

First-Year Seminar I
Section 049: Comedy and the Moving Image
ENGLISH 1001-049 | Fall 2016

Monday, 9:00 AM–12:00 PM, MacLean Center, Rm 619

Instructor: Ian Bryce Jones, Department of Liberal Arts
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Office hours: by appointment, at designated times during the semester
 13th floor seating section of the MacLean Center Café

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Following the general mission of First Year Seminar, this course teaches English writing, close reading, and composition, with an eye towards the unique needs of writing about moving images. What is comedy, and how does it translate across media? How is a visual gag different from a spoken joke? Why are things *funny*? This course examines a broad swath of the history of moving image media, examining films and videos alongside theories of comedy authored by philosophers, critics, and artists. Beginning with turn-of-the-century silent slapstick before fast-forwarding to examine the place of comedy in avant-garde film and video art in the 1970s-1980s, and forward again to the new potentials of comedy in contemporary interactive new media art, this course examines not only what makes us laugh, but also how to write about laughter. By the end of the course, students will be expected to use descriptive and analytic prose in service of putting forward supportable, contestable, and non-obvious claims about the serious business of comedy.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- **Attendance and class participation.** Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and on time. Unexcused absences for more than **two** class sessions will put students in jeopardy of receiving no credit for the course. A string of unexcused and unexplained absences will be call for immediate failure of the course. (*Attendance is not included as a component of the course credit breakdown—it should be considered a separate rule set by which one can receive no credit in the course.*)
- **Nine substantial posts** on the course’s discussion board, in response to weekly prompts. By substantial, I mean somewhere **in the range of 300-400 words**. Ideally, by the end of the course, this will tally up to somewhere around 3,100 words, or **the equivalent of nine double-spaced pages**.
- **First written assignment**, a five-page deep comparison-and-contrast analysis. **First draft** due **October 18th**, electronically. **Revised and final draft** due **November 2nd**, again electronically.
- **Second written assignment**, a seven-page research paper, to be written on one or more films shown in the course, with three required sources (including some outside of course reading). **First draft** due **November 29th**, electronically. **Revised and final draft** due **December 20st**, again electronically.

See the *Course Credit Breakdown* at the end of this syllabus for an exhaustive review of assessment policies, and how the exact division between credit/no credit will be managed.

COURSE POLICIES: WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

- Page numbers for the two written assignments refer to **double-spaced** pages, in **12 point Times New Roman** font, with margins not exceeding **1.25 inches**.
- All writing should consistently include **proper citations**, following the guidelines of either MLA or the Chicago Manual of Style. References for proper citation will be provided for the course.
- All papers are due electronically, by 11:59 PM on the due date listed on the syllabus. **Preferred formats include .doc, .docx, and .rtf**. PDFs are allowed, but discouraged, as they are more difficult to add marginalia to. **Mac users:** Please convert .pages format files to a different standard before sending them. **Google Drive users:** Sharing a paper via Drive is great, but make sure that you share it in a way that allows me to comment on it. We'll troubleshoot this as necessary.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

From the SAIC Student Handbook: Academic misconduct includes both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of: the submission of the work of another as one's own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources.

Academic integrity is expected in all coursework, including online learning. It is assumed that the person receiving the credit for the course is the person completing the work. SAIC has processes in place, including LDAP authentication, to verify student identity.

A quick guide provided by the Flaxman library on how to avoid plagiarism is accessible here: http://www.saic.edu/media/saic/pdfs/campusresources/academicadvising/plagiarism_quickGuide.pdf

A longer, more in-depth detailing of school policy is available here: http://www.artic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism_packet.pdf

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

SAIC is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with known or suspected disabilities, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition who think they would benefit from assistance or accommodations should first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule an appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to your instructors. This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented. **You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible.** The DLRC is located within the Wellness Center on the 13th floor of 116 S Michigan Ave. and can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278 or email at dlrc@saic.edu.

Please note that accommodations can **never be applied retroactively**. They must be submitted to the instructor as early as possible to ensure that they are taken into account when assessing students.

FURTHER ELABORATION ON THE SCHOOL'S ATTENDANCE POLICY

SAIC policy states that students are expected to attend all classes regularly and on time. Students should miss class only with reasonable cause. If a student needs to miss class with reasonable cause, it is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor to receive instruction for how to make up for the missed class. It is the instructor's responsibility to give this information to the student as his/her/their schedule permits. Missing class for other than a reasonable cause may jeopardize the student's academic standing in the class.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

Students are not required to purchase any reading materials. All course readings will be posted on Canvas. Students should check Canvas regularly, as some readings may be slightly changed.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, 2016-09-05

No Class

(Due to Labor Day, there is no class meeting in Week 1)

Week 2, 2016-09-12

Definitions of Comedy

Watch in-class:

<i>One Week</i> (Buster Keaton and Eddie Cline, USA, 1921)	25 min
<i>The Best Fails of All Time (So Far)</i> (FailArmy, 2016)	11 min

Week 3, 2016-09-19

Philosophical Theories of Humor: Hobbes and Schadenfreude

Read for this class session:

