

IDH 3931: (Un)Common Arts: The Problem with Political Jokes is they Get Elected...and also the Capitol Steps

Thursday, period 7 (1:55 – 2:45pm) in 119 Little Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 10am to Noon

Wednesday, 11am to 1pm

By Appointment as Needed

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Course Description

Political comedy and satire have been viable forms of communication for centuries, providing an outlet for transmitting political commentary and opinion in both flattering and unflattering ways. In the contemporary era, there has been a rise in the use of political comedy on television, but there are numerous other outlets where satire and comedy shed light on political realities. Political cartoons, stand-up comedians, blogs and websites, social media and memes, and music or other live-art performances have the power to convey information, form or shape opinions, and even influence or motivate political participation.

The purpose of this course will be to explore the connections between comedy and satire, and politics. As American politics have become more hyper-partisan and bitter, it would seem that political comedy has increased in attention, becoming more popular. In 2009, a TIME Online poll cited Jon Stewart as the most trusted news anchor since the death of Walter Cronkite. A “fake” news program on a cable comedy channel became a legitimate source of news, including spawning multiple offspring. At a time when politicians, including the president, members of Congress, and pundits accuse actual news of being fake, can fake news inform and influence public discourse, policy debates, and politics?

This course will examine the rise of political comedy in the modern era, beginning in the 1960s by examining how stand-up comedians began to use their platform to address social and political issues, leading to television comedy like the Smothers Brothers. Moving through time to the establishment of Saturday Night Live, to the late night comedy legends, to the Daily Show and its offshoots. The course will also examine other outlets beyond television and stand-up, including print and political cartoons, online comedy websites like the Onion, and other outlets. A live performance by the Capitol Steps will be included, and the class will attend together the night before the November election.

Course Objectives

The goal of the course is to promote a new appreciation for and understanding of the influence political comedy has on our politics. In particular:

- How political comedy can influence behavior and shape opinion
- How satire and fake news can be just as, or more, impactful than traditional news sources
- How political actors (candidates and elected officials) can use political comedy to their advantage
- Critically think about, analyze, and evaluate how information – like comedy and satire – influence our public discourse, policymaking, and politics
- How the use of political comedy, in all its forms, has changed over time

Required Text

RECOMMENDED TEXT: S. Robert Lichter, Jody C. Baumgartner, and Jonathan S. Morris. *Politics is a Joke: How TV Comedians are Remaking Public Life*. Westview Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8133-4717-2.

Weekly readings, videos, and websites will be provided to you by the instructor or linked in the syllabus.

Course Requirements

1. This course will be run seminar style, which means it will focus mainly on discussion. It is important that read and watch the required material prior to coming to class so that you will be able to discuss the material. The required material covers a host of controversial topics and issues, and includes the use of colorful and/or foul language, so be prepared. Language matters in public discourse, and specific words or phrases can be impactful at critical moments, also known as comedic timing. Bottom line – we only meet for one hour per week, so come to class prepared.

The following assignment is required for the course:

- **Presentation:** The last few weeks of the semester, you will be required to give a 5-7 minute presentation to the class. The presentation will be on material related to the content of the course. The presentation is up to you, meaning I will give you leeway in what you want to present. It can be a comedy sketch (with others in the course), a talk, a paper, interpretive dance. Think about issues we covered in class, or issues, topics, outlets, comedians that were not covered. Presentations can done individually or in groups.

Grading Distribution

Class participation and attendance: 50%

Presentation: 50%

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

100 – 93% = A	82 – 80% = B-	69 – 68% = D+
92 – 90% = A-	79 -78% = C+	67 – 63% = D
89 – 88% = B+	77 – 73% = C	62 – 60% = D-
87 – 83% = B	72 – 70% = C-	59% and Below = F

Attendance/Participation/Conduct

Assignments are expected to be turned in on the due date, either by hard copy, submitted through Canvas (UF e-learning), or email. One letter grade per day (not class days) will be taken off for late papers unless you have obtained prior approval for a different date due to special circumstances or have a documented illness or family emergency. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have some type of special circumstance, but you must do so before the due date unless it is an emergency. Communication is key. Attendance, assignments, and make-up work will adhere to UF policies and standards, available here <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Your grade for class participation depends not only on physical presence (attendance is mandatory), but also your active participation in class and your "class manners." This means being on time, refraining from side discussions and other distracting behavior and respecting each other's viewpoints. We will be discussing controversial issues about which many people have strong opinions and beliefs so mutual respect is critical for the success of the class. It is fine to challenge someone's ideas/positions, but personal attacks will not be tolerated.

