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ENG 4904-001: Studies in Film

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Spring 2018 English 4904, Studies in Film: The Comic Film

Instructor: Robin L. Murray Course Schedule: R 3:30-6:50, Coleman Hall 3170
Email: rlmurray@eiu.edu Office Hours: T 1:30—3:15; R 1:30-3:30, W 1-3 and by appt.
Phone: 549-0199 Wiki: <http://studiesinfilm.wikispaces.com/home>

“Independent films are where you really get to cut your teeth and have some fun and do the things that mainstream Hollywood doesn't want to do.” (Anthony Anderson)

Course Description: Studies in Film—Comedy Film and the Evolution of Laughter:

Comedy is one of the most appealing and popular genres in cinematic culture. Through comedy, we are not only entertained, but we can also release tension or overcome grief. We even laugh at our own insecurities and inadequacies. Film comedy makes us appreciate the value of a good laugh. But what makes some films so funny? To begin answering this question, this course will investigate many different forms of film comedy from both mainstream and underrepresented directors.

This course offers the opportunity to think about this widely discussed but critically under-researched genre by exploring film comedies geared toward a variety of audiences. To highlight the complexity of this genre, we will explore films from directors such as Buster Keaton, Amy Heckerling, Brenda Chapman, the Coen brothers, Jordan Peele, Stephen Chow, Pedro Almodovar, and Jackie Chan, and forms such as slapstick, deadpan, screwball, satire, and parody. Comedy always implies a special relationship with its audience, and in this course we are reminded that all types of comedies motivate us to laugh but also reflect on the culture that produced them as much as they reflect on ourselves. *Themes: Law and Social Justice; Genre, Form and Poetics; Science and the Environment; Media, Technology and Popular Culture*

Note: May be repeated once with permission of Department Chairperson.

Course Objectives:

Students will:

1. Evaluate comedy films as art form and cultural artifact
2. Analyze and synthesize theories of film form and visual style
3. Identify and analyze both narrative and non-narrative comedy films
4. Identify, critique and apply film theories and historical contexts to comic cinema
5. Write analytically and effectively about comic cinema and related concepts
6. Construct and explain selected comic cinema contexts and concepts

Course Texts:

Branigan, Ed. *Routledge Introduction to Film Theory*

Dick, *Anatomy of Film*

Grant. Ed. *Film Genre Reader III*

King. *Indiewood USA*

Course Policies and Requirements: To succeed in this course, you must effectively complete each of the following:

1. Once a week you will complete an **entrance card** answering a question about the film(s) screened and/or text read for that class. More later.
2. You will also be expected to keep a **film log**, with notes on each film screened in class (you may use on your midterm and final). Make sure you read the material for each class. In-class writing and quizzes will occur sporadically, as well.

3. You will also write **one paper** due after spring break. This paper will allow you to look beyond films screened for class to examine a sub-genre, period, or region in 6-8 pages.
4. You will also provide a Wiki page or other multi-media presentation for your sub-genre that includes at least two representative films.

Note: Paper prompts will be provided.

5. In pairs you will choose a film (of your week's sub-genre) introduce it and lead discussion following its screening.
6. You will take a **midterm exam** and **final exam**, which will allow you to synthesize information gained from the textbooks, films, and their cultural and historical contexts.

Note: In addition to the above requirements, students enrolled in the course for graduate credit will extend their paper to approximately 10 pages (conference length). These students will be asked to submit a proposal for the paper, as will all other students, but should also include a bibliography with their proposal.

Note: No late work will be accepted unless I have approved extensions before the date the work is due.

Grades: Grades for this course will be determined as follows

• Entrance Cards	15%
• Paper with proposal and draft	20%
• Wiki Page (or other multi-media)	10%
• Film Log	15%
• Film introduction and discussion	10%
• Midterm	15%
• Final Exam	15%
	100%

Other Policies:

1. **Plagiarism Statement:** “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--`the inappropriate imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of ‘F’ for the course.
2. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
3. Please also note that this course is Writing Intensive, so a paper completed for the course can be turned in to your electronic writing portfolio—some time during the actual course of the class.
4. Ambitious students can also seek help from the Writing Center. Call for an appointment (581-5920) or visit ((CH3110) at any point in the writing process, from brainstorming, planning and drafting, to final editing. Bring your assignment sheet and any written work and/or sources with you. The Writing Center is open Monday-Thursday, 9-3 and 6-9, and Friday from 9-1.

5. You must complete all major assignments to complete this course.
6. Students seeking Teacher Certification in English Language Arts should provide each of their English department professors with the yellow form, "Application for English department Approval to Student Teach." These are available on a rack outside the office of Dr. Melissa Ames.

