

**POL SCI 2PF3: POLITICS OF FUNNY
Fall 2018**

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Course Description

A tradition of political humour can be traced back to the Greek comedies, in which playwrights poked fun at political elites. Today, satire news programs like *This hour has 22 minutes* and *The Daily Show*, provide comedic relief and perspectives on current events. In addition, stand-up comedy and situation comedies often directly and indirectly address contemporary political issues as well as social questions related to ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and intersectional identities. Political science research suggests that these forms of comedy shape political behaviour and attitudes. Like most careers and industries, careers in the comedy industry also have their own politics and political economies. The Politics of Funny examines all of these issues related to the intersection of politics and comedy.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should:

- be able to identify and critically analyze different forms of humour and comedy with implicit and explicit political content;
- understand key political science concepts relevant to the study of the role of comedy and satire in politics; and
- be familiar with the use of evidence and research methods in political science.

Required Materials and Texts

All required readings will either be available through McMaster Library online or the Avenue to Learn. Unless noted [Avenue] the reading is available through the McMaster Library, and students should access the material directly from the library website. Accessing additional content (e.g., videos, scripts, teleplays, and transcripts) for use in completing assignments will be the responsibility of the student.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Midterm exam (25%)
2. Tutorial attendance (10%)
3. Tutorial participation (10%)
4. In-class attendance and participation (10%)
5. Content analysis paper (25%)
6. Final exam (20%, or 45% if excused from midterm)

Course Evaluation – Details

Midterm exam (25%)

The in-class midterm exam will include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, or short essay questions.

Tutorial attendance (10%)

Tutorial sessions will begin the week of September 17. Regular attendance is expected.

Tutorial participation (10%)

Active participation and demonstrating preparedness for tutorial activities or discussions is expected, and contributions to tutorial activities or discussions will be evaluated each week. Activities may include short assignments or group presentations. Disruptive use of electronic devices will negatively affect participation marks.

Class attendance and participation (10%)

Attendance and participation in class meetings is expected, and may be measured using quizzes, polls, short assignments, or completion of group activities. Students who positively contribute to the online portion of the course by posting to the discussion board will also have their participation evaluated. Disruptive use of electronic devices will negatively affect participation marks.

Content analysis paper (25%)

This short, 4-page paper will provide students with an opportunity to practice content analysis, a method often used in the social sciences.

Final exam (20%, or 45% if excused from midterm)

The 2-hour final exam will be during the regular final exam period and include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, or short essay questions. It will be cumulative.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1

September 5, 2018 – Introductions

September 7, 2018 – Psychology of Humour

Readings: Martin, Rod A. 2007. "Introduction to the Psychology of Humor." In *The Psychology of Humor*, 1–20 (stop at "A Brief History of Humor" heading). Elsevier. [Avenue]

Week 2

September 12, 2018 – Historical overview

Readings: Martin, Rod A. 2007. "Introduction to the Psychology of Humor." In *The Psychology of Humor*, 20-29 (start at "A Brief History of Humor" heading). Elsevier. [Avenue]

Dagnes, Allison. 2012. "Mirroring the Political Climate: Satire in History." In *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Humor*, 78–103. Palgrave Macmillan. [Avenue]

Notes: Add/Drop deadline.

September 14, 2018 – History of Political Satire

Readings: Dagnes, Allison. 2012. "Mirroring the Political Climate: Satire in History." In *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Humor*, 103–32. Palgrave Macmillan. [Avenue]

Gottfried, Jeffrey, Katerina Eva Matsa, and Michael Barthel. 2015. "[As Jon Stewart Steps down, 5 Facts about The Daily Show.](#)" *Pew Research Center* (blog). August 6, 2015.

Notes: Tutorials begin next week.

Week 3

September 19, 2018 – Political Satire and Information

Readings: Becker, Amy Bree. 2013. "[Political Satire Makes Young People More Likely to Participate in Politics. Trevor Noah's The Daily Show Is Likely to Continue That Trend.](#)" *LSE Impact of Social Sciences* (blog), April 3.

Xenos, Michael A., and Amy B. Becker. 2009. "[Moments of Zen: Effects of The Daily Show on Information Seeking and Political Learning.](#)" *Political Communication* 26 (3): 317–32.

September 21, 2018 – Political Satire and Political Participation

Readings: Bode, Leticia, and Amy B. Becker. 2018. "[Go Fix It: Comedy as an Agent of Political Activation: Go Fix It: Comedy as an Agent of Political Activation.](#)" *Social Science Quarterly*, August, 1-13.

Cao, Xiaoxia, and Paul R. Brewer. 2008. "[Political Comedy Shows and Public Participation in Politics.](#)" *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20 (1): 90–99.

