



The Second City

March 2021

Course Title: SCWR 490 Topics in Screenwriting: Race Matters in Comedy

Instructor: Dionna Griffin-Irons

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Class Time & Day: Mondays, 1:30pm – 4:45pm, Online

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00am - 12:00pm and Wednesdays 12:00pm - 5:00pm

FINAL: Monday 06/07/2021, 1:30pm - 4:45pm

Course Description:

This course explores the comedy aesthetic and intersection of race, gender and identity in comedy. Students will analyze curated scenes, stand-up sets, films and discuss creative conventions utilized and the era/medium/style in which they were made. Discussion on the relevance of “create voice” in comedy filmmaking will be an ongoing theme.

Course Overview:

- Based on lecture and student-driven discussion;
- Each class will present an introduction to specific topics of comedy performances supported by clips, activity, and the screening of a sketch revue, set and/or film.
- The shared language of comedic structure and tools will be introduced to discuss a range of sketches, sets and their content each week.
- A final project will give students the opportunity to expand their interpretation of race, gender and identity portrayed in comedy and its application to film.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Understand the language of sketch comedy scenic structure, point of view and conventions
- Ideate and pitch character narratives using relevant news and topical social/political issues
- Understand how point of view, identity, beliefs and systemic “isms” influence comedy culture and the world

- Identify tools and mediums to support and amplify comedic voices regardless of identity
- Recognize how constructs of race, identity and gender impact comedy and its context
- Demonstrate the ability to speak about comedy using a shared language.

Term Project:

Prepare an individual/ group presentation utilizing themes from the ten weeks for a newly created film. The presentation should embody a strong point of view around a thematic choice around race, gender, identity with relevant topical issues that play to the top of intelligence. A research paper should accompany your presentation.

This course includes up to three invited Second City guest actors and/or performers, directors from the resident stages to share their knowledge around an identity topic for student discourse around creating social/political satire on the stages. Moderated online Q & A.

Hybrid Online Learning

This course will be delivered using a hybrid model, featuring a blend of asynchronous and synchronous online learning. For the asynchronous portion of the course, select scene readings, and/or viewing clips of the week can be accessed on your own time via the D2L Content page and must be completed by an assigned due date. For the synchronous portion of the course, you will log in using a Zoom Video Conferencing link provided by the instructor for weekly lecture, small group discussions, select film viewings and/or mini recap lectures. These meetings are held within the class period time frame of Mondays 1:30pm – 4:45pm Central Time.

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. 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: A Look at Race and Racial Identity in Comedy

Introduction to:

- Second City History - The world's largest comedy institution
- The "Waves" of Comedy - A closer look at the Eras
- Cultural Significance of Race, Gender and Identity in Comedy
- Systems of power, privilege, oppression, disenfranchisement
- Second City Detroit Influence
- Structure, Themes and Aesthetics
- Diversity and Inclusion in Comedy and Your Role
- Navigating the Uncomfortable Artform
- Ideate and Reflect the themes for weekly research, guest interviews
- Plan for the Unexpected

Clips:

Second City various, George Carlin, Don Rickles, Richard Pryor, Trevor Noah, Keegan Michael Key, Godfrey and various others.

Viewing:

1 – *Break Out Comedy Festival*

Activity/Assignment:

Watch *Second City archive clips*. Identify 3 comic characters or personalities and identify 3 point of view narratives that resonate with your comedic sensibility. Prepare a pitch to your fellow classmates and discover who shares the same viewpoint. Create Film Cohorts and Writer Topic Rooms for group collaboration and discussion.

Week 2: Continuation from Week 1 and Comedic Tools used in Satire, Sketch and Who's Playing

Lecture:

Highlight Comedic Tools, Satire and Character used on stage. Do these tools become useful in depicting stories in racialized society? Discuss the barriers and obstacles in comedy. Satirizing the Truth and History. Comedy as an act of resistance to power structures.

Clips:

Key and Peele, SNL, Second City, Daily Show, Comedy Central

Viewing:

1 - Second City revue tba or Break Out Comedy Festival part 2

2 - The Whiteness Project

Assignment:

Research and select 2 comedic improvisers for an interview. Discover what they satirized around a topic or issue in comedy. Brainstorm questions on identity. Watch a clip from the Whiteness Project. Write a **Reflection response** in your journal to share in group. Gather info to report in following week(s).

Week 3: Women in Comedy Part 1

Lectures:

"Is Race a Trope?" A look at anti-intellectualizing an Anna Deavere's character creation process and race as a performative experience. Highlights of the "Voice" including SC women in comedy (old school vs. new school) -Judith Scott, Gilda Radner, Angela Shelton, Tina Fey, Nia Vardalos, Sarah Silverman, Aidy Bryant, Christina Anthony. Getting to the "poetic moment" of their character.

Clips:

Christina Anthony, Angela Shelton, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Nia Vardalos, Dulce Sloan, Frangela, Issa Rae

Discussion: What are the recurring themes that are universal? Which issues are only specific to one group and why?

Viewing:

Break Out Comedy Festival (Stand-up)

Anna Deavere Smith (social justice) - Four American Characters

Issa Rae - Insecure

Discussion: "Character or identity, lies not in preexisting essence but in the process of self-authorship."

Assignment:

Response reflection/paper to Anna Deavere Smith's work

Brainstorm and revise ideas from the previous week on historical or historical events.

