

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 499 **History of Stand-Up Comedy**

Location: Social Science Bld. B46

Lecture: Mon 4-5:50pm

2 Units

Spring Semester 2022

Instructor: Professor Wayne Federman

In-person office hours (or Zoom) by appointment

E-mail: WayneFed@usc.edu

Prerequisite(s): N/A

IT Help: ITS

Hours of Service: 7am-10pm PST

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

Catalogue Description:

This course will provide students with a comprehensive overview and understanding of how stand-up comedy evolved in the United States, from the lecture comedians of the 1800's, like Artemus Ward and Mark Twain, to the current performers of HBO and Netflix.

Course Description

Starting in the 1800s, stand-up comedy has developed in the United States. The venues have changed but the act of standing alone on stage, trying to evoke laughter, connects comedians through the generations. The Lyceum movement, vaudeville, burlesque, revues, coffeehouses, nightclubs, resorts, comedy clubs, and the internet have each helped produce celebrated comedy performers.

Special effort will be given to link the legendary comedians of the past like Will Rogers, Bert Williams, Bob Hope, Moms Mabley, Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, George Carlin, Richard Pryor, and Joan Rivers with today's popular comedians such as Chris Rock, Amy Schumer, Bill Burr, Sarah Silverman, and Dave Chappelle. Students will evaluate how each era of stand-ups have adapted, and embraced, new technologies including audio recordings, stage microphones, motion pictures, radio, television, long-playing albums, cable TV, smartphones, and internet streaming.

The instructor is a working comedian who has appeared in over 80 films and television shows. Guest speakers from the world of stand-up comedy will also speak to the class and participate in student Q/As.

Learning Objectives

- Analysis: Through readings, discussions, listening, and researching students will analyze and distinguish the numerous eras of stand-up comedy while developing their critical observational skills. Why did major entertainment structures, like vaudeville and the Borscht Belt, collapse? How did the comedy clubs emerge?
- Connectivity: Each topic will be approached through its historical context, both political and social. How did the social structures and taboos of the day influence the style of comedy? Why was Lenny Bruce arrested multiple times? How have taboo subjects and banned words changed through the generations?
- Context: Who owned these venues? How did the comedians adapt? Where does the term “blue” come from? Why was the “chitlin circuit” necessary? To what extent did organized crime (mafia) run nightclubs?
- Engagement: Students will watch, listen, and contextualize the different stand-up styles through the decades. From ethnic knockabout comics of the late 1800s to ironic deadpan acts of Comedy Central. How did HBO revolutionize content and presentation?
- Making: Students must write original, sourced, papers on stand-up performers. They will also create a hypothetical stand-up show of five comedians from five different eras. This will help develop critical and creative thinking plus writing and research skills.

Objectives and Goals

1. To distinguish between the major stand-up comedy eras.
2. To compare the comedy styles of different periods. Ex: how a vaudeville comic in 1915 might approach stand-up differently than a coffeehouse performer in 1961.
3. To evaluate and analyze the impact of emerging technologies on the art form.
4. To analyze stand-up’s language, and subject matter, evolved through time.
5. To evaluate the changing impact of stand-up comics in popular culture and politics.
6. To track the inclusion of racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual identity in stand-up comedy.

Required Readings

The History of Stand-Up: From Mark Twain to Dave Chappelle. Wayne Federman 2021

Suggested Readings (all available at USC library)

Apatow, Judd *Sick in the Head.* Random House 2015

Berger, Phil *The Last Laugh.* William Morrow 1975

Forbes, Camille F. *Introducing Bert Williams.* Basic Civitas 2008

Foxx, Redd, Miller, Norma *Encyclopedia of Black Humor.* W. Ritchie Press 1977

Knoedelseder, William *I'm Dying Up Here,* 2009

Laurie Jr., Joe *From Vaude to Video.* Henry Holt 1951

Martin, Steve *Born Standing Up*. Scribner 2007
Nachman, Gerald *Seriously Funny*. Back Stage Books, 2004
Nesteroff, Kliph *The Comedians*. Grove Press, 2015
Oswalt, Patton *Silver Screen Fiend*. Scribner 2015
S.D., Trav *No Applause, Just Throw Money*. Faber and Faber 2005
Saul, Scott *Becoming Richard Pryor*. Harper Collins 2005
Shydner, Ritch *Kicking Through the Ashes*. Mr. Media Books 2016
Watkins, Mel *On the Real Side*. Lawrence Hill Books 1999
Wilde, Larry *The Great Comedians Talk About Comedy*. Lyle Stewart 1973
Zoglin, Richard *Comedy at the Edge*. Bloomsbury USA, 2009

