



# Core Curriculum Supplement

Academic Unit / Office CLASS/MCL

Catalog Year of Implementation 2018-2019

Course (Prefix / Number) CLAS / 3371

Course Title Ancient Comedy and Its Influence

### Core Proposal Request

Add to Core Curriculum

Revise course already in Core Curriculum

	Current Core Categorization (New additions: select N/A for this column)	Proposed Categorization for Upcoming Core
Foundational Component Area (required)	N/A (Not currently a Core course)	Creative Arts (50)
Component Area Option (optional)	N/A (No Component Area Option)	N/A (No Component Area Option)
Category Listing: Single or Double?	N/A (Not currently a Core course)	List under the Foundational Component Area ONLY.

**Core Proposal Rationale** - Please provide a rationale for including, or continuing to include, this course in the UH Core Curriculum:

This course was offered as Visual/Performing Arts under the old Core, and was very successful. It should now be reinstated as a Creative Arts Core Course now to meet student demand

### Core Objectives (see [THECB Core objectives](#))

Critical Thinking

Teamwork

Communication

Social Responsibility

Empirical & Quantitative Skills

Personal Responsibility

Please explain how the Core Objectives selected above will be met:

**Critical Thinking:** In essay assignments students will demonstrate Critical thinking through the analysis of comic structure, character development, satire, and social criticism.

**Communication:** In the same essays, students will demonstrate communication skills.

**Social Responsibility:** In the same essays students will demonstration social responsibility as they assess the comic poet's role in probing taboos and subverting social conventions, but within acceptable boundaries of comic license.

**Teamwork:** Students will do group script readings and will write a brief essay evaluating their teamwork.

**When submitting this proposal form, please remember to attach a syllabus, learning objectives, and/or sample lesson(s).**

## CLAS 3371: ANCIENT COMEDY AND ITS INFLUENCE

Dr. Richard Armstrong  
[richarda@central.uh.edu](mailto:richarda@central.uh.edu)

713-743-3306

Office: L205b (Honors College – M.D. Anderson Library)  
Office Hours: MW 11:00am-12:30pm and by appointment

Spring 2017  
M/W 1-2:30pm  
Roy Cullen Hall 109

This course concerns the origins and history of comic plays or “comedies” in the strict dramatic sense. While we will discuss Greek and Roman humor or “the laughable” as a concept, the main interest here is in the growth and evolution of comedy as a dramatic genre from its origins in the dramatic festivals in Athens to its adaptation for Roman festivals, and then the later transmission of this form to the Renaissance and beyond. This represents a clear historical trajectory, a tradition with a good deal of internal continuity as well as innovation.

With the Athenian “Old Comedy” of Aristophanes, we will examine how the license of religious dramatic festivals allowed for comic playwrights to address the political and social concerns of their day. Given the nature of this comedy, we will talk about the use of satire, parody, and metatheater in these oldest comedies in Western literature. We will have a chance to consider the vital role comedy played in the radical democracy of Athens, and reflect on the role of comedians in contemporary American politics.

With the “New Comedy” of Athens (especially Menander), we will look at how changing political and social circumstances transformed comedy into a genre about typical characters undergoing crises of a personal, not political nature. This is a transformation towards social or situational comedy, one that brought with it technical innovations, particularly at the level of plot development. In turn, this “New Comedy” of Greece was adapted for the very different circumstances of Rome, where playwrights like Plautus and Terence strove to create a viable comic form for the more distracted and less theatrical Romans. Since this Latin comedy was read well into the Middle Ages and Renaissance when the Greek comedians were no longer accessible, it was crucial in communicating the form to later ages, inspiring other writers, like Machiavelli, whose *Mandragola* we will read as an example of the later adaptation of the form.

Throughout the semester, we will be very focused on issues of performance in comedy. This will require some imagination, as we are just reading scripts that have come down to us and have little access to the realities of the ancient stage. However, we will draw on American comedy throughout by way of analogy and comparison, developing “comic literacy” or the ability to analyze comic form, content, and performance. Surprisingly, most people resist analyzing comedy, since they take for granted that the comic is self-evident. We will challenge that notion throughout the semester.

**Disclaimer:** it is not possible to discuss comedy and humor seriously without delving into social taboos, inappropriate behavior, sexuality, primary obscenity, political humor, and even derision and cruelty. I will assume that in this class you will understand all such topics are relevant to the course work and may be discussed without fear of offense. This is not to say your sensibilities are irrelevant here: in fact we will refer constantly to the successful and *unsuccessful* probing of our boundaries in which comedians engage. If you feel strong language or adult themes are difficult for you to discuss, then you should probably not take the course. However, I can promise you that whatever we discuss will be completely relevant to the readings and the topic of the course.

