I provide options to make up 15 points total per semester. More details listed under “Make-Up Options”.

Be advised: auditing students observe but do not participate.

#### **Participation (13% of total grade):**

- In-class active student analysis of presented materials such as text and video clips
- Constructive feedback on classmates’ comedy presentations
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and other students to one’s own work
- If a student is late or leaves early, they will lose their participation point for that day

#### **Exercises and Assignments (41% of total grade):**

- Due to the live performance aspect of standup comedy, exercises and homework assignments will be presented in class, no video submissions accepted
- If you cannot commit to being in this class, on time, please wait for another semester
- Student invests fully, striving to make a connection with the crowd and improve over time
- If a student misses an exercise or assignment, student accepts that they have missed their opportunity to perform (stage time) and will lose points which will impact their grade

#### **Midterm (16% of total grade):**

- The Midterm presentation is worth 16 points, presented in class w/no paper component
- No video submission of presentation accepted, except example video requirement
- If you miss the Midterm, you lose 16 points, which will greatly impact your grade
- The policy for tardiness/leaving early (pg. 4) applies to the Midterm, as well
- No phones or papers, but you may hold 3x5 or 5x7 index cards

#### **Show (20% of total grade):**

- You must perform in the Show, it is worth 20 points
- You may sub into another class’ show, provided there is room in that show
- You may choose to do less time, but let’s talk about it before you decide

**Final (10% of total grade):**

- The Final is a paper worth 10 points, due at the beginning of the 2-hour Final period and must be at least 500 words.
- The Final will be submitted electronically, via Blackboard discussion board.
- Tech problems happen during Finals week, please plan ahead. No late papers accepted.
- Not handing in a paper will result in a loss of 10 points, which will impact your grade.

**Make-up options:**

- If you miss an in-class exercise or assignment, you may make up 15 points, total, by Friday, Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11:59pm. Blackboard submissions close at Midnight.
- You may make up **8 points** by doing a **non-USC** open mic or booked show, IRL or remote.
- You may make up **6 points** by doing a **USC** open mic or booked show, IRL or remote.
- You must send a clip of your set. (A photo + audio clip will also work)
- You must post the clip AND a paragraph (at least 5 sentences) on the experience to the entire class, and me, via the specific discussion board on Blackboard.
- Technical/posting issues will result in a loss of points, leave time to figure it out.
- You may make up **2 points** by switching sections, if there is room available that day.
- You may make up **3 points** by watching a live or remote standup show and sending a picture and paragraph (at least 5 sentences) to the entire class via the Blackboard discussion board.
- Make-up points cannot take you over 100 points, 100 points is the maximum
- Make-up points do not count toward the Midterm, Show, or Final. You must do the show.

<b>Exercises and Assignments</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>% of Grade</b>
Week 1, in-class improvised exercise	1	1
Week 2, in-class improvised exercise	1	1
Week 3, in-class write/get up exercise	2	2
Week 4, 1 <sup>st</sup> assignment: Joke Styles	6	6
Week 5, 2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment: 10 Jokes	10	10
Week 6, 3 <sup>rd</sup> assignment: First Set	5	5
MIDTERM Presentation: Critical Analysis, Established Comedian	16	16
Week 8, in-class exercise, Crowd Work	4	4
Week 9, 4 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Second Set	6	6
Week 10, in-class exercise, Heckling	4	4
Week 11, 5 <sup>th</sup> assignment, Polished (Clean) set, 1 <sup>st</sup> Show Rehearsal	7	7
Week 12, 6 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Final Set, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Show Rehearsal	8	8
Week 13, SHOW	20	20
FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Grading Scale:**

**Excellent: A (4) = 100-96; A- (3.7) = 95-90**

**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**

**Fail: F (0) = 59 and below**

### **Further Grading Notes:**

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a “W”, November 12<sup>th</sup>. I will discuss your work at any time.
- Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and will not participate.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

This is a live performance class, no video submissions of presentations or exercises. However, if you are sick, you may perform live, remotely, during your class period.

### **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 me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

### **ATTENDANCE**

#### **Absences:**

Developing standup material and style depends on consistent writing (usually as homework) and “getting up” (performing in class). Each class helps you build and refine material over time. **Be advised: if you miss a class, points awarded that day for performing your stand up material in class and being an active, supportive audience member will be lost.** I provide make-up options should you need to miss a class, or two. But things happen, save missing class for emergencies.

