Dr. Ethan Thompson  
COMM 3351 Screen Comedy  
EN 107  
MW 10-10:50  
Office: BH 3.31

Office Hours: MW 2-3; TR 11-1 and by appointment.  
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Catalog Description: Examination of the varieties of screen comedy, from silent comedy to contemporary forms, with some attention to the history and theory of comic performance.

Course Objectives: After taking this course, the student will be able to:

- Describe major traditions, styles, and techniques in American screen comedy
- Apply theoretical concepts to understand comedy
- Create research projects applying concepts to specific examples of screen comedy

Required Course Texts:

- Comedy (The New Critical Idiom), 2nd Edition by Andrew Stott
- Sitcom: A History in 24 Episodes by Saul Austerlitz
- Television Sitcom by Brett Mills
- Saturday Night Live & American TV edited by Marx, Sienkiewicz & Becker

Additional readings will be made available online via Blackboard

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Blackboard Discussions (10 points each, 150 points total, 15% of grade)

In-Class Attendance & Participation (100 points total, 10% of grade)

Midterm Exam: 25% An essay exam over key concepts addressed in the course readings, lectures, screenings, and discussions.

Final Exam: 25% An essay exam over key concepts addressed in the course readings, lectures, screenings, and discussions.
Course Project: 25% A substantial project such as a paper or digital media project, designed in consultation with the instructor. Topics will vary according to student interests. If paper, length should be 8-10 pages. All students will turn in a one-page prospectus to be discussed with the instructor.

Course Point Totals and Grades

- 900 - 1000 points = A
- 800 - 899 = B
- 700 - 799 = C
- 600 – 699 = D
- 599 and under = F

Blackboard will keep a running total of your percentage of points so you will know where you stand during the course. The same basic grade scale applies: A = 100-90%, B = 89-80%, C = 79-70%, D = 69-60%, F = 59% and under.

E-Communication Policy:

- CONTACT ME THROUGH BLACKBOARD MESSAGES FOR THIS COURSE.
- I will respond to messages within 24 hours (usually sooner), except for Friday at 3 pm until Monday at 9 am.
- I will be happy to talk on the phone, instant message, Facetime etc with you during my office hours.
- I am also happy to meet with you in person during office hours or some other time arranged in advance!

Attendance

- Attendance is mandatory. Two absences are acceptable, but any additional unexcused absences will cause a five-point deduction from your attendance and participation grade, and you may not make up any missed work. Excused absences require official documentation. Two “lates” (or leaving early) equal an absence.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism

University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the
work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in an automatic zero on the assignment and further disciplinary action.

**Dropping a Class**

Events sometimes occur that make dropping a course seem necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class.

**Classroom/Professional behavior**

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

**Additionally, students are expected to:**

1. **Complete readings and assignments as assigned.** All assignments must be turned in on time; exceptions will be made only for extraordinary cases and official documentation is needed.
2. **Proofread all work before turning it in.** Really.
3. **Seek help with writing if necessary.** The Writing Center of TAMU-CC, located in GSSC 112, provides free help for students at any stage in the writing process. More information is available at the Center for Academic Student Achievement website, casa.tamucc.edu.
4. **Properly cite sources.** Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form, and will result in an automatic zero for the assignment and further disciplinary action.
5. **Respect the privacy and opinions of fellow students.** I expect students to participate in discussion, and I expect students to respect each other’s (hopefully well-informed) opinions. Grades and course performance are considered private information. Students are not to openly discuss their grades (good or bad) inside my classroom.
6. **Meet with the instructor during office hours.** I will not discuss individual student grades in the classroom. I will, however, be happy to discuss grades on papers, exams, course performance, etc. during office hours. I also do not allow the following topics to be openly discussed in the classroom: student opinions about other faculty, student opinions about other students, student grades in other classes.
COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (8/27-8/29): Introduction: Bananas!
8/27: Introduction to the class. GET THE BOOKS!

WEEK 2 (9/1-9/5) Comedy = Tragedy + Time (and Other Theories of Humor)
9/1: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY
9/3: Read: Stott, 1-61; 171-190; The Onion 9.26.01; Warner, “The Onion 9/11”

WEEK 3 (9/8-9/12) Sitcom or Satire?
9/8: Read: Mills, Chapters 1 & 2; Feuer, “Genre Studies: Situation Comedy”
9/10: Read: Austerlitz, All in the Family and M*A*S*H; Murray, M*A*S*H and Socially Relevant Humor; Thompson, “I Am Not Down with That”

9/15: Read: Stott, 62-104; Mills, Chapter 3
9/17: Read: Austerlitz, I Love Lucy; Mellencamp, “Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud”

9/22: Read: Austerlitz, Roseanne; Rowe, “Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess”
9/24: Read: Petersen, “Broad City’s Unruly Women”

WEEK 6 (9/29-10/3) Race, Identity, Comedy
9/29: Read: Stott, 105-126
10/1: Read: Haggins, “The Black Comedian’s Place in American Comedy”; Gates, “Bringing the Black”

WEEK 7 (10/6-10/10) Race, Identity, Comedy, Part 2.
10/6: Read: Mills, Chapter 4; Austerlitz, The Cosby Show
10/8: Read: Jhally & Lewis, “Enlightened Racism”; Acham, “The Cosby Show”

FRIDAY ONLINE: MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK 8 (10/13-10/17) Domestic Comedies 1. Families
10/13: Read: Austerlitz, Leave it to Beaver; Newcomb, “Situation and Domestic Comedies”
10/15: Read: Austerlitz, Friends; Sandell, “Friends and the Fantasy of Alternative Families”
WEEK 9 (10/20-10/24) **Domestic Comedies 2. Workplace Families**

10/20: Read: Austerlitz, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*; Feuer, “The MTM Style”


WEEK 10 (10/27-10/31) **Reconsidering Sitcom History**

10/27: Read:


WEEK 11 (11/3-11/7) **Not Necessarily Fake News**

11/3: Read: Stott, 149-170, Gray, Jones & Thompson, “The State of Satire, the Satire of State”

11/5: Read: Day & Thompson, “Live from New York, It’s the Fake News”; Jones, “Politics and the Brand”

WEEK 12 (11/10-11/14) **Sitcom Form and Taste**

11/10: Read: Austerlitz, Arrested Development; Butler, “Televisuality and the Resurrection of the Sitcom”


WEEK 13 (11/17-11/21) **The End of Sitcoms (Not!)**

11/17: Read: Austerlitz, Seinfeld; Hibbs, “Normal Nihilism as Comic”


WEEK 14 (11/24-11/28) **Sitcom as Global Format**

11/24: Read: Shahaf, “Welcome to the Sitcom School”

11/26: Read: Beeden and de Bruin, “Articulations of National Identity”

FRIDAY ONLINE: **FINAL PROJECT DUE**

WEEK 15 (12/1-12/2) **Comedy and Convergence**

12/1: Read: Gurney, “Recombinant Comedy, Transmedial Mobility, and Viral Video”; Thompson & Tussey, “Andy Samberg’s Digital Success Story”

FINAL EXAM: Wed. 12/10, 10 am.
Course Policies

*Notice to Students with Disabilities:* Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come see me. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office (located in 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

**Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

***Grade Appeal Process.* As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.