

General Information

Course Number: 25841 (Seminar A)
Instructor: Aaron Winter
Instructor Email: awinter@uci.edu
Classroom and Hours: MW 3:00-4:20, HH 251
Office and Hours: TBD
Class Website: laughingdove.net/139
Class Listserv: funny-s08@classes.uci.edu

“What’s So
Funny?”

Writing 139W
Spring 2008
Syllabus



Writing 139W fulfills the upper-division writing breadth requirement for students in any major. Completing all ESL and lower-division writing requirements is prerequisite. The registrar’s official title for this course is “Advanced Expository Writing,” but reading and class participation will also factor heavily because good writing doesn’t occur in a vacuum. The course carries four academic units and may be taken pass / no pass unless your department requires that you take it for a letter grade.

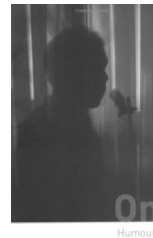
Course Description

Our 139 course deals with a familiar and enjoyable topic but one that turns out to be tremendously difficult to grapple with theoretically. Indeed “what’s so funny?” is a question that has engaged some of the greatest minds in disciplines ranging from sociology to law to mathematics. (And those are just the ones we *won’t* be studying.)

We’ll start by examining the work of a philosopher and a neurobiologist, who use very different methods to answer the question in its broadest sense. Then we’ll consider a third approach, taken by a literary critic who is interested more specifically in what’s funny in contemporary U.S. culture and politics. We’ll discuss their differing conclusions, applying them to our personal experiences and our favorite works of humor and arguing about whether we agree with them. But we’ll also pay close attention to the methods of analysis these thinkers use and the methods of writing they use to present this analysis and convince us that it’s credible.

The goal of the course is for you to create a piece of writing that reflects your own analysis of the phenomenon of humor, which you’ll create by synthesizing (or contrasting) several of the methodologies you’ve encountered in the reading assignments and class activities.

Course Books



Simon Critchley
On Humour
Routledge, 2002
ISBN = 0415251214
\$17.95



Robert Provine
*Laughter:
A Scientific Explanation*
Penguin, 2001
ISBN = 041002255
\$15.00



Paul Lewis
*Cracking Up: American
Humor in a Time of Conflict*
U. Chicago, 2006
ISBN = 0226476995
\$25.00 (sorry, no paperback)



Little Penguin Handbook
or
Writing from A to Z
(whatever style guide
you used in Writing 39)

Assignments & Values



On the Road: Class Participation (10%) Discussion Questions (10%)

These are the daily assignments that keep us talking and thinking. I'm way too busy with my own work to assign you busywork. This class will be driven by discussion, not lecture, so I expect you to come to class having read all assigned materials. Read slowly, read carefully, read more than once, and please, please, please read with a pen in your hand. Underline, circle, star, flow chart, start a dialogue with the author and tell him when you like something or when you think it sucks. If you can't or won't write in your books, take notes on index cards or post-it notes and stick them between the pages. Reading with care and attention does wonders for your own preparation for the overall quality of our class discussion.

Believe it or not, students in my previous classes have said that the discussion questions were the most useful assignment, because they helped them organize their thoughts as they were reading and got their brains churning before the essay deadlines really sunk in. Many successful students used whole sentences or paragraphs from their discussion questions in their papers. You should always try to answer all of the discussion questions *in writing* before the start of class. They won't be graded for grammar or content, but I may check to see if you're completing them, and you'll turn them in with your paper drafts.

I will specially assign each question to one person, which will rotate through the entire class. This doesn't mean that the rest of you shouldn't be prepared to answer the question, just that this one person should be *more* prepared to answer the question. Sometimes I'll give you the discussion questions for the next session at the end of class, but other times I won't even think of them until after we've talked, so they'll be posted to the listserv and the website later that afternoon.

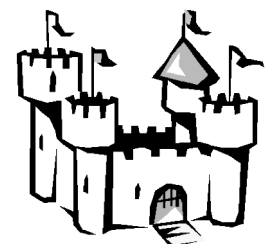
Stopovers: 1. Phenomenological Analysis of Humor (15% ► 3-4 pages) 2. Empirical Analysis of Humor (15% ► 3-4 pages per group) 3. Contextual Analysis of Humor (15% ► 3-4 pages)



These are shorter assignments that let you solidify your work from class activities and discussion questions. The first asks you to think and write like Critchley by exploring one of the subtopics he discusses in chapters 2-6 of *On Humour* (i.e. humanity, the body, the laughing machine, ethnicity, common sense). The second is a group assignment that asks you to think and write like Provine by conducting a small-scale scientific study. (A lot of his involve chimpanzees, so you'll probably have to substitute your roommates.) The third asks you to think and write like Lewis by situating a particular work of humor (your choice of book, movie, show, game, website, event, etc.) in its immediate cultural context. I'll give you a specific prompt for all three assignments before the due date. You'll write a first draft for each one and receive written comments, and for 1 and 2 you'll have a mandatory conference with me to discuss these comments. Conferences for 3 are optional.