**Required Texts** (please buy only these translations and editions)

1. Euripides. *Cyclops*. Tr. David Konstan. Oxford UP. ISBN 9780195143034.
2. Aristophanes. *Aristophanes' Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds*. Tr. Jeffrey Henderson. Focus Publishing. ISBN 9780941051583.
3. Menander. *Plays and Fragments*. Tr. Norma Miller. Penguin. ISBN 9780140445015.
4. Plautus. *Four Comedies*. Oxford World's Classics. ISBN 9780199540563.
5. Terence. *The Comedies*. Tr. Betty Radice. Penguin. ISBN 9780140443240.
6. Machiavelli. *The Mandragola*. Tr. Flaumenhaft. Waveland Press. ISBN 9780917974571.

**Recommended Texts**

- Lowe, N. J. 2008. *Comedy*. Cambridge UP. ISBN 9780521706094.
- Segal, Erich. 2001. *The Death of Comedy*. Harvard UP. ISBN 9780674012479.
- Hughes, Alan. 2012. *Performing Greek Comedy*. Cambridge UP. ISBN 9781107009301.

**Grading and Assignments**

This is a content-rich course, so your first task is to keep up with the readings and to understand their importance for the weekly themes and discussions. To facilitate your engagement with the texts, the assignments for the course comprise short written responses to set questions, which will come due at regular intervals (usually the end of a particular unit). I will try to give out the questions ahead of the readings and lectures so you know effectively what questions you need to answer, and it is considered fair game to refer to these questions in class (in fact, this is partly the idea). While I do think it is a good idea for students to work together in formulating their ideas and answers, please note that these are individual assignments. There is a real difference between collaboration and collusion, so your answers need to be written in your own words and sufficiently distinct from your partners' so as to avoid plagiarism issues flagged by Turnitin.com. There is a fair amount of writing in this course, but it will involve multiple paragraph-length answers to questions. They will be graded on organization and succinctness, so please note that a *short* answer does not imply that it is an *easy* answer. You will have some time to develop this kind of writing, so don't worry – you'll get used to it. Because of the constant writing assignments, there is no midterm or final examination. There is also no research paper.

The percentage breakdown for the final grade is as follows:

- Written work (in separate question sheets): 80%
- Daily preparation, discussion, group work: 20%

**Note: All written work must be submitted to Turnitin.com by 11:59pm on the due date. The course id number 14348902 and the password is aristophanes.**

Please review the UH Academic Honesty policy in the student handbook at [www.uh.edu/provost/policies/uhhonesty\\_policy.html](http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/uhhonesty_policy.html). Students are expected to abide by the UH Academic Honesty Policy. Students who violate this policy will be penalized.

### **Absences, Tardiness, Electronics in the Classroom**

Given the amount of material and the difficulty of some of it, absences are extremely inadvisable. Three unexcused absences will constitute a *prima facie* case for being dropped from the course. However, if you are ill, have a family emergency, or other complication, all you need to do is to contact me and explain the situation.

Generally speaking, I like an orderly classroom as much as anybody. So I will ask you to be on time, leave on time, and conduct yourself professionally. I'm sure you expect the same of me. I find that students using laptops are very often ceding to the temptation to distract themselves. This is annoying not just to me, but also to your fellow students. If you are using your laptop to access course readings (some of which will be online) or to take notes, then I don't have a problem with you. But if I see you shopping or car parts or clothing, I may fall into a diatribe about the wayward youth of today. Let's not go there.

Cell phones are another matter. We all need to impose a LOT of discipline with these devices. So again, unless you are accessing a course reading, let's agree that you'll not look at your phone during class, and I won't look at mine.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will become conversant with the history of comedy from its origins in ancient Greece, to its later transformation at Rome and in the Renaissance.
- Through the careful reading of primary source texts in translation, students will learn to analyze comic drama for plot and characterization, with especial interest in aspects of staging and performance.
- By reflecting on the social and historical setting of ancient comedy, students will heighten their critical thinking abilities in relation to how comedy is connected to other aspects of culture and society.
- By writing regular assignments for the class, students will improve their skills at critical analysis and argument as well as literary interpretation.

The University of Houston is committed to providing equal education opportunities for all students, and will make reasonable academic accommodations for students identified as disabled under the law. For more information, contact the Center for Students with Disabilities at 713- 743-5400, or see their online explanation of policies and procedures at <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>