English 4904 Tentative Course Calendar, Subject to Change

January

Silent Comedies

- 11 Introduction to the class and each other and review of film form, style, and history. Introduce film comedy and in-class responses.

Laughing Gas (1907), *Matrimony's Speed Limit* (1913), *Sherlock, Jr* (1924), Charlie Chaplin excerpts.
Complete film log.

Read "Film Space and Mise-en-Scene" and "Comedies" in *Anatomy of Film* and "Screwball Comedies." in *The Film Genre Reader III* (396-416) for January 18 and prepare for in-class response.

Screwball Comedy

- 18 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Review Screwball Comedy and gender construction.

It Happened One Night (1934) or *Bringing Up Baby* (1938).
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* "Film and Affect, and "Film as Art" and *Indiewood, USA* Introduction.
for 1/25 and prepare for in-class response.

Dead Pan

- 25 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Review Dead Pan actors and comedies.

Smoke Signals
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* "Film and Emotion" and "Cinematic Excess" and *Film Genre Reader III* "Film Bodies: Gender Genre and Excess" for 2/1 and prepare for in-class response.

February

Slapstick

- 1 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Slapstick comedies.

Girls' Trip (2017)
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Cinematic Movement,” “Ideology and Cinema,” and “Formalist Theories of Film” and *Film Genre Reader* “Genre Film and the Status Quo” for 2/8 and Prepare for In-Class Response.

Satire and Parody

8 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Satire, Parody, and Ideology.

Bamboozled (Dir. Spike Lee, 2000)
Complete film log.

Read “Intellectual Associations” (219-229) in *Anatomy of Film* and *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Queer Theory/Queer Cinema” for 2/15 and prepare for in-class response.

Romantic Comedy

15 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Judd Apatow, Norah Ephron and beyond.

Saving Face (Dir. Alice Wu, 2004)
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Auteur Theory,” “Point of View,” and “Representation” and *Film Genre Reader III* “Genre” (Tudor) for 2/22 and prepare for in-class response.

Contemporary Comedy Filmmakers

22 Paper Proposal due. Discuss Responses and Reading. Tyler Perry and the Niche Audience.

Student Introduction and screening of Tyler Perry Film.
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Third World Cinema” and *Film Genre Reader III* “The Idea of Genre...” (Buscombe) and “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach...” (Altman) for 3/8 and prepare your paper draft.

Midterm Review.

March

1 Midterm and possible film screening.

8 Paper Draft due. Pedro Almodovar and *La Movida Madrileña* in Context. Third World Cinema and Genre Theory.

Student Introduction and screening of Almodovar Comedy.
Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Feminist Film Theory, Core Concepts,” “Feminist Film Theory, History of,” and “Gaze Theory” for 3/22 and complete a revision of your paper.

12-16 Spring Break—No Classes

22 Paper Final due. Gillian Robespierre and Feminist Comedy Films. In-class group “quiz” on readings.

Student Introduction and screening of *Obvious Child* (2014)

Complete film log.

Read *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* “Fantasy and Spectatorship” and *Film Genre Reader III* “Social Implications in the Hollywood Genres (Bourget) and “The Structural Influence...” and prepare for in-class response.

29 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Film and Genre Theory. Brenda Chapman and the Animated Comedy.

Student Introduction and Screening of Chapman animated comedy.

Complete film log.

Read *Film Genre Reader III* “The Structural Influence...” (Schatz) and “Global Noir...” (Desser) and prepare for in-class response.

April

5 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Stephen Chow and International Parody.

Student Introduction and screening of Chow comedy.

Complete film log.

Read “Film Adaptation” (276-312) in *Anatomy of Film* and *Film Genre Reader III* “Teen Films...” (Shary) and prepare for in-class response.

12 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. Amy Heckerling and Adaptation

Student Introduction and screening of Heckerling comedy. Complete film log.

Read *Film Genre Reader III* “Genre Film: A Classical Experience” (Sobchack) and “Hybrid or Inbred...” (Staiger) for 4/19 and prepare for in-class response.

19 In-Class Response. Discuss Responses and Reading. The Coen Brothers

Student Introduction and screening of Coen Brothers’ comedy.

Complete film log.

Complete multimedia presentation for 4/26.

26 Multimedia presentations due. Jordan Peele and Contemporary Satires. Intersectionality and genre crossings. Prepare for Final Exam.

Student Introduction and screening of *Get Out!*

Complete film log.

May

Final Exam.