

DC 370/470 – EVOLUTION OF FILM COMEDY — WINTER 2015
DC 370/470 (801): Wednesdays, 5:45-9:00pm in 14 E. Jackson Room 801
LECTURE-DISCUSSION
Course Management system: D2L

Instructor — Jessica King

Office Hours: Wednesday 4:15-5:45pm in 14 E. Jackson Room 801
email: jking5@cdm.depaul.edu

Course Description

This class will provide an in-depth examination of the evolution of film comedy with a focus on developments within the film industry as well as cultural trends that have shaped the way humor is expressed through film. Through lectures, screenings, readings, discussions, and critical writing assignments, students will analyze the distinctive traits of film comedy within the broader context of cinema history and culture. PREREQUISITE(S): NONE

Learning Objectives | Students will be able to...

- explain how required screenings represent specific comedic genres/styles
- describe and analyze the features, character types, and narrative structure of various comedic films
- describe and analyze how certain cultural/historical moments affected comedic genres
- describe and analyze the ways film comedy comments on American culture

Required Texts

In this class, films are the essential texts. All additional readings will be posted by the instructor on D2L.

Grading Practices

In your analytical work, I grade for *clarity, precision, accuracy*, and whether or not you apply *relevant* ideas/concepts from class to the material you are analyzing.

In your creative work, I look for the standard requirements for effective screenplay writing (clear characters, precise and revealing visuals, original dialogue, effective structure, etc) as well as that you demonstrate an understanding of the medium you are writing for (especially in terms of concept, audience, and budget). SEE GRADE PROFILE FOR MORE INFORMATION

Grading Scale: A = 90%-100% plus/ minus = top/ bottom 3% of grade range; B = 80%-89%, C = 70%-79%, D = 60%-69%, F = 59% and below

Final grade breakdown (approximate and subject to change):

30% Attendance & Participation; 30% Analysis Essays; 10% Weekly Responses; 30% Final Project

An incomplete grade may only be assigned to a student if: (1) the student has experienced an extenuating circumstance near the end of the term, (2) the student is in good standing in the class, (3) the request is made in advance. It is solely up to the discretion of the instructor to grant an incomplete.

The Way Things Work: Assignments, Due Dates & Late Assignments

Details for all assignments and readings will be discussed in class and posted on D2L. This class will focus on practice not on lecture. It will emphasize both individual and collaborative work in understanding visual media through analysis of successful examples. On a typical class day, you will be working either as a class, in small groups, or by yourself practicing disciplined analytical or creative thinking. You will be regularly responsible for assessing your own work and that of your peers using criteria and standards modeled and discussed in class.

Unless otherwise noted, the due date is the start of class on the day an assignment is due and anything after the start of class is late. This is true even if you are absent, in which case the assignment is to be emailed to me by the due date and time. Graded assignments will lose one full letter grade for each week (or partial week) they are late.

Reading assignments:

Students are expected to fully complete assigned readings on time so they are prepared for class discussions and writing assignments. Reading matters. When done well, it is the most effective and efficient way to access another's intelligence, experience, and wisdom. Students who manage their time to allow for careful reading will more successfully learn and participate in this course.

Writing assignments:

This course requires students to write both analytically (analysis essays) and, potentially, creatively. All formal compositions are expected to be typed, properly formatted, and carefully proofread. Creative assignments will undergo multiple drafts.

Final Project Options:

1. Screenplay (MFA SCREENWRITING STUDENTS)

Write an original five- to ten-page screenplay (in standard screenplay format) that fits into a particular comedic genre during a particular period. For example, "1940s Screwball Comedy." While the screenplay may be homage, it must not be camp. The screenplay may also be produced by two other students in the class. All screenplays must be submitted to turnitin.com.

2. Research Paper

Write a five-page research paper that explores the evolution of a particular comedic trope, character type, motif, or genre. Possible topics: Take a major comedic character type and explore its evolution over the course of at least three films spanning three different eras. The thesis of the paper must make an argument for how the comedic element has evolved in relation to film industry trends, as well as shifts in American culture and values. The research paper must incorporate articles of academic criticism, and should respond to those articles. Film reviews without their own bibliographies and notes are not considered academic criticism. Footnotes/endnotes and a bibliography are mandatory for your own papers (use MLA conventions).

Attendance

Students are expected to attend each class, arrive on time, and remain for the duration. Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student. The overall grade for participation drops one-third after any absence. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course.

Class Discussion, Participation, and Community

Over many years of teaching I've found that in addition to careful reading, the best way for students to learn is to process information collaboratively, to ask questions, and to be actively engaged in their own learning. In order for this to happen in the richest way possible, we must remember to behave in a professional and academic manner at all times. We must be considerate and cooperative, even when we don't agree with one another. Professional academic behavior is expected at all times. Measurable examples of problematic behavior include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or a computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom.

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under 'News' in D2L, and emailed to you.

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>. If you have any questions be sure to consult me.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment. Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (<http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>) and must do so by 9/23/14 with no penalty.

Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

csd@depaul.edu

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd;

Phone number: (312)362-8002, TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 – COURSE INTRODUCTION & SILENT FILM COMEDY

Class/student introductions. What is your current relationship to/understanding of film comedy? Comedic tastes?

Lecture/Discussion: What is comedy and what role does humor play in society? Limitations and developments in early film comedy.

Screening I: “The Sprinkler Sprinkled” and other Lumiere Shorts.

Screening II: Shorts: Chaplin (*The Idle Class*), Keaton, Lloyd

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow up questions

READ: “Definitions, Genres, and Forms” *Popular Film and Television Comedy*

WEEK 2 – THE SILENT FILM ERA (1900-1920s)

Lecture/Discussion: Limitations and developments in early film comedy.

Screening I: *City Lights*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow-up questions

READ: “Comedy’s Greatest Era” by James Agee

WEEK 3 – THE TALKING PICTURE (1930s-1940s)

Lecture/Discussion: Limitations and developments in early film comedy: the talkie.

Screening I: *The Lady Eve*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow-up questions

READ: Excerpt from: *Pursuits of Happiness : the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*

WEEK 4 – CHALLENGING NORMS ABOUT SEX & GENDER (1950s)

Lecture/Discussion: Limitations and developments in early film comedy: the Code.

Screening I: *Some Like It Hot* (1959)

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow-up questions

READ: TBD

WEEK 5 – EMERGENCE OF DARK SATIRE (1960s)

Lecture/Discussion: Downfall of The Code/Rise of social consciousness/sexual revolution

Screening 1: *How I Stopped Worrying...*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow-up questions

READ: TBD

WEEK 6 – MID-TERM CHECK-IN

Peer Review: Rough Drafts of Research Paper/Short Comedies due

WEEK 7 – ADULT THEMES EXPLORED (1970s)

Lecture/Discussion: Downfall of The Code/Rise of social consciousness/sexual revolution

Screening: *Annie Hall*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow up questions

Read: TBD

WEEK 8 - CAMP (1970s)

Lecture/Discussion: The Sultan of Sleaze: John Waters

Screening: *Pink Flamingos*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow up questions

Read: "Notes on Camp" Susan Sontag

WEEK 9 – THE RISE OF RAUNCH PART ONE (1980s)

Lecture/Discussion: teen raunch.

Screening: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow up questions

Read: TBD

WEEK 10 – THE RISE OF RAUNCH PART TWO (present)

Lecture/Discussion: Adding women to the mix

Screening: *Bridesmaids*

ASSIGNMENT: Film follow up questions

Read: TBD

WEEK 11 – FINAL EXAM

Final Assignment due.

--NOTE: COURSE CALENDAR IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITH NOTIFICATION