

THTR 222: Comedy Techniques

Spring 2007-08

Instructor: **D. Ohlandt**

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MWF 1 - 2:20pm

Buchanan 200

office hours: M 2:30-4

Th 11-12:30

Co-instructor: **Jennifer Lowe**

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office hours: MWF 12noon - 1pm

In this course we will explore dramatic comedy from three angles: reading critical scholarship of humor and comedy, experimenting with physical comedy techniques through exercises, and watching professional performances of comedy and trying to stage our own similar scenes. From all three angles, this course is a course of exploration and discovery.

Texts–

The following books have been ordered through the Lake Forest College bookstore:

On Humour by Simon Critchley

The Physical Comedy Handbook by Davis Rider Robinson

You should acquire the following plays for yourself (any edition):

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

'Dentity Crisis by Christopher Durang

The Real Inspector Hound by Tom Stoppard

Regular Class Attendance:

When you are in class, you should be focused on class: turn off cell phones, no food, no writing letters or reading for other classes. *Bring with you any texts under discussion that day.*

You are required to attend all class meetings, and to arrive on time, ready to work.

Attendance will be taken every day (tardies will be noted). A number of unexcused absences or late arrivals will result in a lower grade for the course, at my discretion.

Excused absences will be granted for verifiable medical and family emergencies, as well as for observed religious holidays, if brought to my attention ahead of time.

Field Trip Attendance:

Going to Chicago to see professional performance is a hallmark of the Theater Program at Lake Forest College, and an educational opportunity unmatched at other colleges. Of necessity, many of these trips will take place outside of normal class meeting time.

Please note: There will be a fee of \$200 associated with the costs of attending performances in Chicago. Your attendance is mandatory on class field trips. I expect that you will adjust your schedule of non-College activities in order to attend these field trips. In the event that an unavoidable conflict arises with a class field trip, I may, at my discretion, agree to one of the following options for full credit:

- you may arrange at your own expense to attend the same event at a different time, as long as you do so in time to participate in class discussions and/or projects relating to the

missed event

- you may propose an alternative event or project in line with the goals of the event, which (in my opinion) requires equal or greater work on your part, again to be completed in time to participate in class discussions and/or projects relating to the missed event

You will not, under any circumstances, be reimbursed for your ticket or travel expenses for a missed field trip. You may, however, sell or give your ticket to a friend if you must miss a field trip.

Special Accommodations:

Everyone is built a little differently, and it shouldn't be surprising that everyone has different needs when it comes to learning in the classroom. Please come and talk with me if I am not meeting your needs.

I am happy to provide large-print copies of any materials that I hand out, and I can also make available written outlines of the things that I have prepared to say in class. If differences in your ability to see, hear, or learn require more elaborate aids than this— if, for example, you need outlines of what everyone else says in class— then you will need to alert me early in the term, and you will also need to arrange for services through the college.

If you have concerns about mobility requirements for any assignment or physical access to the classroom, performance spaces, or any resources, please see me and we will work together to resolve the problem.

Notes on Email:

Please give me a minimum of four hours to respond to an urgent email. I typically will not respond to emails sent after 5pm until the next morning, or to emails sent anytime on Saturdays and Sundays until Monday afternoon. If I choose to make an exception to this policy from time to time, that does not mean that I will do so every time.

Assignments:

1) Mondays are READING/DISCUSSION days. *On Mondays we will be discussing the class plays and the critical writings on humor and comedy in an attempt to understand dramatic comedy from a scholarly perspective.* You are expected to complete all readings listed on the term schedule before class and to come to class prepared to discuss them. Readings will be discussed on the day they are listed, although we may refer back to them in later weeks. Please bring copies of the readings with you and your notes on the day we are scheduled to discuss the readings.

2) Wednesdays are EXERCISE days. *On Wednesdays we will be working through the Physical Comedy Handbook and various other resources in an attempt to understand dramatic comedy from an exploratory perspective.* You are expected to participate enthusiastically in all exercises in the spirit of collective exploration, and to engage with one another in the good-natured adventure of finding out what works (and what doesn't). You should come to class dressed in clothing that permits a free range of movement (including appropriate footwear), and be prepared to get on the floor. Above all, you will be expected to keep class a *safe* space of exploration for all.

3) Fridays are SCENE WORK days. *On Fridays we will be working on fully staging 5 minute scenes from the plays we are reading in class (except for our unit on improv, in which our final scene work will*

consist of an improv olympics) in an attempt to understand dramatic comedy by experiencing it formally. You are expected to work with your classmates to select a scene of appropriate length and casting, and to prepare the scene for formal performance.

4) Dramaturgy packets, for three of the four unit scenes. Detailed information will be given out in class.

5) Final exam. A written final exam will be given during the final exam slot: Monday, May 5, 2008, 1:30-4:30pm. There will be a performance/demonstration component to the final exam.

D's requirements for written work:

Papers are due in class on the due dates laid out for the option you choose. If you choose to submit your paper electronically, it must be sent or uploaded before class begins that day.

Written work must be in MLA format, using MLA standards for citation, and be printed double-spaced in 11- or 12- pt font, with 1" margins. Your pages must be numbered, and the first page should have a header that includes a title (or "final exam" if it is the final exam), the course number, the date the paper was turned in, quarter and year, and your name, in whatever arrangement you find aesthetically pleasing, *as long as the information is clear and logical.*

You should use parenthetical citations in the body of your paper, and you must include a works cited page with bibliographic entries at the end, under its own heading. *Your works cited page does not count towards your total page count!*

All ideas that are not your own must be cited (parenthetical citations are appropriate here), even if you do not quote them directly.

If you choose to submit your papers in hard copy, you may print on both sides of the page—*however*, if your last page is printed on both sides, please staple a blank page on the end for me to write my comments. You must staple your pages together if you submit a hard copy— paper clips are not acceptable.

If you choose to submit your papers electronically, the formatting and citation standards apply.

Grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors will absolutely lower your grade. *If it seems that you have not proofread your paper at all, I will return it to you for proofreading and accept it again within 24 hours for half credit.*

Submitting papers via email or Moodle

I encourage you to submit your dramaturgy packets to me in electronic form to me at [<ohlandt@lakeforest.edu>](mailto:ohlandt@lakeforest.edu) or via our class webpage on Moodle. (Please be patient, I am just

learning Moodle for the first time this year.) Written work submitted electronically MUST be uploaded as an attachment, and they MUST be formatted like other papers– double-spaced, paginated, with a title and your name, in MLA format, etc.

ONLY the following formats are acceptable: 1) .pdf (Adobe Acrobat) - preferred, 2) WordPerfect, 3) MS Word.

On receipt, I will convert your file to a .pdf document, and I will mark/grade it using a stylus input, so it will look like handwriting. I will save the marked paper as a different .pdf and return it to you in that format. You should be able to print .pdf files on any computer with the free Adobe reader installed. *If I have technical difficulties with the stylus input, I reserve the right to print a hard copy of your paper, mark it, and return it to you in hard copy.*