Week 4

September 26, 2018 – Political Satire and Candidate Evaluation

Readings: Baumgartner, Jody C., Jonathan S. Morris, and Natasha L. Walth. 2012. "[The Fey Effect Young Adults, Political Humor, and Perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign.](#)" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (1): 95–104.

Becker, Amy Bree. 2016. "Late-Night Shows Are Trying to Make 2016 Voters Skeptical of Trump. It's Probably Working." *Vox* (blog). July 25, 2016.

September 28, 2018 – Political Satire and Unintended Consequences

Readings: Becker, Amy B. 2017. "[Trump Trumps Baldwin? How Trump's Tweets Transform SNL into Trump's Strategic Advantage.](#)" *Journal of Political Marketing*, 1–19.

Week 5

October 3, 2018 – Political Satire in Comparative Perspective

Readings: Baym, Geoffrey, and Jeffrey P. Jones. 2012. "[News Parody in Global Perspective: Politics, Power, and Resistance.](#)" *Popular Communication* 10 (1/2): 2–13.

October 5, 2018 – Canadian Political Satire

Readings: Druick, Zoë. 2008. "Laughing at Authority or Authorized Laughter? Canadian News Parodies." In *Programming Reality: Perspectives on English-Canadian Television*, edited by Zoë Druick and Aspa Kotsopoulos, 107–28. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press. [Avenue]

See also: [Walking Eagle News](#); [The Beaverton](#); [The True North Times](#)

Week 6

October 10, 2018 READING WEEK

October 12, 2018 READING WEEK

Week 7

October 17, 2018 – EXAM REVIEW

October 19, 2018 – MIDTERM EXAM

Week 8

October 24, 2018 – Comedy and Society

Readings: Mintz, Lawrence E. 1985. "[Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation.](#)" *American Quarterly* 37 (1): 71–80.

October 26, 2018 – Comedy and Society

Readings. Lockyer, Sharon, and Michael Pickering. 2008. "[You Must Be Joking: The Sociological Critique of Humour and Comic Media.](#)" *Sociology Compass* 2 (3): 808–20.

Week 9

October 31, 2018 – Comedy and Society: Race

Readings: Pérez, Raúl. 2013. "[Learning to Make Racism Funny in the 'Color-Blind' Era: Stand-up Comedy Students, Performance Strategies, and the \(Re\)Production of Racist Jokes in Public.](#)" *Discourse & Society* 24 (4): 478–503.

Steinmetz, Katy. 2013. "[How to Tell Race-Related Jokes in a 'Post-Racial' Society.](#)" *Time*, July 6.

November 2, 2018 – Comedy and Society: Race

Readings: Park, Ji Hoon, Nadine G. Gabbadon, and Ariel R. Chernin. 2006. "[Naturalizing Racial Differences Through Comedy: Asian, Black, and White Views on Racial Stereotypes in Rush Hour 2.](#)" *Journal of Communication* 56 (1): 157–77.

Week 10

November 7, 2018 – Comedy and National Identity

Readings: Cwynar, Christopher. 2013. "The Canadian Sitcom and the Fantasy of National Difference: Little Mosque on the Prairie and English-Canadian Identity." In *Beyond the Border: Tensions Across the Forty-Ninth Parallel in the Great Plains and Prairies*, edited by Kyle Conway and Timothy Pasch, 39–70. McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP. [Avenue]

Takeuchi, Craig. 2017. "[Why CBC's Kim's Convenience Is Particularly Important for Vancouver at This Point in Time.](#)" *Georgia Straight Vancouver's News & Entertainment Weekly* (blog). September 18, 2017.

November 9, 2018 – Comedy and National Identity

Readings: Santa Ana, Otto. 2009. "[Did You Call in Mexican? The Racial Politics of Jay Leno Immigrant Jokes.](#)" *Language in Society* 38 (01): 23.

Week 11

November 14, 2018 – Comedy and Gender

Readings: Martin, Rod A. 2014. "Humor and Gender: An Overview of Psychological Research." In *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, edited by Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini. [Avenue]

Hitchens, Christopher. 2007. "[Why Women Aren't Funny.](#)" *Vanity Fair*, January.

West, Lindy. 2012. "[Hey, Men, I'm Funnier Than You.](#)" *Jezebel*. May 25.

November 16, 2018 – Comedy and Gender

Readings: Swigger, Nathaniel. 2017. "[The Effect of Gender Norms in Sitcoms on Support for Access to Abortion and Contraception.](#)" *American Politics Research* 45 (1): 109–27.

Week 12

November 21, 2018 – Comedy and LGBT+

Readings: Battles, Kathleen, and Wendy Hilton-Morrow. 2002. "[Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: Will and Grace and the Situation Comedy Genre.](#)" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (1): 87–105.