Destination: 4. Multi-Disciplinary Analysis of Humor (35% ► 7-8 pages)

This is your final paper, which will incorporate much of the work you've already done in the earlier assignments. You'll put most of your effort into revising your ideas from the previous papers and figuring out how they fit together (or how they don't fit together), so the introduction, conclusion, and



transition sentences will have the most leverage. Because this paper will be due at the start of exam week and because we'll spend a lot more time discussing the prompt, peer-reviewing, workshopping, revising, etc. in class, there won't be any conferences for this paper. You will receive written comments on a draft however.

Course Policies

Attendance: Our class is relatively small; the maximum is 21 students. This provides a tremendous opportunity for hands-on learning, but it also means that you can't skip and get all the lecture notes from your buddy, or slink into the back of the room and listen to your iPod. Your active physical and mental presence in class is vital to your own success and to the success of the class as a whole. I will allow each student one "free" absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, or other reasons - no explanation necessary, no explanation desired. Beyond this, missing class will decrease your participation grade, and if necessary your total grade. Excessive absence could result in failing the course. Lateness is very disruptive and thus unacceptable, so two lates will equal one absence.

If you have extenuating circumstances (e.g. family emergency, serious illness, or other catastrophe), you must communicate with me in a timely manner so we can discuss how to handle it. In my five years teaching at UCI, I have never failed a student who came prepared to each class and turned in all assignments completed and on time. Students who fail my classes are flaky. The worst thing you can possibly do is drop out of contact with me.

Papers & Grades: All assignments should be typed in 12-point font with black print on white background, doubled-spaced, with one-inch margins. (Note: on some word processors this is not the default margin.) You'll find I'm pretty easy-going but I am fanatical on this particular point. Hold onto any instructor- or peer-commented drafts of an assignment and turn them in with the final draft. You may also be asked to submit other materials with final drafts, such as outlines, annotations, reflections, and acknowledgement statements. I'll provide you with a checklist whenever a final paper comes due. Late papers will be penalized one full grade per 36 hours late. You cannot receive a higher grade for rewriting a final, graded paper.

Calendar

Monday 3/31 = Course Introduction
Wednesday 4/2 = Critchley (read 1-19)

Monday 4/7 = Critchley (read 25-52, 65-91)
Wednesday 4/9 = Critchley (read 93-111)
[Sunday 4/13] = Paper 1 draft due

Monday 4/14 = Critchley, Paper 1 conferences
Wednesday 4/16 = Critchley, Paper 1 conferences
[Sunday 4/20] = Paper 1 final due

Monday 4/21 = Provine (read 1-9, 23-53)
Wednesday 4/23 = Provine (read 55-64, 75-84, 92-97, 129-37, 149-51, 189-203t, 206m-207)

Monday 4/28 = Provine, Paper 2 draft due,
Paper 2 conferences
Wednesday 4/30 = Provine, Paper 2 conferences

Monday 5/5 = Provine, Paper 2 final & presentations
Wednesday 5/7 = Lewis (read 1-21)

Monday 5/12 = Lewis (read 23-71b, 109-154)
Wednesday 5/14 = Lewis (read 155-206)
[Sunday 5/18] = Paper 3 draft due

Monday 5/19 = Lewis, Paper 3 conferences (optional)
Wednesday 5/21 = Lewis
[Sunday 5/25] = Paper 3 final due

Monday 5/26 = Battle of the Disciplines
Wednesday 5/28 = Battle of the Disciplines
[Sunday 6/1] = Paper 4 draft due

Monday 6/2 = Revising Workshop
Wednesday 6/4 = Revising Workshop
[Sunday 6/8] = Paper 4 final due

E-Mail & Website: I'll use the course listserv and website to disseminate important information throughout the quarter—from posting handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines to accepting your papers and returning my comments. You'll use it them to address questions and thoughts to your classmates. **You are responsible for checking your email before every class session.** If you would like me to add an alternate (non-UCI) email address to our listserv, let me know.

