



*The Second City*

**April 2019**

**Course Title:** SCWR 374 Improv & Sketch to Film

**Instructor:** Jeff Griggs

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**Class Time & Day:** Mondays, 1:30pm – 4:45pm, Screening Room

**Course Description:**

This course features an in-depth study of improv and sketch comedy and its influence on television and film. Students will analyze the distinctive traits of improvisation and sketch comedy and how different television shows and movies utilize the medium to create highly polished products. From SNL to Key & Peele to Whose Line Is It Anyway, Curb Your Enthusiasm, SCTV and Best In Show, Improvisation and Sketch Comedy have become a formative tool to create comedy.

**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:

- Execute and recognize sketch comedy structure.
- Enhance collaboration skills.
- Identify and execute Improv story structure and improv techniques.
- To explore the relationship between cinema/television and improv/sketch and the techniques used to film it.
- Develop a language with which to discuss television and film as well as a toolbox of techniques to use when creating filmed improvisation.

**Term Project:**

Write 2 sketches in the style of any sketch performance we viewed in class. Each sketch should be 5 to 7 pages long and should follow formatting and sketch structure guideline's.

**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%  
Sketch Assignments 20%  
Response Papers 20%  
Final Project 40%

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.

**Homework:**

All assignments for this course must be typed and submitted on D2L. Homework is due at the start of class. No late work is accepted. Homework 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.

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

## **Week 1: Sketch and Improv Foundations**

### **Introduction to:**

- Sketch and Improv
- History of Sketch
- Cultural Significance
- Innovations
- Theme, POV and Metaphor
- Structure and Aesthetics
- Foreshadow the themes of the next 10 weeks of classes.

### **Lecture:**

Sketch structure, formatting and creating through abundance.

### **Clips:**

Vaudeville, Radio Sketches, Your Show of Shows, Ernie Kovacs, Laugh In, Goon Show, Carol Burnette, Monty Python

### **Viewing:**

1 – *The Meaning of Life*

### **Homework:**

Bring in an outline of a sketch utilizing the 5 point structure.

## **Week 2: Improv**

### **Lecture:**

Chronicle the history of Improv and it's growth into television and film.

### **Clips:**

Second City, Spinal Tap, Best In Show, Bob and Ray

### **Viewing:**

1 – Spinal Tap

### **Homework:**

Record a Bob and Ray style radio interview.

### **Week 3: SNL**

#### **Lectures:**

The history of SNL through the decades

#### **Clips:**

70's, 80's, 90's, 2000's, 10's

#### **Viewing:**

1 - SNL

#### **Homework:**

Write a paper: Pick a cast and argue why that cast is the best SNL cast in the show's history.

### **Week 4: The SNL Effect on Sketch**

#### **Lectures:**

Explore the advances in storytelling and humor and the changes in sketch after the success of SNL.

#### **Clips:**

Muppet Show, Kids in the Hall, MadTV, Letterman, The Tonight Show, All That, The Amanda Bynes Show

#### **Viewing:**

1 – SCTV

2 – Not Necessarily The News

3 – In Living Color

4 – Mr. Show

#### **Homework:**

Write 10 sniglets.

## **Week 5: The films of Christopher Guest**

### **Lecture:**

The evolution of Christopher Guest films and improv based films.

### **Clips:**

Best In Show, For Your Consideration

### **Viewing:**

1 - Waiting For Guffman

### **Homework:**

Watch A Mighty Wind. Be prepared for a quiz and discussion in class.

## **Week 6: Improv on TV**

### **Lecture:**

Explore the history of Improv on television. Dissect the structure of Curb, Veep and the League.

### **Clips:**

Who's Line British/American, Thank God you're here, Wild n out, Nathan for you

### **Viewing:**

1 – Curb Your Enthusiasm

2 – Veep

3 – The League

### **Homework:**

Opinion Paper: Which is better, The Veep style of improv production or Curb Your Enthusiasm?

## **Week 7: The State of Sketch**

### **Lecture:**

A new edge appears in sketch comedy. From Dana Carvey to The State to UCB, we'll dissect how sketch gets grittier.

### **Viewing:**

1 – *Wet Hot American Summer*

### **Homework:**

Watch the Dana Carvey documentary on Hulu. Also read the Oral History of the Dana Carvey Show from GQ. Be prepared for a quiz and discussion in class.

## **Week 8: Modern Sketch**

### **Lecture:**

Exploring the evolution of sketch from Chappelle Show to Key And Peele to Portlandia to The Amy Schumer Show and everything in between.

### **Clips:**

Tim Eric Awesome Show, Garfunkle and Oats

### **Viewing:**

- 1 – Chappelle Show
- 2 – Portlandia
- 3 – Amy Schumer
- 4 – Key and Peele

### **Homework:**

Scene Analysis: Take a sketch from one of the programs we watched and dissect how it utilizes the 5 point structure.

## **Week 9: Sketch Outside the US**

### **Lecture:**

History and evolution of sketch comedy outside the US. A dive into comedy sketch shows from Britain, Ireland, Australia, Japan and others.

### **Clips:**

League of gentleman, Little Britain, The Day Today, French and Saunders, A Bit of Fry and Laurie

### **Viewing:**

- 1 – Little Britain
- 2 – French and Saunders

## **Week 10: Mumblecore**

### **Lecture:**

History and relevance of the improv based, low budget evolution of the Mumblecore genre

### **Clips:**

Hannah takes the stairs (mumblecore) drinking buddies, your sisters sister, cyrus,

### **Viewing:**

- 1 – The One I Love

## **Week 11: Final**

### **Sketch Packet -**

Write 2 sketches in the style of any sketch performance we viewed in class. Each sketch should be 5 to 7 pages long and should follow formatting and sketch structure guideline's.

## **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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