



August 2018

Course Title: SCWR 474 Evolution of Comedy

Instructor: Jeff Griggs

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Class Time & Day: Thursdays, 5:45pm – 9:00pm, Screening Room

Office Hours: Thursdays, 4:45pm – 5:45pm, 9:00pm – 9:30pm, Screening Room

Course Description:

This course examines the language, physicality, and structure of some of the most revered comedic films and television shows of all time. Students will analyze and discuss the conventions utilized in these works, how they influenced the era in which they were made, and what relevance they have to comedy filmmaking today.

Course Overview:

- based on lecture and student-driven discussion;
- Each class will present an introduction to specific topics of comedy film supported by clips and/or the screening of a feature film.
- The shared language of cinema will be introduced and used to discuss multiple levels of film comedies and their content each week.
- A final project will give students the opportunity to expand their interpretation of seminal film comedy.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Understand the language of mainstream American comedy
- Describe how the film or television episode is reflective of that era
- Identify what makes comedy function on a creative level
- Recognize how effective comedy is dependent on its context
- Demonstrate the ability to speak about comedy using a shared cinematic language

Term Project:

Prepare a presentation designed to convince your classmates that a film you select is a perfect comedic representation for a movie under the topic of Satire, Parody or Anti-hero. A research paper should accompany your Comedic Passion Presentation.

D2L

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to: <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home/650286> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, video lectures, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc.

Required Texts/Viewing:

Since this course focuses on studying television and film, it's very important for students to have access to Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and/or an ability to purchase episodes on Amazon or iTunes. The subscription to these sites should be considered your "books" for this course. Please do not pirate materials for this course.

Grading:

Class Attendance and Participation 20%
Create-A-Quiz Questions 10%
Weekly Class Topic Responsibilities 15%
Response Papers 15%
Final Paper 20%
Final Project 20%

A= 100-93, A-=92-90,
B+=89-88, B=87-83, B-=82-80,
C+=79-78, C=77-73, C-=72-70,
D+=69-68, D=67-63, D-=62-60,
F=59-0.

A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Assignments:

All assignments for this course must be typed and submitted on D2L. Assignment is due at the start of class. No late work is accepted. Assignment is not accepted via email unless there is a malfunction with D2L. Please do not send me assignments via email unless I ask for them first.

Screening Response Papers (15% of final grade)

The instructor will post a topic for you to write about in regards to the lecture, the film that was screened, and the corresponding viewing/reading assignment after each class. Your response must be a minimum of 500 words, which is essentially two double spaced typed Word document pages. The document must then be saved as a PDF and submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission Folder by the assigned due date.

Screening Group Discussion Leadership (15% of final grade)

The instructor will post a film or television show for you to view. You will be requested to bring in discussion topics and questions to lead discussions with your fellow MFA students and undergrads.

Screening Create-A-Quiz Questions (10% of final grade)

The instructor will post a film or television show for you to view. You will be required to create a five-question quiz to test your fellow students. This will provide insight to determine how well they and you watched the assigned film/tv show. The document must then be saved as a PDF and submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission Folder by the assigned due date.

Final Paper & Presentation (Paper = 20% of final grade, Presentation = 20% of final grade)

Prepare a 10 minute presentation designed to convince your classmates that a film or television show you select is a perfect comedic representation for a movie under the topic of Satire, Parody or Anti-hero. (Your choice cannot be a film or TV show that was viewed as a clip, screening or assigned viewing.)

A research paper should accompany your Comedic Passion Presentation. The paper should be a deeper analysis of why the film or television show you selected is a perfect comedic representation of Satire, Parody or Anti-hero. The analysis should NOT be a linear retelling of the script's plot. You MUST have a definitive opinion on the material and defend it with specific examples.

The paper is due via the corresponding D2L Submission Folder assignment link on before the 11th week of class. No late assignments will be accepted. A few things to keep in mind:

- Remember, your opinion is not wrong as long as you can support it with specific examples from the film.
- In an effort to present your work objectively, please do not use any personal pronouns when referring to your opinion, such as "I feel this film exhibits poor structure" – It is clear you are saying it because the entire paper is your opinion.
- The paper must be no less than four pages - MLA Formatting Required <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

COURSE SCHEDULE: (Viewing selections are subject to change. You will be alerted in advance of all changes)

Week 1: Humor Theory and Foundations

Introduction to:

- Comedy and Humor Theory
- History of Comedy
- History of Comedic Film and TV
- Cultural Significance
- Innovations in Technology and Storytelling
- Theme and Metaphor
- Structure and Aesthetics
- Foreshadow the themes of the next 10 weeks of classes.

Clips:

Buster Keaton highlight reel, *Duck Soup*, *Some Like It Hot*, *The Honeymooners*

Viewing:

1 – *The Graduate*

Assignment:

Watch *The Great Dictator*. Bring in a Quiz of 5 questions, designed to stump your fellow classmates.

Week 2: Satire

Lecture:

Chronicle the history and importance of Satire in TV and Film. Discuss the difference between Parody and satire. Note that not all parodies are satire.

Clips:

In Living Color, *Chappelle Show*, *Key and Peele*, *The Producers*, *Modern Times*, *Network*, *Colbert*

Viewing:

1 - *Wag the Dog* (Satire) or *Bob Roberts* (Satire and Parody)

Assignment:

Watch *All In The Family* (season 1, episode 1{pilot}). Write a response paper to All In the Family: **Is the satire effective in All In The Family?** Bring in topic discussions for class to discuss with undergrads.

Week 3: Parody

Lectures:

Chronicle the history and evolution of parody and accentuate the tropes and tendencies of the medium. Differences between television and film parodies?

