

THTR 317 Section 63044R

Theatre Clown

Units: 2

Spring 2025

TTH, 11-12:50pm

Location: PED 208

Instructor: Zachary Steel

Office: JEF 208

Office Hours: available by appointment

Cell: 347-546-0298

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USC Slack: @Zachary Steel

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 scripted material
- 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

Clown Presentation #1 – an introduction to clown work incorporating performer/audience connection, separations, bafflement, and interruptions.

Clown Presentation #2 – 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

Participation (discussion and evaluation)	100	10
Class Work (clown exercises)	100	15
Clown Presentation #1	100	20
Clown Presentation #2	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

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

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 needed.
- 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.
- 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 1/14, 1/16	Introduction to each other, how this class works... Introduction to Clown		
Week 2 1/21, 1/23	Clown Exercises	Due Thursday: Watch Clown Playlist, link on	

	Discussion on <i>Simple Clown</i>	Blackboard. Bring in two clown clips.	
Week 3 1/28, 1/30	Clown Exercises	Due Tuesday: Read <i>The Simple Clown</i> in <i>Why is That So Funny?</i>	
Week 4 2/4, 2/6	Clown Exercises		
Week 5 2/11, 2/13	Clown Exercises		
Week 6 2/18, 2/20	Simple Clown Presentations		<i>InClass Presentation #1</i>
Week 7 2/25, 2/27	Simple Clown Presentations		
Week 8 3/4, 3/6	Clown Exercises Discussion on <i>Pathetic Clown</i>	Due Tuesday: Read <i>The Pathetic Clown</i> in <i>Why is That So Funny?</i>	
Week 9 3/11, 3/13	Clown Exercises		
SPRING BREAK 3/16-3/23			
Week 10 3/25-3/27	Pathetic Clown Presentation		<i>InClass Presentation #2</i>
Week 11 4/1, 4/3	Pathetic Clown Presentation		
Week 12 4/8, 4/10	Group Clown Exercises		
Week 13 4/15, 4/27	Discussion on Reading Group Clown Exercises	Due Tuesday: <i>Folly of Racism: Enslaving Blackface and the "Natural" Fool Tradition</i> by Robert Hornback	
Week 14 4/22, 4/24	Group Clown Exercises		
Week 15 4/29, 5/1	Group Clown Exercises		
FINAL	FINAL CULMINATION – A show run of curated material from throughout the semester.		FINAL Tuesday, May 13th, 11-1pm OR TBD

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 Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to

practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

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

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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

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

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

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.