

Make 'em Laugh: Hollywood Film Comedy

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Course Information

Course Description

This class delves deeply into the history of Hollywood comedy as well as theories of comedy, and is divided into two parts. Part one explores theories of comedy, both formal/aesthetic (the elements of artistic form) and socio-cultural (philosophical and psycho-social theories of comedy). The second part of the course explores historical developments in Hollywood comedy in terms of the development of artistic form (performance, verbal and visual gags, narrative structure, visual style), the film industry, and questions of socio-historical impact. Students can also opt to learn how to write a comedic screenplay. Films and artists to be discussed include the Marx Brothers, Mae West, Mel Brooks, Blazing Saddles, The Royal Tenenbaums, The Seven Year Itch, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, The Philadelphia Story, Hairspray, and There's Something About Mary.

Course Learning Goals

At the end of this course, you will be able to describe the meaning and the relevance of standard topics of economics such as:

A-1-I:

- 1) Develop definitions of narrative and non-narrative comedy, satire and parody, comedy as mode or genre, as well as a working knowledge of comedy's generic requirements in terms of narrative, characters, and situations.
- 2) Identify a Hollywood film comedy and analyze it through rudimentary formal criteria.
- 3) Distinguish narrative and non-narrative comedy, as related to definitions of high and low comedy.
- 4) Analyze and synthesize the components of comic expression.
- 5) Distinguish the components of narrative comedy.
- 6) Develop a working knowledge of the social meanings of comedy: social distinctions and hierarchies (high/low comedy, character types, stereotypes, laughter as social critique versus confirming conventions).
- 7) Distinguish as well as synthesize aesthetic/formal theories about the poetics of comedy and social theories about how comedies represent society, identity, and social hierarchies.

A-3-G:

- 1) Understand, discuss, and apply Freud's notions of self-directed (humor) and outwardly-directed (jokes/wit) comedy, role of the parental and the infantile agencies of ego, id and superego in jokes and humor, and the social implications of these theories.
- 2) Understand, discuss, and apply Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism as a critique

of the classical body and bourgeois society.

- 3) Distinguish and discuss the approaches of the two thinkers above, how each envisions the radical and normative potential of comedy.
- 4) Synthesize Freud and Bakhtin's ideas about comedy as both social critique and a means of social control.

H-2-G:

- 1) Understand, analyze and discuss Hollywood film comedy through formal/aesthetic theories, social and psychoanalytic theories, and histories of Hollywood comedy.
- 2) Comprehend the sociohistorical role and struggles over Hollywood film comedies in terms of upholding as well as challenging and redefining social conventions about class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and taste.
- 3) Understand and analyze the histories and aesthetics of: comedian comedy; silent comedy shorts versus silent features; early sound "anarchistic comedy" versus romantic comedy; romantic comedy versus sex comedy; and "animal comedy."
- 4) Comprehend and evaluate the vital role served by Hollywood self-censorship in terms of containing, and in some instances fomenting, some of the critical, controversial potential of film comedies, from the classical through the post-classical periods.

Course Resources

1) Text Books:

Required:

Popular Film & Television Comedy by Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik
Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader, edited by Frank Krutnik
Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy by William Paul
Additional readings as assigned

Recommended:

Rules for Writers by Diana Hacker (a helpful manual for paper writing)

- 2) Film screenings as assigned
- 3) Writing assignments as assigned
- 4) Class activities (statements, responses)

Course Competences

In this course, you will develop the following competences:

Competence	Competence Statement and Facets
A-1-I: Can use two or more theoretical approaches to interpret a work in the arts or popular culture.	1) Identifies a work within the arts (literature, drama, music, painting, etc.) or popular culture (film, television, advertisements, etc.). 2) Identifies and describes two or more theoretical approaches appropriate to the study of this work. 3) Compares the differences in interpretation that these two approaches yield.

<p>A-3-G: Can assess the assumptions and implications of significant ideas about human experience.</p>	<p>1) Identifies a significant philosopher, theologian, tradition, or thinker's ideas that address the meaning of human experience.</p> <p>2) Identifies appropriate criteria to assess these ideas.</p> <p>3) Applies these criteria to the assumptions and implications of these ideas.</p>
<p>H-2-G: Can evaluate the role and impact of mass media or information technology on society.</p>	<p>1) Specifies a medium of mass communication or an information technology and articulates its scope.</p> <p>2) Describes the role that this medium or information technology plays in society.</p> <p>3) Evaluates the impact of this medium or information technology on society or on one's perceptions of societal norms and issues.</p>

How the Competences will be Demonstrated in this Course

A-1-I:

Graded discussions of films and film sequences, dialogue, essay (4-5 pages)

A-3-G:

Graded discussions of films and film sequences, two "dialogues" among theorists (4-5 pages/each), essay (4-5 pages)

H-2-G:

Graded discussions of films and film sequences, four-step term paper assignment: step 1, bibliography; step 2, response to research questions (5-10 sentences/each); thesis introduction (1-2 pages); finished paper (5-6 pages)

Course Structure

This course consists of ten modules. The estimated time to complete each module is one week.