Suggested Stand-Up Documentaries

Comedian (w/Jerry Seinfeld) - (2017) Netflix.
Dying Laughing – (2016) interviews with comedians. dir. Lloyd Stanton.
Hysterical – (2021) a close look at women comedians. dir. Andrea Nevins
I Am Comic – (2010) a close look at stand-up comedy. dir. Jordan Brady
Misery loves Comedy – (2015) stand-up interview documentary. dir. Kevin Pollak
When Stand-Up Stood Out – (2016) Boston Comedy Scene of the '80s. dir. Fran Solomito

Additional suggested media

Crashing HBO (2017-2019)
Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee (2012-2019)
The Comedians of Comedy - Comedy Central (2003)
Inside the Actors Studio - Dave Chappelle (2006)
The Marvelous Mrs. Masiel - Amazon Prime (2017- present)
Richard Pryor: Live in Concert - feature film (1979)
WTF w/ Marc Maron – podcast (2008-present)

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Each assignment will receive a grade out of 100.

A = 100-94

A- = 93-90

B+ = 89-86

B = 85-84

B = 83-80

C+ = 79-76

C = 75-74

C- = 73-70

D = 60's

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.

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| 1 (Open Internet Test): In-Class | January 31, 2022 |
| 2 (Performance Analysis) | February 14, 2022 |
| 3 Midterm (Annotated Bibliography) | March 7, 2022 |
| 4 (Critical Paper) | March 30, 2022 |
| 5 Final (Creative Paper or Video) | April 25, 2022 |

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week One

Course Overview and Mark Twain Prize Winners

Week Two

MLK Day (no class)

Week Three

The Four Forefathers (Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, Bert Williams, Will Rogers)

Week Four

Vaudeville and TOBA (ethnic monologists, Palace, blue material, Orpheum circuit, Frank Fay, Charlie Case) Burlesque, Revues, Comedy recordings (Minsky Brothers, Ziegfeld Follies, Cohen on The Telephone)

Week Five

Radio - Birth of NBC & CBS, advertising, Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Bob Hope, Fanny Brice, local comedians.

Week Six

Nightclubs, Chitlin Circuit, Strip Clubs (mafia, Moms Mabley, Timmie Rogers, Copacabana, Ciro's, Latin Quarter, Chez Paree, Don Rickles, Shecky Greene). Resorts, Presentation Houses (Catskills, Las Vegas, Miami, Apollo, Roxy, Paramount, Jean Carroll)

Week Seven

Presidents Day (no class)

Week Eight

Early Television (Ed Sullivan Show, Milton Berle, Texaco Star Theater, variety shows)
The New Wave, Comedy Albums, Late-Night (Mort Sahl, Redd Foxx, Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, The Sickniks, The Tonight Show, daytime talk shows)

Week Nine

President’s Day (no class)

Week Ten

Greenwich Village (Hootenannies, Joan Rivers, Bill Cosby, Woody Allen, early Pryor and Carlin). Comedy Clubs (The Improvisation, Pips, Rodney Dangerfield, Robert Klein)

Week Eleven

The ‘70s (Johnny Carson, Comedy Store, Freddie Prinze, Catch a Rising Star, SNL, Steve Martin, HBO, Richard Pryor Concert Film, first road comedy clubs)

Week Twelve

Alternative Comedy, Sitcoms (Janeane Garofalo, UnCabaret, *Roseanne*, *Seinfeld*, Jim Carrey) Black comedy explosion (Martin Lawrence, *Def Comedy Jam*, *In Living Color*, Original Kings of Comedy, All Things Comedy, Robin Harris)