Thomas Hobbes, chapters VII, VIII, and IX of *Human Nature*

Watch in-class:

<i>The Four Troublesome Heads</i> (Georges Méliès, France, 1898)	1 min
<i>The Man with the Rubber Head</i> (Georges Méliès, France, 1901)	3 min
<i>The Pawn Shop</i> (Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1916)	25 min
<i>Cops</i> (Buster Keaton and Eddie Cline, USA, 1922)	18 min

Week 4, 2016-09-26

Philosophical Theories of Humor: Kant and Incongruity

Read for this class session:

Immanuel Kant, §54, "Remark," in *Critique of Judgment*

Noël Carroll, "Notes on the Sight Gag"

Watch in-class:

<i>Sherlock, Jr.</i> (Buster Keaton, USA, 1924)	45 min
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Week 5, 2016-10-03**Philosophical Theories of Humor: Bergson and the Body, pt 1****Read for this class session:**

Henri Bergson, Chapter I pts II, IV, & V + Chapter III pts IV and V, in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*

Watch in-class:

clips from *The Circus* (Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1928)
The Rink (Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1916) 24 min
 selected clips from the career of Jackie Chan

Week 6, 2016-10-10**Philosophical Theories of Humor: Bergson and the Body, pt 2****Read for this class session:**

Noël Carroll, “Themes of *The General*” (selection), in *Comedy Incarnate*
 Alex Clayton, “Introduction” (selection) and “Body and Mind: Charlie Chaplin,” in *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick*

Take-home viewing assignment to complete by this class session:

The General (Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman, USA, 1926) 76 min

Watch in-class:

“Eugene” (Ernie Kovacs, USA, 1961) 21 min
Rupture (Pierre Étaix, France/Germany, 1961) 11 min

Week 7, 2016-10-17**Humor and Formal Experimentation****Read for this class session:**

Lynn Spigel, “Silent TV: Ernie Kovacs and Noise of Mass Culture,” in *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television*

Watch in-class:

Ballet Mécanique (Dudley Murphy, Ferdinand Léger, Man Ray, Georg Antheil, and Ezra Pound, France, 1924) 16 min
Pie in the Sky (Russell Collins, Elia Kazan, Elman Koolish, Irving Lerner, Ralph Steiner, and Molly Day Thather, USA, 1935) 22 min
Bleu Shut (Robert Nelson and William T. Wiley, USA, 1970) 30 min

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18th:**First draft of written assignment 1****Week 8, 2016-10-24****Dada Deadpan: The Avant-Garde’s Love Affair with Comedy****Read for this class session:**

Luis Buñuel, “Buster Keaton’s *College*” and “The Comic in Cinema”
 Jennifer Wild, selection from “The Distribution of Subversive Systems: Dada, Chaplin, and the End of an Age,” in *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923*

Watch in-class:

Selected Works: Reel 2 (William Wegman, USA, 1972) 20 min
Semiotics of the Kitchen (Martha Rosler, USA, 1975) 5 min
Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman (Dara Birnbaum, USA, 1978) 5 min
Super Mario Movie (Cory Archangel and Paper Rad, USA, 2005) 15 min

Week 9, 2016-10-31**From Avant-Garde Cinema to Video Art****Read for this class session:**

T.J. Demos, selections from *Dara Birnbaum: Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*

Ed Halter, “Get It? An Interview with Corey Arcangel on Comedy”

Dara Birnbaum and Corey Arcangel, “Do It 2”

Watch in-class:

selected *Chappelle Show* sketches/episodes

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1:

Revised and final draft of written assignment 1

Week 10, 2016-11-07**Race and Social Commentary in American Comedy****Read for this class session:**

Bambi Haggins, selection from “Dave Chappelle: Provocateur in the Promised Land,” in *Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America*

Watch in-class:

Rick and Morty, S1 E5, “Meeseeks and Destroy” (Bryan Newton, 2014)

[other material TBA]

Week 11, 2016-11-14**Punching Up & Punching Down****Read for this class session:**

Ben Schwartz, “Knock Yourself Out: ‘Punching Up’ in American Comedy”

Lindy West, “How to Make a Rape Joke”

Take-home viewing assignment to complete by this class session:

Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (Larry Charles, USA, 2006)

Watch in-class:

selected stunts/episodes of *Jackass*

Week 12, 2016-11-21**Sadism and Identification****Read for this class session:**

Muriel Andrin, “Back to the ‘Slap’: Slapstick’s Hyperbolic Gesture and the Rhetoric of Violence”

Scott Richmond, “‘Dude, That’s Just *Wrong*’: Mimesis, Identification, *Jackass*”

Play in-class:

Sumotori Dreams (Gravitysensation, 2007)

QWOP (Bennett Foddy, UK, 2008)

Surgeon Simulator 2013 (Bossa Studios, UK, 2013)

Turbo Dismount (Secret Exit, Finland, 2014)

[possibly others TBA]

Week 13, 2016-11-28**Interactive Abuse****Read for this class session:**

Ian Bryce Jones, “Do the Locomotion: Dehiscent Performance, Obstinate Avatars, and the Rise of the Comedic Videogame”