#### **Tardiness/leaving early:**

Everyone gets up each class. Names are picked “lottery” style. When you are late or leave early it is unprofessional, disruptive, and unsupportive. Committing to this class means being here from 10am to 12:50pm. **If you arrive after 10:05:00am you will lose your participation point for the day.** Students arriving late are put at the end of the lottery and might not get up, depending on time. I take the late people last, in the order they arrived. Students choosing to leave early lose their participation point and risk not getting picked before they wish to leave, losing all the points for the day. I do, however, try my best to get you all up. I realize things happen and will try to make time for you, but class is full, and we have a lot to cover. Be mindful of days that have more points, like 10 Jokes Day and the Midterm. I end class at 12:40pm to give homework. Everyone who comes to class on time and stays the duration will get up. Anyone who is late/leaving early may or may not get up, depending on time and running order. If you are not in class for the homework refer to this syllabus or contact another student before contacting me. Please do not email me asking what the homework is. Make the choice to be in class on time and stay.

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Text in **bold** indicates **assignment requiring preparation**.

(This timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace and unpredictability of the creative process of any given class. Being in class ensures you are aware of any changes.)

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
<b>Week 1</b> <b>Aug. 27</b>	Warm-up, introductions, discussion of syllabus (our contract) Introduction to the tools of our trade A guide to the writing phases: Write, “get up”, record, evaluate, rewrite, get back up In-class improvised exercise and stage time	<b>Begin reading/listening to:</b> <b>Born Standing Up or I Can’t Make This Up</b>	Re-write your jokes and compile them to build your show set.
<b>Week 2</b> <b>Sept. 3</b>	Pain in Standup: Comedy as sword, shield or balm Class conversation and clips In-class improvised exercise and stage time How to write for stand up	<b>Continue reading:</b> <b>Born Standing Up or I Can’t Make This Up</b>	Re-write your jokes and compile them to build your show set.
<b>Week 3</b> <b>Sept. 10</b>	Anger in Standup: Bend it, don’t break it Class conversation and clips In-class writing exercise and stage time	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Research the joke style I assign to you</b>	<b>Due week 4</b> <b>Sept. 17, 2021</b>
<b>Week 4</b> <b>Sept. 17</b>	<b>First assignment* - Joke Styles</b> Present assigned joke style given in class 3 3 minutes, max. I will give specifics in class and on Blackboard	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Deliver 10 original jokes, in any joke style</b>	<b>Due week 5</b> <b>Sept. 24, 2021</b>
<b>Week 5</b> <b>Sept. 24</b>	<b>Second assignment* - 10 Jokes</b> Perform 10 original jokes, any style 3 minutes, max.	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Work on first set</b>	<b>Due week 6</b> <b>Oct. 1, 2021</b>
<b>Week 6</b> <b>Oct. 1</b>	<b>Third assignment* - First Set</b> Bring in 2 minutes, max, of best “bits” from weeks 1-5, creating a “set” Point of View and Stage Persona Clips and discussion on the use of rhythm, timing, wit, physicality and themes	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Receive assigned comic and prepare Midterm presentation</b>	<b>MIDTERM</b> <b>week 7</b> <b>Oct. 8, 2021</b>
<b>Week 7</b> <b>MIDTERM</b> <b>Oct. 8</b>	<b>MIDTERM* Presentation</b> <b>Critical Analysis of Established Comic</b> No phones, papers allowed “on stage” during presentation, 3x5 or 5x7 notecards OK Presentation of assigned comedian, analyzing and critiquing their material, influences, POV, persona, work habits, career, legacy, etc. I will give specifics in class and on Blackboard	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Study examples of crowd work for discussion in class</b>	Discussion and exercise week 8 Oct. 22, 2021  <b>Enjoy your fall break!</b>