To view the course schedule, click on the Schedule link on the left-hand navigation bar. This page contains the most recently updated listing of the topics and assignments due for each week of the course.

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Assessment

Course Grading Criteria

A-1-I:

Class Activity: 30%
Dialogue: 30%
Essay: 40%

A-3-G:

Class Activity: 20%
Dialogue#1: 25%
Dialogue#2: 25%

Essay: 30%

H-2-G:

- Class Activity: 20%
- Film/Biblio.: 10%
- Research Questions: 15%
- Thesis Intro: 15%
- Term Paper: 40%

Course Grading Policies and Procedures

1) Cheating will result in an "F" for that assignment, as well as any other repercussions according to DePaul University's policies regarding an individual student's academic status.

Cheating is defined as: (1) plagiarism, the representation of another person's work as your own; (2) the representation of work that you've produced for another class as original work created for this course; and (3) co-authoring work.

2) Deadlines: (1) Late work will lose points and have a delayed return. (2) No late discussion postings can be accepted after two days; (3) No late assignments will be accepted after one week following the deadline.

3) Comportment: Professional, respectful behavior is expected toward your classmates and the instructor. Failure to cooperate will result in deducted points and possible disciplinary action.

5) Returning Graded Work: Work submitted on time will be returned one week later.

Grading Scale

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following distribution:

A	90 to 100 points
B	78 to 89 + points (78-80: B-; 81-84: B; 85-89: B+)
C	65 to 77 + points (65-68: C-; 69-73: C; 74-77: C+)
D	55 to 64 + points (55-58: D-; 59-61: D; 62-64: D+)
F	0 to 54 + points

General Assessment Criteria for All Writing Assignments

- 1) Completion of assignment according to deadline
- 2) Fulfillment of research requirements and content stipulations
- 3) Adherence to the terms and directions of the assignment
- 4) Depth and originality of thought
- 5) Coherence of communication
- 6) Adherence to length requirements
- 7) Presentation (proofreading, adherence to "Writing Guidelines" and other formal norms)

Assessment Criteria for your Final Paper or Project by Competence

H-2-G:

Term Paper, step #1 (film & bibliography): Grade based upon completion of assignment on time, number of sources, fulfillment of research requirements, adherence to the terms of the assignment, and presentation/proofreading.

Term Paper, step #2 (Research Questions): Evaluated based upon responses to questions in the term paper assignment, depth and originality of thought, evidence of

research, length (5-10 sentences per response), and presentation/proofreading.

Term Paper Introduction, step #3: Evaluated based upon originality of main argument, the presentation of sub-arguments that clearly correspond to each other and the thesis/main argument, the research sources, response to instructor's feedback given on Step #2 assignment, adherence to the Term Paper assignment, length (1-2 pages), and presentation/proofreading.

Term Paper: Evaluated based upon the original main argument, sub-arguments that clearly correspond to each other and the thesis/main argument, sturdy support for the thesis and sub-arguments in the body of the paper, deep applications of theoretical and critical concepts covered in the course readings, citations of research sources and the required number of sources, response to instructor's feedback given on Steps 1, 2 & 3 of the assignment, response to all of the questions in the Term Paper assignment, length (5-6 pages), and presentation/proofreading.

A-3-G:

Dialogue#1: Evaluated based upon responses to the questions posed in the assignment, application of ideas from readings, clarity and depth of thought, originality of ideas, length (4-5 pages), and presentation/proofreading.

Dialogue #2: Evaluated based upon evidence of a deep grasp of the theories and concepts being discussed, a sturdy sense of the differences between theories and concepts, and an ability to apply these theories and concepts toward the analysis of a film comedy. Length (4-5 pages) and presentation/proofreading are also factors in the evaluation.

Essay: Evaluated based upon definition and development of the thesis argument, sub-arguments and supportive discussion that delve deeply into theories and concepts discussed in the assigned readings, and application of them to the analysis of the film chosen. Evaluation is also based upon immersion in the material, depth of thought and support, originality, length (4-5 pages), and presentation/proofreading.

A-1-I:

Dialogue: Evaluated based upon evidence of a deep grasp of the theories and concepts being discussed, a sturdy sense of the differences between theories and concepts, and an ability to apply these theories and concepts toward the analysis of a film comedy. Length (4-5 pages) and presentation are also factors in the evaluation.

Essay: Evaluated based upon definition and development of the thesis argument, sub-arguments and supportive discussion that delve deeply into theories and concepts discussed in the assigned readings, and application of them to the analysis of the film chosen. Evaluation is also based upon immersion in the material, depth of thought and support, originality, length (4-5 pages) and presentation/proofreading.

Online Participation Guidelines

Class activity grade is based upon the extent to which students respond to the discussion questions, apply ideas from readings and notes, their clarity and depth of thought, and the originality of ideas. Consideration is also given to the timeliness of the responses.

Class discussions will require students to pose ideas based upon the module's questions and directions, and post them for the other class members to read. Although it is not always required, students are welcome to respond to each other's ideas.