Conferences & Office Hours: In addition to our workshops and exercises in class, we will have mandatory individual conferences for the Phenomenological Analysis and mandatory group conferences for the Empirical Analysis. These conferences will be pretty brief (about 15 minutes per student, 60 minutes for a group of four). Conferences will take place in my office or at one of the cafés, depending on the weather; I'll pass around a sign-up sheet in class a few days before the conference with more details. Before the conferences I'll either give you handwritten comments on your draft or send you a computer file with my comments for you to print out and bring with you. Optional conferences will be available for the Empirical Analysis.

If you're encountering any difficulties or would simply like to talk more about class, come to my office hours. I am required to hold them even if no students come to talk to me. If no one comes to office hours, I may be forced to strike up conversations about the philosophical and neurobiological aspects of humor with innocent bystanders. Please take pity on these people. If you can't make my office hours, feel free to arrange an appointment with me. **Please ask questions anytime, in and out of class. Ask them twice if I don't actually answer them,** which happens with unfortunate frequency. Regular office hours may be cancelled for holidays and conference days.

Enrollment Issues: **If you are absent on the second day of class, you will lose your place on the class roster.** For MWF classes, which begin on Monday, March 31st, the second day is Wednesday, April 2nd. The deadline for adding/dropping classes (and for changing from a grade to P/NP) is the end of the second week of classes on Friday, April 11th. If you want to add or drop in the first two weeks, ask me for an add/drop card, fill it in, and submit it to the Registrar.

If you stop attending but forget to officially drop the course, you may get an F on your transcript. This goes even for students who communicate to me that they want to drop the class and students who get kicked off the roster in favor of a waitlisted student because they missed the second day. If you need to find another section or have any other enrollment question I can't answer, please ask the Registrar, the Campus Writing Program administrator (Iveta Cruse, Krieger Hall 500-D, icruse@uci.edu), or the Campus Writing Program coordinator (Jonathan Alexander, Krieger Hall 500-B, jfalexan@uci.edu).

Getting Help: For most students, the kind of reading and writing you're asked to do in 139W is very time-consuming. To do well, it helps to start assignments early, write multiple drafts, and attend office hours for individualized feedback and instruction. You know, the same tricks you learned in the dreaded 39B and 39C courses. Many successful students also find the services of the Learning and Academic Resource Center (LARC) to be very helpful. LARC is located on the fourth floor of Social Science Tower (SST). If you need to see a Campus Writing Program administrator for any reason, contact Iveta Cruse in Krieger Hall 500-D (icruse@uci.edu).

Acknowledgements: If you receive any help at all with an assignment—from your classmates, roommates, study group, LARC writing counselors, parents, siblings, other teachers, dead

celebrities encountered through astral projection, etc.—you are required to include a written acknowledgment. No one else should generate the language of your papers.

Turnitin.com: Although copies of assignments must be submitted to me by hand or by email when they're due, formal written assignments are not considered “complete” until they have also been submitted to turnitin.com—or until you have satisfied an alternative means for verifying the authenticity of your work—and your grade on any assignment and/or for the course will be withheld until you complete this process. Before the first paper comes due, I'll provide the class I.D. number, password and instructions so you can register for turnitin.com.

Plagiarism: Please read the university policy on Academic Honesty printed on the Registrar's home page at <http://www.reg.uci.edu>. Submitting a paper that includes researched information that is not cited is grounds for failure in the course. All information borrowed from print sources or the Internet must be identified. From a legal standpoint, failure to do so constitutes intellectual property theft. Plagiarists fail the course and have their offense recorded by their School and by the School of Humanities. Violations of academic honesty can affect a student's graduation, financial aid, and eligibility for honors. The Composition Program deals with plagiarism cases every quarter, even though most people do not hear about them. No matter how pressured you feel, do not plagiarize; it isn't worth it, and I will nail your sorry ass.

Fails/Repeats: Submitting the same work for more than one class without notifying the instructor is considered plagiarism at UCI. I can't imagine how your work in this particular class would overlap with another class in such a way, but I suppose it's possible.

This is What Happened When I Typed “So Funny” into a Google Image Search

See? Nemo is trapped inside the maki. Isn't that So Funny? I guess that wasn't tremendously difficult after all. We should just cancel the course and have spring break for two months.



Let this be a lesson that Google has some limitations as a research tool!