Clips:

The Little Train Robbery, Your Show of Shows, SCTV, I'm Gonna Git You Sucka, Shaun Of The Dead

Viewing:

- 1 - *Police Squad*
- 2 - *Blazing Saddles*

Assignment:

Response paper to the question: **Is Blazing Saddles still relevant and is it still funny?**

Week 4: Physical Comedy

Lectures:

Discuss the historical evolution of physical and slapstick comedy from Commedia to Batacchio to Minstrel Shows to Vaudeville to Slapstick. Highlight the path of success from Buster Keaton to Laurel and Hardy to the Marx Brothers to 3 Stooges to Jerry Lewis to Carol Burnett to Jim Carey to Kristen Wiig to Melissa McCarthy.

Clips:

Laurel and Hardy, 3 Stooges, *Singing in the Rain*, Carol Burnett and Chris Farley, Stepin Fetchit.

Viewing:

- 1 - *Sherlock Jr*
- 2 - *I Love Lucy*
- 3 - *Dick Van Dyke Show*

Assignment:

Read The *Demise of the Physical Comedian* from the New Yorker. Write a Response Paper to the article: **Why are there so few physical comedians today?** Prepare topic discussions to discuss with Undergrads in class.

Week 5: Improv/Mockumentary

Lecture:

The history, features and techniques of a Mockumentary. Improv's influence on TV and Film.

Clips:

Zelig, Real Life, Office, Documentary Now, SNL, What We See In The Shadows, Reno 911

Viewing:

1 - *Spinal Tap* or *Waiting For Guffman*

Assignment:

Watch episode 1 of *American Vandal*.

Week 6: Antihero

Lecture:

Definition and history of the Antihero in literature and film. Analysis of the Antihero and their "hero's" journey.

Clips:

Annie Hall, Holy Grail, Dogville, Being John Malkovich, Shameless, Horrible People, Ab Fab

Viewing:

1 - *Larry Sanders*

2 - *Veep*

3 - *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

4 - *Broad City*

Assignment:

Watch *National Lampoon's Vacation*. Bring in a Quiz of 5 questions, designed to stump your fellow classmates. Response paper: **What makes Clark Griswold an antihero?**

Week 7: Comedians/Auteurs

Lecture:

Describe and identify the Comedian Auteurs. Discuss the advancement of the Auteur from Mack Sennett to Charlie Chaplin to Woody Allen to Francois Truffaut to Wes Anderson to Tarantino to Apatow. Analyze modern comedic Auteur's.

Clips:

Dr. Strangelove, Girls, Between 2 Ferns, Master of None, Insecure, Chewing Gum, Fleabag

Viewing:

1 – *Do The Right Thing*

Assignment:

Watch *Royal Tennenbaum's*. Be prepared to discuss. Read *Truffaut and Other Auteurs* from Commentary Magazine, and *What is Auteur Theory and Why Is It Important?* from Indie Hustle website and post your responses.

Week 8: Dark Comedy/Dramedy**Lecture:**

Exploring how a film or TV show takes a heavy, controversial, disturbing, or generally off-limits subject matter and treats it in a humorous manner. Also discuss notable “Dramedy’s”.

Clips:

Arsenic and Old Lace, Mary Tyler Moore Show, Harold and Maude, Heathers, Life of Brian, Orange Is The New Black, Eternal Sunshine, Get Out

Viewing:

1 - *Fargo*

Assignment:

Watch *House Of Yes*. Write a response paper: **Is House of Yes funny, or is it just offensive?** Prepare topic discussions to discuss with Undergrads in class.

Week 9: Screwball/Romantic Comedy**Lecture:**

History and relevance of Romantic Comedy. Explain the birth of the Hays Code and the subsequent birth of Screwball Comedy. Accentuate the characteristics and differences between Romantic Comedy and Screwball.

Clips:

Some Like It Hot, When Harry Met Sally, Chasing Amy, The Big Sick, Living Single, Clueless

Viewing:

1 - *Roman Holiday* (film) or *The Philadelphia Story* (film)
2 - *The Mindy Project*

Assignment:

Watch *Coming to America*. Bring a quiz of 5 questions designed to stump your fellow students.

Week 10: Animation

Lecture:

History and relevance of Animation. Innovation in technology and storytelling of Animation.

Clips:

Felix, Crusader Rabbit, Disney shorts, Looney Toons, Fat Albert, Toy Story, Boondocks.

Viewing:

- 1 - *Simpsons*
- 2 - *South Park*
- 3 - *Rick and Morty*

Week 10: Final

Argue your Comedic Passion.

Prepare a presentation designed to convince your classmates that a film you select is a perfect comedic representation for a movie under the topic of Satire, Parody or Anti-hero. A research paper should accompany your Comedic Passion Presentation.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance

If a student misses two classes, the final grade will be reduced by one full letter. A third absence will result in a failing grade. The accumulation of two or more tardy arrivals to class (more than 20 minutes after the start of class) or two or more departures before class is formally dismissed may count as a full absence. Attendance is taken very seriously in this class.

Late Work

Assignments and exercises must be completed by the due date provided. Late work will not be accepted without prior consent of the instructor.

Laptops

This class has a no-laptop policy during normally scheduled lecture and screening class sessions. Please do not bring a laptop to class. Please do not use any devices with keyboards & screens (iPhones, iPads, whatever) to take notes in class.

Class Discussion

Student participation in class discussions is a significant portion of class. Students are expected to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. The development of analytical skills and historical appreciation of subjective material will be a focus of the class and students will actively utilize those skills through class discussions.

Attitude

A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude 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 computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

Civil Discourse

DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

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 on D2L and sent via email.

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 with your professor.

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: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

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: <mailto:csd@depaul.edu>.

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