Discussion Boards

Discussion Boards are a forum for discussion and sharing information among students. Your instructor may create one or more public conferences related to the topics you are studying each week.

At the beginning of the quarter, your instructor will set up two discussion conferences. These two conferences will help you and your classmates get off to an immediate start on the course, by providing conversational spaces for necessary, ongoing social and administrative activities. These conferences are:

- Course Q&A
- Screening room - a social meeting space for discussion that is not directly related to course content.

The **Q&A** conference is where the management and administrative tasks of the course are conducted, and where you can ask 'process' questions and receive answers. You will also find the schedule of specific dates for your course in this Conference, and the emails sent out to the whole class using the Listserve.

The **Screeningroom** can be used freely for your own conversation

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Policies

Academic Integrity

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.
- Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.
- Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
- The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If a instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion.

Disability Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities on an individualized and flexible basis. The Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) determines appropriate accommodations through consultation with the student. For certain learning disabilities and/or attention deficit disorders, the Productive Learning Strategies Program (PLuS) determines the appropriate accommodations. See the instructor for more information or call OSD at 773-325-7290 (phone) or 773-325-7296 (TTY); or call PLuS at 773-325-1677.

Incomplete Grades

The intent of the Incomplete grade is to allow students extra time to complete their final assignments. This need arises because, in the closing weeks of the course, they have an event of

significant magnitude that adversely affects their ability to complete the course, e.g. serious illness, death in the family, overseas deployment, or natural disaster.

You must request an incomplete grade in writing two weeks before the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades will be considered only after you have satisfactorily completed at least 75 percent of the coursework, and you have such an unexpected, uncontrollable event that prevents you from completing your course. Do not assume that you will qualify for an incomplete. Students who are failing the course at the point where they request an incomplete will not receive one, nor will they be granted after the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.

If you do receive permission from the instructor to take an incomplete in the course, you will be required to complete a contract with the instructor, specifying how you will finish the missing work within the next two quarters (excluding summer). Incompletes not finished by the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) will automatically become an F grade on your transcript.

Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee.

NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four week grace period before final degree certification.

Protection of Human Subjects

For more information see: <http://research.depaul.edu/>.

Demonstrating the acquisition of competences in this course can involve “interactions”—interviewing and or observing other people—discussing those interviews or observations with other class members and writing them up in one or more final report(s). As such, these activities qualify as “research” with “human subjects” and are subject to University and Federal guidelines. Because it takes place in the context of this course, your research is exempt from approval by the School for New Learning’s Local Review Board only under the following conditions:

1. The information you collect is EXCLUSIVELY for the purpose of classroom discussion and will NOT be used after the term is over. If there is any possibility that you will EVER use it in further research or for publication, you must obtain approval from the Local Review Board before you begin.
2. You assess and ensure that no “harm”—physical, mental, or social—does or could result from either your interviews and/or observations or your discussion and/or reports.
3. The privacy and confidentiality of those that you interview or observe must be protected. Unless you receive specific permission, in writing, from the person(s) you interview or observe, please change their names, and make sure that their identity cannot be readily ascertained from the information you provide.
 - a. If you want to use real names and relationships, they must sign an “informed consent” document. For information on creating an “informed consent document” see, for example, <http://www.research.umn.edu/consent>.

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Course Expectations

Time Management and Attendance

SNL’s online courses are not self-paced and require a regular time commitment EACH week throughout the quarter.

You are required to log in to your course at least four times a week so that you can participate in the ongoing course discussions.

Online courses are no less time consuming than “face to face” courses. You will have to dedicate some time every day or at least every second day to your studies. A typical four credit hour “face to face” course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week, plus at least three to six

hours of study and homework per week.

This course will require at least the same time commitment, but your learning activities will be spread out through the week. If you have any problems with your technology, or if you need to improve your reading or writing skills, it may take even longer.

The instructor should be notified if your life events do not allow you to participate in the course and the online discussions for more than one week. This is particularly important when there are group discussions or you are working as part of a team.

If you find yourself getting behind, please contact the instructor immediately.

Your Instructor's Role

Your instructor's role in this course is that of a discussion facilitator and learning advisor. It is not their responsibility to make sure you log in regularly and submit your assignments. As instructor, s/he will read all postings to the general discussion forums on a daily basis but may not choose to respond to each posting. You will receive feedback to assignments.

The instructor may choose to designate "office hours" when s/he will be online and available and will immediately respond to questions. Depending on the instructor, this response may be by e-mail, instant messenger or telephone. Otherwise, you will generally receive a response to emailed or posted queries within 48 hours.

Your Role as a Student

As an online student, you will be taking a proactive approach to your learning. As the course instructor's role is that of a learning guide, your role is that of the leader in your own learning.

You will be managing your own time so that you can complete the readings, activities and assignments for the course, and you will also be expected to take a more active role in peer learning.

Credits

This course was designed and produced by Dr. Ken Feil (the Author) and staff at the Center for Distance Education of the School for New Learning of DePaul University.

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