Week Thirteen

Internet Dane Cook, MySpace, YouTube, Bo Burnham, Anjelah Johnson, Marc Maron, Podcasting, Twitter

Week Fourteen

Covid Comedy (DIY, live streaming, outdoor shows, Sarah Cooper, Ziwe Fumuhoh)
Politics and Speech Restrictions (*Daily Show*, Bill Maher, Amber Ruffin, John Oliver)
Actors playing comics (*Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Hacks*, *Punchline*)
Broadway and Academy Awards (Lily Tomlin, Victor Borge, Jackie Mason, Mike Birbiglia, Whoopi Goldberg)

Week Fifteen

FINAL PAPER presentations

Final topic must be chosen from a list of suggestions, or of students’ own choice subject to instructor approval, before week twelve (April 4, 2022). Pick one of three options.

1. A written paper of at least 1,000 words pages, double spaced, sourced and cited (Wikipedia is a great place to start but not an accepted source), Times New Roman, 12-point, and margins may not exceed one-inch.
2. Video presentation of at least 7 minutes.
3. Class PowerPoint presentation of at least 10 minutes.

Grading Points Breakdown:

Week 1 in-class participation..... 1 point
 Week 2 in-class participation..... 1 point

Week 3 in-class participation / test.....	15 point
Week 4 in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 5 in-class participation 1st paper due	15 point
Week 6 in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 7 in-class participation	1 point
Week 8 MID-TERM: Biography	15 points
Week 9 in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 10 in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 11 in-class participation, 2nd paper due	15 points
Week 12 in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 13, in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 14, in-class participation.....	1 point
Week 15, FINAL	25 points

Grading Breakdown

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Participation	15%
Test	15%
Paper #1	15%
Midterm	15%
Paper #2	15%
<u>Final</u>	<u>25%</u>
Total	100%

General expectations

Students are expected to be capable of taking full and accurate notes on lectures, and actively participate in discussions. I will sometimes use PowerPoint in class (mainly for images - sometimes text), as well as video and audio clips. I am happy to share these files afterward (usually not before lecture), but these are not a substitute for your own notes.

If you are having trouble following lectures, try sitting closer to the front of the room, recording lectures, and getting help from me outside of class. Please feel free to talk to me about any problems you are having.

Written work, apart from tests, will normally be submitted electronically, either via e-mail or on Blackboard. On a title page include your name, the date the work was submitted, and the title of the assignment; your main text should be double spaced. All work must be entirely your own, unless you are specifically instructed to collaborate.

See the guidelines (below) on academic integrity as to what constitutes plagiarism, or proper and improper use of sources.

Since this class covers a fair amount of material, it is to your advantage to make use of my office hours, whether in person or via Zoom – not only if you are having problems with the material, but also simply in order to find out on a topic more than can be covered in class, or so that we can become better acquainted. The pieces and information covered in class are only a starting point; don't limit yourself to just that.

You may use laptop computers or tablets (*not* cell phones; please also silence your ringer before class starts) for note-taking during lecture, and for accessing electronic resources *as directed by me*, but please refrain from e-mailing, phoning, texting, checking Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other activities unrelated to class.

Non-class-related electronic activity during lecture may result in temporary confiscation of phones, expulsion for the rest of the lecture, and/or a grade penalty.

Attendance

In-person attendance is expected, if you are healthy and can pass Trojan Check; attendance will be checked. We will take a 10-minute break near the midpoint of the class.

You are responsible for all material, whether you were there when it was presented or not. If for some *legitimate* reason you must miss class, arrive late, or leave early, please inform me *in advance* (in person, or by e-mail).

Legitimate excuses include illness, personal emergencies, or occasional conflicts with master classes or rehearsals of large ensembles, but *not* lessons, or outside gigs.

During this time while we're still dealing with a pandemic, attendance may be lower than usual. If you need miss one or more classes, try to get lecture notes from a classmate, and ask me any questions you might have, afterward.

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.

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://uscsa.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