

**DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES  
AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

<https://uofa.ualberta.ca/modern-languages-and-cultural-studies>

**2016-2017** MLCS 299 B1: Comedy Across Cultures  
(Winter Term)

Instructor: Jay Friesen  
Office: 409-A Arts & Convocation Hall  
Fax: 780-492-9106  
E-mail: [jayf@ualberta.ca](mailto:jayf@ualberta.ca)  
Course Website: eClass

Time: Tue / Thu 9:30-10:50 AM  
Place: HC 2 -29  
Office Hours: 11 AM to 1 PM, Tuesdays  
or by appointment

---

**Course Prerequisite:** No prerequisites

**Course-based Ethics Approval** in place regarding all research projects that involve human testing, questionnaires, etc.?

Yes       No, not needed, no such projects approved.

**Community Service-Learning** component

Required     Optional     None

**Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material Available**

- Exam registry – Students' Union  
<http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/infolink/exam/>
- See explanations below
- Document distributed in class
- Other (please specify)
- NA

**Additional mandatory Instructional fees (approved by Board of Governors)**

Yes       No

## Course Description and Objectives:

“Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind (E.B White 1941).

*Let’s kill some frogs”*

– (McGraw and Warner i)

The combined study of comedy and cultures contains a paradox. On one hand, laughing at something funny is a universal trait across societies. As such, comedy is a relatable concept for nearly everybody, no matter one’s upbringing. On the other hand, anyone who has tried to integrate into a foreign culture is keenly aware that comedy is one of the most difficult pieces to grasp; jokes often do not tidily translate from one context to another. Consequently, our paradox: how do we understand comedy as simultaneously universally relatable but also culturally specific?

This course uses the tension in the above paradox to motivate learning. Crucially, to thoughtfully examine cultures through comedy, we need to cultivate the language and skills to do so. Accordingly, the course weaves together two related elements: ideas and contexts. With respect to ideas, this course will introduce the key ways one might think about comedy, including: the main theories of comedy (incongruity, relief, and superiority), genres (e.g., sitcoms, standup, and comics), and contemporary issues (e.g., the right to offend and cross cultural sharing of jokes). These ideas, of course, need a context and practicality; therefore, each idea will be situated within a comedic tradition from around the world. Together, ideas and context will allow us to explore cultures around the globe, producing novel insights about what comedy can teach us about people and cultures, both shared and unique.

The learning outcomes for this 200-level class strive to lay the foundation for skills required for upper-level course work. Importantly, it assumes that students know nothing of the topic specifically, and will be introduced to new topics throughout the term. At the end of the course, successful students will demonstrate competencies in the following areas.

- **Comprehension:**
  - Students will be able to *classify* different genres of comedy;
  - *summarize* key ideas found in texts; and,
  - *identify* the basic theories of comedy used in course materials.
- **Application:**
  - Students will *compare and contrast* the various texts studied based on their comedic features;
  - *situate* texts within the larger social, political, and historical contexts from which they arise; and,
  - *apply* ideas about comedy in new contexts from their own experiences.
- **Analysis:**
  - Students will *reflect on the relationships* between comedy and culture; and,
  - *analyze* the cultural forces which shape comedic traditions.

## Community Service-Learning Component (Optional):

In addition to the traditional course option, there is the *entirely optional* opportunity for students to participate in a Community Service-Learning (CSL) component. Participating in this program is a way

of developing cultural sensitivities and competencies in an applied context.

As discussed in the previous section, comedy can bring communities together, but it can also serve as a difficult impediment for those trying to understand a new culture. Appreciating that learning about culture (and comedy) are a reflective process, the CSL component allows students to employ the ideas learned in class in a contemporary and local context. Accordingly, CSL provides students the opportunity to learn how comedy can be utilized as a tool to engage and help others.

Specifics concerning CSL placement details will be given during the first/second week of class.

### **Texts:**

Required:

Carroll, Noel. *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Choi, Ins. Kim's Convenience. 1st Edition. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2012.

Friesen, Jay, ed. "MLCS 299 Winter 2018, Course Pack." Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2018. Online resource (eClass). (No cost, all accessible online via eClass).

McGraw, Peter, and Joel Warner. *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny*. Reprint edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

### **Grade Distribution (see "Explanatory Notes"):**

- Class attendance, discussion, and engagement: 20%
- Short papers: 15% (February 15 for non-CSL students; or, February 15 and April 5 for CSL students)
- Presentations: 10% (April 3-5)
- Term paper: 30% (April 12)
- Final Exam: 25% (April 24)

### **Date of Deferred Final Exam**

A student who has missed a final exam because of incapacitating mental and/or physical illness, severe domestic affliction or for circumstances as described in the University's Discrimination, Harassment and Duty to Accommodate Policy (including religious belief) may apply for a deferred exam. Please consult the website for more information: <http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Regulations-and-Information/Academic-Regulation/23.5.html> - 23.5.6(3)

### **Explanatory Notes on Assignments:**

- **Class attendance, discussion, and engagement (20%):** This mark derives from in-class participation, including discussions, activities, and the "Weekly Reviews" that we complete after each week of classes.
- **Short Paper (Non-CSL Students) (15%):** This paper will be worth 15% and will be due electronically. Papers will be maximum 4-6 pages in length. Topics, and more detail, will be

distributed in class. Submission will be via eClass.