<b>Week 8</b> <b>Oct. 22</b>	Performance technique: Crowd Work and Improvising Survival skill #1 that leads to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Work on 2<sup>nd</sup> set</b> <b>2-3 minute max.</b>	<b>Due week 9</b> <b>Oct. 29, 2021</b>
<b>Week 9</b> <b>Oct. 29</b>	<b>Fourth assignment* - Second Set</b> Present second set, 2-3 minutes max. May include new material Assessment of each student's POV and stage persona	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Study examples of heckling for discussion</b>	Discussion and exercise week 10 Nov. 5, 2021
<b>Week 10</b> <b>Nov. 5</b>	Performance technique: Heckling Survival skill #2 that leads to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Research – What the heck is clean comedy, then rewrite your set as a polished clean set for 1<sup>st</sup> rehearsal</b>	<b>Due week 11</b> <b>Nov. 12, 2021</b> **Make-up class Tuesday Nov. 9 <sup>th</sup> 12-2:50pm PED 206 Please RSVP**
<b>Week 11</b> <b>Nov. 12</b>	<b>Fifth assignment* - Polished/Clean Set First Rehearsal with Hosts</b> Perform a 3-minute polished, clean comedy set Select from existing material and make it "TV Clean". Doing clean comedy requires skill and intelligence. If you want to do comedy on television, you must have a clean set. Many live shows and benefits require clean comedy. Many of our heroes were clean comics. Strive for greatness! Must choose from material presented in classes 1-10 <b>Hosts will "audition" on this day</b> <b>Receive student for "switch set"</b>	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Rewrite polished set for 3-minute final set rehearsal during class time (Does not need to be clean, but it wouldn't hurt)</b>	<b>Due week 12</b> <b>Nov. 19, 2021</b>
<b>Week 12</b> <b>Nov. 19</b>	<b>Sixth assignment*</b> <b>"Final" Set, Second Rehearsal with Hosts</b> The act returns in an advanced, playful, confident way Emphasis on beginning and ending, handling "mistakes", nerves, boredom, etc.	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Rewrite 3-minute set for THE SHOW</b>	<b>Due week 13</b> <b>Dec. 3, 2021</b> <b>(Makeup work is due Dec. 3, next week, by 11:59 pm)</b>
<b>Week 13</b> <b>Dec. 3</b> (TBD, I will give you plenty of notice)	<b>THE SHOW*</b> Plus, show notes and celebrations!	<b>Homework:</b> <b>Write and post Final paper, prepare student "switch up" to present at our Final</b>	<b>Due by the beginning of your Final Period-----</b> <b>Monday</b> <b>Dec. 13, 2021</b> <b>8-10am</b>

<b>FINAL</b> <b>Dec. 13</b> 8am	<b>Final*</b> <b>Critical Analysis, Self – Paper Due</b> Written paper due, self-assessing the student’s overall progress through the class; including personal challenges, strengths, weaknesses, discoveries, and victories. 500 words minimum Submitted via Blackboard Plus, student switch up farewell exercise		<b>Hooray,</b> <b>you did it!</b> <b>Celebrate!!</b>
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**Class Show Dates**

USC Stand Up Comedy Showcases are on campus, during your class period **DATE, TIME TBD**

You must be at one of the two rehearsals (class 11 and 12) to **participate** in the show

You must be at both rehearsals (class 11 and 12) to **host** the show

Rules for missing either class rehearsals still apply

You may sub into a different class show, provided there is room in that show

**KEY DATES**

Friday, Sept. 10: Last day to add or drop this class without a “W”, or to select “P/NP”

Friday, October 8: Last day to change “P/NP” to letter grade

Thursday – Friday, October 14-15: Fall Recess

Friday, November 12: Last day to drop this class with a mark of “W”

Wednesday – Sunday, November 24-28: Thanksgiving Break

Friday, December 3: Fall semester classes end

Saturday – Tuesday, December 4-7: Study Days

Wednesday – Wednesday, December 8-15: Exams

Wednesday – Sunday, December 16-January 9: Winter Break

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.

**Additional Notes**

- ***No eating or drinking is allowed during class at any time, per USC Covid guidelines.***
- ***No social media, texting, computer work. Phones are for sets and recording only.***
- ***We will take a 10-minute break midway through class so you can chat, go outside, etc.***

**Welcome to Introduction to Standup Comedy, dear students! It is my joy and privilege to get to know each of you through our collaborative and creative exploration and especially, your jokes. Do good work, know yourselves better, risk a little, support each other, make lasting, sincere friendships, and laugh through it all!**

**Judith Shelton (Jude)**

## **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](http://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](mailto: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.

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### **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/>).



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**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>

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**Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health* - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.