November 23, 2018 – Comedy and LGBT+

Readings: Schiappa, Edward, Peter B. Gregg, and Dean E. Hewes. 2006. "[Can One TV Show Make a Difference? Will & Grace and the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis.](#)" *Journal of Homosexuality* 51 (4): 15–37.

Week 13

November 28, 2018 – Discuss papers.

Notes: Paper due.

November 30, 2018 – The Political Economy of Comedy

Readings: Zinoman, Jason. 2013. "[Upright Citizens Brigade Grows by Not Paying Performers.](#)" *The New York Times*, February 19, sec. Theater.

Mudhar, Raju. 2018. "[Standup Comedians Take a Crack at Government Funding.](#)" *Toronto Star*, March 7, 2018. See also: [E-1512 \(Funding Aid\)](#)

Week 14

December 5, 2018 – EXAM REVIEW

Course Policies

Course Communication Policy

This course has a strict "no email" policy. Emails to the instructor will not be answered. Students should make an appointment to meet with the instructor in her office or virtually (phone, Skype, or FaceTime). Students can [schedule an office hours appointment online](#) or in person at the beginning or end of class.

Students are encouraged to use the Discussion section of Avenue to Learn to post questions about the course outlines, assignments, links to course-related media, or to organize study groups. Engagement on Avenue, including answering other students' questions about the course, will count positively toward participation marks. The professor will also monitor the Discussions board to answer questions and confirm information posted by others.

Submission of Assignments

Assignments should be submitted in class and in hard, paper copy unless otherwise indicated. Late submissions should be submitted online to the appropriate location on Avenue.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK GRADE

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Unexcused late assignments (i.e., no MSAF, no SAS accommodation, or no Faculty advising office approval) will earn a reduced maximum value determined by how many hours they are late. Assignments turned in within the first 6 hours of the due date & time will be eligible for a maximum of 90% of the total assignment value. Assignments turned in between 6 and 24 hours will earn up to 80% of the maximum value. Assignments turned in between 24 and 48 hours will earn up to 70% of the maximum value. Any unexcused late assignment will be marked according to the normal McMaster University grading scale adjusted for the maximums just described. Late assignments will not be accepted beyond 48 hours after the original due date without an excuse (see below). There is no guarantee that late assignments will be marked before the end of the term or before the final exam.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Absences due to illness or other documented or verified needs will be exempt from the late penalties described above. If a student uses the McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) to report an absence from tutorial or for an assignment, the student *does not* need to email the professor. Please note that the MSAF may not be used for the midterm or paper. The assignment missed will be due exactly 3 days (72 hours) after the original due date and time. If the student would like credit for attending a tutorial session for which they used the MSAF, they should submit to their Teaching Assistant a 1 page summary of the assigned readings for that week within 72 hours of the end of the missed tutorial. While efforts will be made to return assignments in a timely fashion, there is no guarantee that late assignments will be marked before the end of term or before the final exam.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Students are reminded that their participation in this course is governed by the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) of McMaster University. In particular, students have the right to “live and work in an environment free from harassment, intimidation, discrimination, assault, and sexual violence,” and they are also responsible for “supporting an environment free from harassment, intimidation, discrimination, assault, and sexual violence” and for “treating others in a way that does not harm them physically and/or threaten or intimidate them emotionally or mentally.” One exception to the “no email” policy, students who email the Instructor a link to a captioned YouTube video of their favourite comedian before October 10 will earn an additional 5 points on the midterm exam. In this course, we may sometimes discuss sensitive subjects or material that may be offensive or objectionable to some students. In such cases, students may excuse themselves from uncomfortable discussions, though they remain responsible for submitting any assignments due during class and are expected to substitute online contributions to the Avenue site for any deficits in in-class participation. Students who anticipate challenges meeting the expectations of any assignments are encouraged to meet with the professor or Student Accessibility Services as needed to confirm appropriate accommodations are available before assignment or exam due dates whenever possible.

Resources for Students

McMaster students have access to several resources to help them succeed, including:

- [Student Success Centre](#), provides academic support services and programming for professional and personal development
- [Student Wellness Centre](#), provides mental and physical health care facilities and programming;
- [Sexual Violence Support](#), provides support and information about sexual, intimate partnership or family violence including rape;
- [Student Accessibility Services](#), provides academic accommodation assistance and related supports to students with disabilities, including learning disabilities;
- [Indigenous Student Services](#), provides support services and programming for Indigenous students;
- [International Student Services](#), provides information and resources for international students; and
- [McMaster Recreation](#), provides facilities and programming for your physical and mental well-being;

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. *Any student who does not want to submit their work to Turnitin.com must notify the instructor during office hours or before or after class at least five business days before the assignment due date so that the alternative instructions and drop box can be set up.* No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). For more information please refer to the [Turnitin.com Policy](#).

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. *Please also see above the Communication Policy for this course.*

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.