Students with Disabilities: If you have special needs, you must register with the Disability Resource Center, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>, so that you can be provided the necessary accommodations to ensure your success. You must inform me at the beginning of the semester and provide me with a copy of your letter. I will work with you to be successful in this course.

Please do not ask me specific questions about your assignments or grades outside of office hours. Federal privacy rules (FERPA) prohibit any discussion that can be heard by others. FERPA also prohibits me from sending grades through e-mail.

Honor Code of Conduct: UF students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty. Requirements, expectations, and violations can be found here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1617/advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>. It is your responsibility to know UF policies and procedures, and you should hold yourself to the highest standards.

"There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self." ~ Ernest Hemingway

COURSE SCHEDULE:

1. August 23: Introduction

- Introduction and Syllabus discussion
- Discuss course goals
 - Context, Social Change, and Politics

2. August 30: NO CLASS

3. September 6: How Popular Political Comedy Influences Opinion and Politics

- Lichter et al., *Politics Is A Joke*
 - Preface through Chapter 2

4. September 13: The Early Landscape of the 1960s and the Death of Free Speech on Television with the Smothers Brothers.

- “The Uncensored Story” Of the Smothers Brothers, NPR Fresh Air interview with David Bianculli <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130569467>
- Smothers Brothers on the cancellation of “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqriMwc53es>
 - Smothers Brothers Explain Politics <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V2zFaogBcg>
- Pat Paulson Editorials <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4kWLUnorTU>

Early Comedians on Television Change Political Comedy, Challenge the Social Norms

- The Comedy of Lenny Bruce <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-comedy-of-lenny-bruce/>
 - Lenny Bruce, On Obscenity
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDkoCtMOFOg&feature=youtu.be>
 - On the Steve Allen Show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3QgxmIBfNY>
 - ***On Southerners, Religion, Racism, Obscenity, Law, Police, Politics
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umI4XCOGrmo> (optional)***
- Dick Gregory <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3jtu5Hgame> AND
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkQ4OCNecXs&list=RDp3jtu5Hgame&index=6>
- George Carlin – 7 Dirty Words <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbZhp3sQxQ>

5. September 20: The Rise of Late Night Television as Political Barometer from SNL to Colbert

- The Launch of Saturday Night Live
 - “Ford’s Speech” <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/fords-speech/n8607>
 - “Christmas Eve at the White House” <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/christmas-eve-at-the-white-house/n8620>
 - “Ask President Carter” <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/ask-president-carter/n8649>
 - “President Reagan Uses Stick Figures to Explain the Economy”
<http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/cold-opening/n8786>

- Newsweek, “The Most Popular Political Sketches on SNL” from 2017
<https://www.newsweek.com/10-most-popular-political-saturday-night-live-sketches-latest-season-613267>
- The Late Show with David Letterman
 - Watch – “David Letterman Grilling Politicians and Pundits Through the Years”
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/20/david-letterman-grilling-politicians_n_7345464.html
 - David Letterman (2012) Is Donald Trump Racist or just a Dope?
<https://www.facebook.com/HuffPostPolitics/videos/10154035724007911/>
- MadTV – The Apple iRack <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw2nkoGLhrE>
- Julia Ioffe, “Seth Meyers Has ‘Very Fond’ Memories of Roasting Trump” from *The Atlantic*
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/seth-meyers-trump-oprah/559118/>
- How Jordan Klepper does satire in the age of Trump - <https://wapo.st/2NCwr4I>
 - Who Says Conservatives Can’t Do Comedy? -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsMIGNaAJLM>
- Behind the scenes with Seth Meyers - <https://wapo.st/2LGOGFK>
 - Late Night Press Briefing - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65vOUdre1nI>
 - A Closer Look - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXCuAi9tSno>
- The Late Show with Stephen Colbert - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk6uNlSkLj4>

6. September 27: Political Effects on Thought and Mobilization: Does Comedy Influence? And, why do academics have to remove the humor from political comedy? How do we make sense of information?

- Lindsay Hoffman and Dannagal Young, “Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation,” from *Communication Research Reports*, 28/2 (2011)
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/08824096.2011.565278?needAccess=true>
- Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris, “The Daily Show Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth” from *American Politics Research*, 34/3 (2006)
<http://apr.sagepub.com/content/34/3/341>
 - **Focus on pages 341-344 and 361-363.**
- Young et al., “Psychology, Political Ideology, and Humor Appreciation: Why is Satire So Liberal?” <http://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2017-51853-001.pdf>