Upload to D2L

Week 4: Women in Comedy Part 2

Robin Thede, Maya Rudolph, Leslie Jones, Margaret Cho, Sasheer Zamata, Lilly Singh, The NBC Search

Lectures:

The Search for the Women of Color in Comedy

Discuss 3 women in comedy and discuss their career trajectory. Identify their influences, challenges assimilating into a white male dominated culture. Read an excerpt from *Whose Improv Is It Anyway?* The connection between Second City and NBC to find the best woman of color in comedy. The list.

Clips/Reading:

Assorted Clips

Reading & Discussion: Vulture article and related articles

Viewing:

1 - Stand-up sets (Female)

2 - A Black Lady Sketch Show

3 - Shrill tbd

4 - Dear White People

Assignment:

Read an excerpt provided from *Whose Improv Is it Anyway* by Amy Seehan and Read the assigned article by Vulture. Write a **Response Paper** to two questions: What does the writer mean "women especially need to be transcendent in a white male dominated culture"? What does it mean to "go along to get along"? Why did Second City and NBC share a similar problem with women represented in comedy? **What ways are women breaking these barriers in comedy?** Prepare topic discussions for class.

Upload to D2l

Week 5: Men in Comedy, Various SC alums, Alternative groups (Neo-Futurist), Defiant Thomas Brothers, Aaron Freeman, Tim Meadows, Adam McKay, Steve Carrell, Keegan Michael Key, Jordan Peele, Sam Richardson, Improv comedy Influences. White privilege spoofs.

Lecture:

influences in comedy. Impact. Are white male comics discussing race? Who is having the race conversation and why? How are the stories among different racial groups the same and different?

Clips:

Defiant Thomas Brothers, Second City various,
John Leguizamo
White privilege spoofs
Contemporary Satirists

Viewing:

- 1 - Don't Think Twice (director: Mike Berligia)
- 2 - Various tbd

Assignment:

Interview and research your 2nd comedian invited to class. (Sample questions) How does privilege and identity influence the comedy culture? What stories are being told in a racialized society? Is race a factor for ALL comics? Why or why not? Be prepared to present and share with fellow grads in a future group and write a **Response Paper**. Upload to D2l

Week 6: Social and Political issues: Classism, Sexism, Racism, Otherism

Lecture:

Politicians, Presidents, Policies and Predators
How does status and systemic issues of oppression affect comedy?
Discussion of common racial/social/ political issues that are satirized in comedy.
Current issue discussion for comedy creation.

Clips:

SNL, various Second City clips, Daily Show, Stand-up sets,

Viewing:

- 1 - Second City
- 2 - Key and Peele, Veep
- 3 - Student/Teacher's Choice
- 4 - Contemporary Satirists

Assignment:

Watch Second City revue or assigned film. Bring in three current racial/social issues to discuss with the group. **Reflection paper:** Why are the 4 P's a prevalent source of humor in our culture? What characteristics, status, and behavioral influences make good comedy? Does Race, Gender and Identity Influence these roles? How and Why? Upload to D2L.

Week 7: Late Night News, Songs and Rants about Race and Identity**Lecture:**

Are comedy institutions woke? Do they provide space and access for diverse voices to thrive and create? What is the ideal writer room? Has Diversity and Inclusion improved since the MeToo and BLM movement? Why or why not? Identify systemic issues. Wokeism.

Clips:

Various clips TBA

Viewing:

- 1 – Woke
- 2 - Current topics web series
- 3- Student/Teacher's Choice

Assignment:

Identify a current or historic non comedic film that shares a racial/social theme that you would like to see as a comedy.

Pitch your idea to the group. Ideate character strategies and conventions to satirize and pitch as a narrative. Write a **Response Paper** on what being "Woke" means to you - a personal experience. Upload to D2L.

Week 8: Tragedy + Time =Comedy**Lecture:**

Define formula. Explore difficult and uncomfortable subject matters around race, gender and identity and how stand-ups and satirists use controversial events and transform into humor. Experiment with improv tools for pitching narratives. Build on assignment from week 7

Clips:

Daily Show, Various Second City, SNL clips, TV clips

Viewing:

- 1 - The Great Dictator
- 2 - Woke
- 3 - Vorhaus lecture tbd
- 4- Student/teacher's Choice

Assignment:

Watch assigned film or movie from class. Collaborate and create current news topics to pitch for comedy and character narrative. Write a response reflection on one of the viewing topics. Upload to D2L.

Week 9: The New Identity World Narrative - Future Now

Lecture/Discussion:

What does a post racial world look like? Brainstorm 20+ years into the future. Is race, identity and gender or the myriad "isms" a factor? What is different/same and what has changed? What are the topical concerns? What's the headline news and the new movie? Overview for final presentation.

Clips:

Break Out Comedy Festival,
Assorted clips TBD

Viewing:

- 1 -Student Choice TBD
- 2 - BORAT
- 3- Teacher's Choice TBD

Assignment:

Watch assigned Second City revue. Work on your Topic Film ideations. Organize group collaborations. Submit your brainstorm to D2L.

Week 10: Fixing and Changing the Race problem. Can Diversity, Equity and Inclusion dismantle power structures? A Call to Action.

Lecture:

Experimental works in comedy. New works and conventions in storytelling. Class final presentations of new film. The new identity in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The call and demand to institutions and entertainment. A unique problem with a challenging solution.

Clips: Student/Teacher's Choice (Time permitting after presentations)

Present your Comedic Topic Point of View Film.

Prepare a slide presentation designed to convince your classmates that a film you create is a solution to address a broader social, racial, gender identity issue. Enlist at least one fellow (optional) student to contribute as an “extra” in your project. A research paper should accompany your Comedic Topic Presentation. Upload to D2L.

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 (For In Person only)

This class has a no-laptop policy during normally scheduled lecture 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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