- **Short Papers (CSL Students) (15%):** This assignment consists of 2 reflection papers (7.5% each), each 2-3 pages in length (4-6 pages, total). Both papers should explore the relationship between two topics discussed during class as they relate to your CSL placement project. More detail will be given in class. Submission will be via eClass.
- **Presentations (10%):** Presentations will occur during the week of April 3-5, and will consist of 5-minute-long presentations about the students' upcoming term papers. While not necessary, audio/visual techniques may be used, and more detail will be provided in class.
  - Non-CSL students will be expected to describe the thesis of their paper, possible conclusions, and a brief reflection on how their paper fits into the broader themes of the class.
  - CSL students will be expected to reflect on their experiences in their placement and how it related to the course content.
- **Term Paper (Non-CSL students) (30%):** Students will be required to produce an essay 8-10 pages in length (not including a Works Cited page) using MLA citation and a minimum of 3 secondary sources. By mid-March students will receive an essay outline, which consists of specific guidelines for the paper and a series of essay topics.
- **Term Paper (CSL students) (30%):** CSL students will be required to produce a reflective essay 8-10 pages in length (not including a Works Cited page) using MLA citation and a minimum of 1 secondary source. The paper will look to explore the themes and texts discussed in class in relation to their CSL placements. By mid-March students will receive an essay outline, which consists of specific guidelines for the paper and a series of essay topics.
- **Final Exam (Take home) (25%):** The final exam will cover readings from throughout the term and include both short and long written answers. By the end of March, students will receive exam outline, which consists of specific guidelines for the exam as well as strategies for preparation.

### **Required Notes:**

“Policy about course outlines can be found in the [Evaluation Procedures and Grading System](#) of the University Calendar.”

### ***Academic Integrity:***

“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at <http://www.governance.ualberta.ca/en/CodesofConductandResidenceCommunityStandards/CodeofStudentBehaviour.aspx>) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a

serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”

***Learning and Working Environment:***

The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring all students; faculty and staff are able to study and work in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The Department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the [Office of the Student Ombuds](#). Information about the [University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures](#) is described in [UAPPOL](#).

***Academic Honesty:***

**All students** should consult the information provided by the [Office of Judicial Affairs](#) regarding avoiding cheating and plagiarism in particular and academic dishonesty in general (see the [Academic Integrity Undergraduate Handbook](#) and [Information for Students](#)). If in doubt about what is permitted in this class, ask the instructor.

**Students involved in language courses and translation courses** should be aware that on-line “translation engines” produce very dubious and unreliable “translations.” **Students in languages courses** should be aware that, while seeking the advice of native or expert speakers is often helpful, **excessive editorial and creative help** in assignments is considered a form of “cheating” that violates the code of student conduct with dire consequences.

An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. See the [Academic Discipline Process](#).

***Recording of Lectures:***

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the content author(s) or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

***Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components:***

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult sections [Attendance](#) and [Examinations](#) of the University Calendar. Be aware that

unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result.

In this course, the section above will be graded through the class discussion and engagement (20%). This mark is derived from in-class participation, including discussions, activities, and the “Minute Reviews” that we complete after each class, which also serves as class attendance.

***Policy for Late Assignments:***

Students who consult *in advance* with an instructor regarding contingencies preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at the discretion of the instructor, be granted an extension just one time throughout the course with no penalty. However, if a second excuse will be granted for late assignments, the student will be penalized at 5% per day (including weekends), unless you requested an extension for a valid reason. Extensions will not be granted after the due date. After the period of 7 days (from the due date) no assignments will be accepted.

***Student Accessibility Services:***

If you have special needs that could affect your performance in this class, please let me know during the first week of the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If you are not already registered with [Student Accessibility Services](#), contact their office immediately (1-800 SUB; Email [sasrec@ualberta.ca](mailto:sasrec@ualberta.ca); Email; phone 780-492-3381).

**Grading:**

Assessment of the individual course components may be in the form of numerical marks or letter grades. The final letter grade will be based on "a combination of absolute achievement and relative performance in a class" (University Calendar, [Evaluation Procedures and Grading System](#)). The University Grading Procedure mandates that "a student's level of achievement of the goals/outcomes of a course, their grade, and the descriptor of that grade must be aligned" (<https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/>). The following guidelines have been adopted by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies:

**“MLCS Undergraduate Grading Scale”**

Descriptor	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	%
<b>Excellent.</b> A+, A or A- is earned by work which is superior in content and form and demonstrates an exceptional grasp of the subject matter. The grade of A+ designates work that far exceeds course expectations. Grades in the A range are normally achieved by a small number of students.	<b>A+</b>	4.0	<b>97-100</b>
	<b>A</b>	4.0	<b>93-96</b>
	<b>A-</b>	3.7	<b>90-92</b>
<b>Good.</b> B+, B or B- is earned by work that demonstrates a thorough comprehension of the course material and a good command of relevant skills. Grades in the B range are normally achieved by the largest number of students.	<b>B+</b>	3.3	<b>87-89</b>
	<b>B</b>	3.0	<b>83-86</b>
	<b>B-</b>	2.7	<b>80-82</b>
<b>Satisfactory.</b> C+, C or C- is earned by work that demonstrates an adequate grasp of the course material and relevant skills. Grades in the C range designate work that has met the basic requirements of the course.	<b>C+</b>	2.3	<b>77-79</b>
	<b>C</b>	2.0	<b>73-76</b>
	<b>C-</b>	1.7	<b>70-72</b>
<b>Poor/Minimal Pass.</b> D+ or D is earned by work that demonstrates minimal familiarity with the course material. Grades in the D range generally indicate insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the subject matter.	<b>D+</b>	1.3	<b>65-69</b>
	<b>D</b>	1.0	<b>60-64</b>
<b>Failure.</b>	<b>F</b>	0.0	<b>0-59</b>