7. October 4: Contemporary Internet Tom Foolery and Shenanigans: Rise of Satire Websites

- The Onion:
 - <http://www.theonion.com/article/tim-tebow-just-sitting-by-himself-in-darkened-floor-32289> (can’t resist this one)
 - The Onion Politics - <https://www.theonion.com/tag/politics>
 - How to Discuss Politics With Your Loved Ones - <http://www.theonion.com/graphic/how-discuss-politics-your-loved-ones-52646>
 - 16 Times The Onion Masterfully Trolled American Politics -
http://www.salon.com/2015/10/16/16_times_the_onion_masterfully_trolled_american_politics_partner/
 - “How Trump changed everything for the Onion” -
<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/05/20/donald-trump-onion-stories-597809>

- “Onion writer’s routinely recycled mass-shooting headline hits close to home” - <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/onion-writers-routinely-recycled-mass-shooting-headline-hits-close-to-home-2018-02-15>
- The Borowitz Report
 - Trump Demands that NFL Players Stand During the Russian National Anthem - <https://www.newyorker.com/humor/borowitz-report/trump-demands-that-nfl-players-stand-during-russian-national-anthem>
 - Go to The Borowitz Report homepage and have a look - <http://www.newyorker.com/humor/borowitz-report>
- Compost – The Washington Post’s Alexandra Petri puts the ‘pun’ in punditry
 - Main page - https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/?utm_term=.1195b9372eb0
 - Too bad we can do nothing about the excesses of this president - <https://wapo.st/2mDQPqA>

Is social media changing the landscape?

- How Social Media Has Changed Politics - <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-social-media-has-changed-politics-3367534>

8. October 11: Political Cartoons: Is a political picture worth 1000 editorials?

- Historical:
 - Pat Oliphant – Examine cartoons from the collection <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/oliphant/obj-list.html>
 - 15 Historic Cartoons that Changed the World https://www.buzzfeed.com/victornavasky/15-historic-cartoons-that-changed-the-world?utm_term=.dtKENEQb2#.edZawaJNp
- Contemporary:
 - I was fired for making fun of Trump <https://nyti.ms/2uL7iOd>
 - Interview with AJC Cartoonist Mike Luckovich <https://cnn.it/2mA8wY6>
 - Luckovich cartoons <https://www.ajc.com/news/luckovich-blog/>
 - Charlie Hebdo editor says the paper is done with prophet Muhammad cartoons <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/07/17/charlie-hebdo-editor-says-the-paper-is-done-with-prophet-muhammad-cartoons/>
 - Look at Charlie Hebdo’s website - <https://charliehebdo.fr/en/>
 - The Week cartoon page – look this over on a few different days http://theweek.com/cartoons?sort=publish_date&page=2
 - RealClear Politics http://www.realclearpolitics.com/cartoons/cartoons_of_the_week/

9. October 18: Birth of a New Era: The Rise and Dominance of the Daily Show

- Jon Stewart’s Post 9/11 Monologue <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/1q93jy/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-september-11--2001>
- 5 Times the Daily Show Actually Influenced Policy <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/5-times-the-daily-show-influenced-policy/>
- How Jon Stewart Changed Politics <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/10/politics/how-jon-stewart-changed-politics/>
- Jon Stewart Interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UAHHkg6D0Y>

- Read and Watch – Jon Stewart’s Top 5 Political Moments
<http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/10/politics/jon-stewart-best-political-moments/index.html>
- Watch - Jon Stewart: I despise interviewing politicians <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/jon-stewart-i-despise-interviewing-politicians/>
- Why There’s No Conservative Jon Stewart
<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/02/why-theres-no-conservative-jon-stewart/385480/>

10. October 25: Post-Daily Show and Contemporary Political Comedy

- White House Correspondents Association Dinner Speeches
 - Stephen Colbert – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X93u3anTco>
 - Larry Wilmore - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IDFt3BL7FA>
 - Michelle Wolf - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxISB26avpw>
- Don’t forget about other Daily Show spin-offs like:
 - John Oliver: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3XTzVzaHQEd30rQbuVctTQ>
 - Trump vs. Truth - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xecEV4dSAXE>
 - Samantha Bee: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC18vz5hUUqxbGvym9ghtX_w
 - Здравствуйте to Our New Mother Russia - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u8MVFI9SOk>

11. November 1: Final Reflections and Thoughts on How Humor Influences Politics

- Politics is a Joke – Chapter 8. Political Humor: Prospect and Retrospect (all)
- What about Fake News? What happens when to fake news when real news is called fake?
 - How do you write political satire when politics are a farce? <https://wapo.st/2NG6zF1>

12. November 8: Presentations

13. November 15: Presentations

14. November 22: Happy Thanksgiving – No Class

15. November 29: Presentations

16. December 6: Reading Day