



April 2019

Course Title: DC 405 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 trace the development of improv and sketch comedy as it evolves from the stage to TV to the Movie Theater Screens. The class will view and analyze notable benchmarks in improv and sketch, from Second City to Monty Python to Key & Peele to Veep and many more in between. We will also work with interpretive frameworks that uncover deeper meanings and patterns in film and television, such as satire, point of view and ideological analysis.

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.
- Explore the importance of Point Of View and Satire
- Identify and execute Improv story structure and improv techniques.

- Develop and advance analyzation skills.
- Develop a language with which to discuss television and film as well as a toolbox of techniques to use when creating filmed improvisation and sketch comedy.

Term Project:

Based on our viewings of Chris Elliott and Mumblecore films, write a structured treatment for a comedic film where the dialogue would be improvised. The treatment should be thoroughly outlined and be 30 to 45 pages long.

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 40%
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 – *And Now For Something Completely Different*

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:

Write a sketch, utilizing the homework from week one. 3 pages.

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 SNL style live sketch (not a digital short). You must turn in the sketch and the outline. Sketch should be 4 to 6 pages.

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 a digital sketch. 3 to 5 pages.

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:

Create a 3 paragraph pitch for an improvised mockumentary.

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:

Outline an episode for Curb, Veep or The League.

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:

Create a 3 paragraph pitch for the final.

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:

Write a sketch in the style of Portlandia, Amy Schumer or Key And Peele. 4 to 6 pages.

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, Not the Nine O'Clock News, A Bit of Fry and Laurie

Viewing:

- 1 – Little Britain
- 2 – French and Saunders

Homework:

Write a sketch in the style of Little Britain, French and Saunders or Fry and Laurie. 3 to 5 pages.

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 -

Based on our viewings of Chris Elliott and Mumblecore films, write a structured treatment for a comedic film where the dialogue would be improvised. The treatment should be thoroughly outlined and be 30 to 45 pages long.

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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