

THTR 317 Section 63044R

Theatre Clown

Units: 2

Spring 2023

TTH, 11-12:50pm

Location: PED 204

Instructor: Zachary Steel

Office: JEF 208

Office Hours: available by appointment

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Course Description

Clown is a theatrical discipline that explores and exploits a pre-socialized version of yourself that is in pursuit of one thing: shared fun. The clown expresses themselves as if no one ever told them the rules of polite society. The clown has unearned hopes and dreams of success as if preparation was not an issue. They are fully in the moment and in direct connection with the audience. And because they exist without pre-judgement, they have the power to show you what it is to be human, all the beauty and joy, fear and sadness, ridiculousness and sublimity, sacred and profane. This class will challenge students to fully surrender to the immediate stakes of performance, to redirect their focus to the relationship between performer and audience, to examine the threshold of what can be done with our bodies and voices in performance, to confront preconceptions about one's own individual capabilities and discover what makes each individual funny, to celebrate one's greatest failures and experience the magnitude of true openness in front of an audience. And most of all, this class will guide you toward discovering a pre-socialized, chaotic, playful, maybe forgotten version of yourself: the clown.

Learning Objectives

- To define the principles of theatrical clowning
- To implement the principles of clowning through in-class improvisational exercises
- To apply the principles of theatrical clowning to on-camera performance
- To analyze various modes of contemporary performance that utilize clown technique

Prerequisite(s): THTR 101

Co-Requisite(s): N/A

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The required excerpts will be available on Blackboard as PDFs:

Why Is That So Funny? By John Wright

Folly of Racism: Enslaving Blackface and the "Natural" Fool Tradition by Robert Hornback

Required viewings will be posted on blackboard.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Simple Clown Presentation – an introduction to clown work incorporating performer/audience connection, separations, bafflement, and interruptions.

Pathetic Clown Presentation – a solo clown piece that explores the expressiveness of the clown.

Group Clown Piece – clown piece that explores clown relationships.

Final - A show run of curated material from throughout the semester.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation (discussion and evaluation)	100	10
Class Work (clown exercises)	100	15
Simple Clown Presentation	100	20
Pathetic Clown Presentation	100	20
Group Clown Presentation	100	15
Final Project	100	20
TOTAL	600	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

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

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

- Due to the impulsive, often improvisational nature of this work, some things might come up that can offend, be hurtful, or trigger. It is important that in these moments we take the time as a class process these incidents as much as is appropriate.
- Learning in class depends on the presence and participation of each individual student at a high commitment level. Points may be deducted for missed in-class work, in the event of absence or tardiness. In the event of an absence, you are responsible for the content of any missed class time. You must be ready to work at the start of each class.
- If you are going to be absent for COVID reasons or any other reason, it is required that you inform me in advance of the class, not thirty minutes before class or after class has begun.
- If you are required to quarantine, we will come up with a solution so your educational experience will continue until you return to class.
- Please wear clothing in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged. Acting can get messy, plan accordingly.
- Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class. Depending on the day's flow, we may or may not take an official break in the hour and fifty minutes of class — you should be prepared to stay active in the class, both as performer and audience.
- Please don't eat in class unless absolutely necessary and please never chew gum.

Zoom etiquette (if necessary):

- 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 schedule is subject to change based on the flow and needs of the class.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 1/10, 1/12	Introduction to each other, how this class works... Introduction to Clown	Due Wednesday: Watch Clown Playlist, link on Blackboard. Bring in two clown clips	
Week 2 1/17, 1/19	Clown Exercises Discussion on <i>Simple Clown</i>	Due Monday: Read <i>The Simple Clown</i> in <i>Why is That So Funny?</i>	
Week 3 1/24, 1/26	Clown Exercises		
Week 4 1/31, 2/2	Clown Exercises		
Week 5 2/7, 2/9	Clown Exercises		

Week 6 2/14, 2/16	Simple Clown Presentations		InClass Presentation – Simple Clown
Week 7 2/21, 2/23	Simple Clown Presentations		
Week 8 2/28, 3/2	Clown Exercises Discussion on <i>Pathetic Clown</i>	Due Monday: Read <i>The Pathetic Clown</i> in <i>Why is That So Funny?</i>	
Week 9 3/7, 3/9	Clown Exercises		
SPRING BREAK 3/13-3/17			
Week 10 3/21, 3/23	Pathetic Clown Presentation		InClass Presentation – Pathetic Clown
Week 11 3/28, 3/30	Pathetic Clown Presentation		
Week 12 4/4, 4/6	Group Clown Exercises		
Week 13 4/11, 4/13	Discussion on Clown and Race Group Clown Exercises	Due Monday: <i>Folly of Racism: Enslaving Blackface and the "Natural" Fool Tradition</i> by Robert Hornback Due Wednesday: "Noses Off" Link available on Blackboard under Content	
Week 14 4/18, 4/20	Group Clown Exercises		
Week 15 4/25, 4/27	Group Clown Exercises		
FINAL Tuesday, May 9th, 11-1pm	FINAL CULMINATION – A show run of curated material from throughout the semester.		FINAL Tuesday, May 9th, 11-1pm

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 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:

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