Watch in-class:

<i>Plane Crazy</i> (Walt Disney, USA, 1928)	6 min
<i>Playful Pan</i> (Burt Gillett, USA, 1930)	7 min
<i>Spooks</i> (Ub Iwerks, USA, 1931)	8 min
<i>The Great Piggy Bank Robbery</i> (Bob Clampett, USA, 1946)	8 min
<i>Northwest Hounded Police</i> (Tex Avery, USA, 1946)	7 min
<i>Scaredy Cat</i> (Chuck Jones, USA, 1947)	7 min
<i>Duck Amuck</i> (Chuck Jones, USA, 1951)	7 min
<i>Adventure Time</i> , S1 E6, “The Jiggler” (Larry Leichliter, 2010)	11 min

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29th:**First draft of written assignment 2****Week 14, 2016-12-05****Animation and Fantastic Physics****Read for this class session:**

Sergei Eisenstein, selections from *On Disney*

Scott Bukatman, “Some Observations Pertaining to Cartoon Physics, or, The Cartoon Cat in the Machine”

Watch in-class:

clips from <i>The Lego Movie</i> (Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, 2014)	
<i>Ghosts Before Breakfast</i> (Hans Richter, Germany, 1928)	9 min
<i>The Flat</i> (Jan Svankmajer, Czechoslovakia, 1968)	13 min
<i>Picnic with Weissman</i> (Jan Svankmajer, Austria, 1969)	13 min

Week 15, 2016-12-12**The Transformation of Everyday Life****Read for this class session:**

Hans Richter, short selection from *Hans Richter by Hans Richter*

Kristin Thompson, “Play Time: Comedy on the Edge of Perception,” in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*

Take-home viewing assignment to complete by this class session:

<i>Play Time</i> (Jacques Tati, France, 1967)	120 min
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Week 16, 2016-12-19**Conclusion**

In-class presentations on final papers, wrap-up, student requested topics, makeup/overflow week

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20th**Revised and final draft of written assignment 2**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

The Writing Center provides one-on-one writing tutoring for students. It is located in the MacLean Center Basement, 112 S. Michigan Ave., B1-03

Fall and Spring Semester Hours:

Monday–Thursday 9:00 AM–7:15 PM, Friday 9:00 AM–5:15 PM
4:15–7:15 PM are designated as walk-in hours.

Monday–Thursday SAIC offers free, hour-long writing tutorials at the Writing Center, which is located in the basement of MacLean. Tutors are available to assist all currently enrolled students with any stage of the writing process.

Appointments: To schedule an appointment with a Writing Center tutor, students first need to create an account through the online sign-up system: <https://www.supersaas.com/schedule/saic/WritingCenter>.

Once students have set up their own account, they may sign up for appointments. Weekly standing appointments are available upon request. When students come to their tutoring appointments, they should make sure to bring their assignments with them and have any work printed out.

Online schedule instructions are available outside of the Writing Center suite (in the hallway outside of the MacLean Center B1-03).

Contact Information:

Leila Wilson, Writing Center Coordinator: lwilson@saic.edu or 312.345.3588

Writing Center Suite: 312.345.9131 (Call to see if there are any last-minute openings.)

Course Credit Breakdown

Assessment of Student Progress

Assessment of student progress toward learning outcomes will be given on a 100-point scale. Achieving **70 or more out of these 100 points** will result in students **receiving credit** for the course. Achieving **less than 70** out of these points will result in students **receiving no credit** for the course.

There are no letter grades. There are no percentages. There are only points, and you receive them or you don't. The remainder of this document will break down where these points come from.

Breakdown of the class's points

- 1) Discussion board posts: 3 points each x 9 = 27
- 2) First written assignment: 31
- 3) Second written assignment: 42

1) Nine substantial posts on the course's discussion board

27 of these points come from postings on the course's discussion board. Students are expected to post nine times throughout the course of the quarter, in response to prompts. Each post is worth 3 points. Posting nine insightful posts, that address the topic of the prompt in 300-400 words, will net you all 27 of these points. Posting fewer posts, or shorter, less substantive posts, will net you fewer points, but still some. Not posting at all will not give you any points, which will make it very hard to pass the course.

2) The first written assignment

31 of these points come from the class's first written assignment. This assignment will be assessed via a rubric, clearly laying out expectations and learning goals for the assignment, allowing students to clearly see which points they are receiving, which points they are not, and why. Two drafts of this assignment are due. When reviewing the first draft, I will indicate how many points would be earned by the assignment in its current state. Points will not actually be distributed, however, until the second draft is reviewed, so students will have a chance to fix problems and earn more points.

3) The second written assignment

42 of these points come from the class's first second assignment. Again, this assignment will be assessed via a rubric. This rubric will be slightly different from the first assignment. The revision system will be identical: Two drafts of this assignment are due, and, when reviewing the first draft, I will indicate how many points would be earned by the assignment in its current state. Points will not actually be distributed until the second draft is reviewed.