

# The Evolution of TV Comedy: EMED 1050

## **Course Description and Learning Outcomes:**

Through weekly lectures and screenings of classic episodes and scenes, students will explore the American television comedy as a significant form of storytelling; as a uniquely elastic form of expression and contemporary critique; and as an exceptionally creative, topical, and influential art form. The course includes investigation into comedy and sitcom style and structure, as well as historical and societal context and impact. Approaches will be both chronological—tracing the development of sitcoms by decade—as well as thematic (e.g., exploration of women’s roles, minority representation, controversy). Students will be guided in the development of various criteria for critical and aesthetic examination.

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a grasp of the historical development and context of TV comedy;
2. Recognize and apply the basic technical and critical vocabulary of TV comedies ;
3. Recognize and evaluate literary/dramatic criteria of significant TV series (e.g., character, plot, POV, style, voice; polemic, pastiche);
4. Assess formal and aesthetic criteria of significant TV series (e.g., production design, shooting style, music and editing choices)
5. Differentiate styles and production techniques of various sub-genres of TV comedies;
6. Examine and evaluate TV series in coherent and well-reasoned oral and written arguments based upon prevailing critical approaches;
7. Demonstrate increased and more comprehensive media literacy.

## Office & Contact Information

**Adjunct Professor  
Nick Belperio**

**E: [belperns@uc.edu](mailto:belperns@uc.edu)**

**Office: TBD**

**Office Hours: by appointment**

## Materials/Equipment

**In-class screenings; Various  
critical essays and articles,  
as assigned.**

## Grading

Grading will be based on a combination of quizzes, exams, and Viewing Notes.

Quizzes:	50%
Viewing Notes:	20%
Final Exam:	30%

## Course Objectives:

This course is focused in the historical and cultural development of television comedies from their pre-TV origins to their contemporary manifestations. Students will develop strategies for “reading” sitcoms qualitatively while also investigating the sitcom’s historical, literary, cultural, and aesthetic contributions to 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>- century art forms.

## Course Requirements:

Students will be given weekly quizzes on lecture and screening content, in addition to a final exam. Students must keep regular loosely-structured Viewing Notes of in-class and assigned screenings; these Notes will be collected randomly throughout the semester.

## Attendance & Use of Media Devices

Class attendance is required and will be taken at various times during the class period. Students are expected to be on time for class, and to stay until class is dismissed by the instructor; chronic tardiness and/or early departures may result in a reduced grade. Two unexcused absences will result in a grade lowered by one letter. If a student misses a quiz, there will be one opportunity to make-up that quiz: immediately before the next week’s class. It is the student’s responsibility—not the instructor’s—to procure screening info and to schedule in advance the make-up quiz.

Cell phone, laptop, and tablet usage/texting are not permitted during class lectures or screenings.

**Instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus; lecture topics, shows, and/or episodes are subject to change.**  
Changes, if any, will be announced in class and/or electronically.

## **Tentative Class Schedule**

**Week 1 (Jan 16) – Course Introduction: How Do You Know It's a Sitcom? Screening: Three Classics**

**Week 2 (Jan 23) – 1930s-50s: Domestic Bliss and Idealized America**

**Week 3 (Jan 30) – 1960s: Counter- and Counter-counter-culture**

**Week 4 (Feb 06) – 1970s: Sophisticated Satire and Storytelling Revolutions**

**Week 5 (Feb 13) – 1980s: Blue Collar and Working Class Comedies**

**Week 6 (Feb 20) – 1990s: Nostalgia and Pastiche**

**Week 7 (Feb 27) – The Sitcom Goes to Work**

**Week 8 (Mar 06) – Virgin to Anti-heroine: Women's Roles, part 1**

**Week 9 (Mar 13) – Strength in Numbers: Women's Roles, part 2**

**Week 10 (Mar 20) – NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

**Week 11 (Mar 27) – Father Knows Best and/or Nothing**

**Week 12 (Apr 03) – TV Plays Itself: Modernism**

**Week 13 (Apr 10) – Very Special Episodes: Sitcoms and Controversy**

**Week 14 (Apr 17) – Brilliant but Cancelled: Post-modern Anti-hits**

**Week 15 (4/24) – Genre-Smashers: Dramedies**

**Week 16 (May 01) – Genre-Smashers: Past and Future(?) + FINAL EXAM**