**DO NOT PRINT A COPY OF THIS SYLLABUS. SUBJECT TO CHANGE.**

**Special Topics in Psychology: The Psychology of Humor (Psych 459)**  
Mon – Wed 4:20-5:50, Pen-401

Instructor: Dr. Sean Duffy  
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***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***

**Course description:**

This course aims to explain why a man slipping on a banana peel is funny.

**Course requirements:**

1. Quizzes (each 5 questions, worth 50% of grade), graded 4/5. I don’t know how many there will be – likely 12- but I’ll drop your lowest grade.

2. Humorous Projects (25%) These will be both written and in class assignments.

3. Comprehensive final exam (25%)

All readings are available on sakai. Martin book on reserve at library.

**This course will involve reading material that some of you may find tasteless or offensive. Humor is a part of the human condition that in part allows us to deal with uncomfortable or taboo subjects – sex, death, racism – so such a course necessarily requires engaging in this aspect of humor. If you are prudish and uncomfortable with explicit language or topics, I respectfully ask that you NOT TAKE THIS COURSE.**

## Classroom behavior

## The use of ALL portable electronic devices (cell phones, text messaging, pagers, laptops, blackberries) is strictly prohibited unless you have a disability that requires you to use this technology, which requires a note from the disability coordinator.

## You may not leave class to take a phone call, other than in case of an emergency. If I am not important enough to take a call during class, neither are you.

## 

## Use the bathroom before you come to class…it is distracting to your fellow classmates to have people wandering in and out just because you need to pee. PB4Ugo.

## If you are more than 5 minutes late, out of respect for your fellow students and me, do not come to class. I reserve the right to deny students entry to class 5 minutes after the class starts. If I can make it to class on time, so can you. I reserve the right to call you out for talking in class or engaging in foolish, inappropriate, and ridiculous behavior. I get distracted very easily by mindless chatter, and talk at your own (and your grade’s) risk.

If you happen to miss a single class, please do not email me explaining the reason for your absence. I don’t care. My class should be the most important thing in your life right now, because the grade you receive gets figured into your GPA, and your GPA will later determine whether you get into law school, get that awesome job, or accomplish whatever it is you plan to do with your life. So make it your priority. This class is your job - treat it like a job. You are paying a ton of money for this education – you might as well take advantage of it.

## Sakai

I use Sakai for distributing materials, grading, and general announcements.

## Use your Rutgers Email

When I email the class, I use the list that the Registrar gives me. I can not change this list, and it is your responsibility to either use your Rutgers email account or set up your Rutgers account so that you receive emails in your personal account. If you use some other account, such as [foolish-rutgers-student@yahoo.com](mailto:foolish-rutgers-student@yahoo.com), you may not receive my emails, and you will definitely not receive pity from me after you drive through a snowstorm to get to class on a day that the school cancels classes.

**Academic Honesty:**

You are expected to read and understand rules regarding academic misconduct. Ignorance of these rules will not be accepted as an excuse for academic misconduct. **If you are found cheating on exams or plagiarizing on your paper, you will receive a failing grade for the paper and I will report you to the Office of Academic Affairs.** I offer no exceptions to this rule, ESPECIALLY ignorance of what plagiarism is. Rutgers maintains a website with specific guidelines concerning academic honesty. You are expected to read and understand all of these rules:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Ask any of the students who have gotten Fs from me for plagiarizing how much fun it is to get caught. I’ve been a professor longer than most of you’ve been an adult, so I can spot plagiarism like a hawk can spot a mouse in a field. Do not test me on this. I will make your life absolutely miserable.

**Class cancellations:**

In the event of a natural disaster (e.g., snow storm, earthquake, tsunami) class may be cancelled. In the case of bad weather, check your email to be sure that I have not cancelled class. (See above section on using your Rutgers email)

**Incompletes / Pass – No-credit:**

Granted ONLY under unusual situations. Poor performance in the course is not a valid reason for requesting an incomplete. Those signed up for pass/no-credit, a final grade of a C or better is required to pass.

**Disability accommodations:**

For disability accommodations, please call the Disability Services Coordinator.  Students who require special accommodations for the course or its assignments or exams (as indicated by a formal letter/statement from the Disability Services Coordinator) should also contact the instructor as early as possible.

**Missed class:**

Don’t.

**Course schedule:**

WEEK 1

**Wednesday, 9/5/12: Intro to course,**

WEEK 2

**Monday, 9/10/12: The positive side of psychology / Introduction to humor**

Readings:

Positive Psychology: An Introduction (Seligman)

Introduction to the Psychology of Humor (Martin\_Ch\_1)

**Wednesday, 9/12/12: Discussion**

Woody Allen The Kruegelmass Episode (allen)

Mark Twain Excerpts from Adam’s Diary

Eve’s Diary

Week 3

**Monday, 9/17/12: Humor theories**

A brief history of humor theories (HurleyetalCh2)

One Professor’s Attempt to Explain Every Joke Ever (warner\_benign\_violation)

Benign Violations: Making Immoral Behavior Funny (mcgraw.warren.inpress)

(Don’t read this last one too hard – I will go over it in class. Skim it.)

**Wednesday, 9/19/12**

Charlie Chaplin, The Kid (1921), (movie, watch before class)…

<http://www.archive.org/details/TheKid1080p>

WEEK 4

**Monday, 9/24/12: History and roots in antiquity: Superiority Theory**

Readings:

Origin and evolution of humor (RoeckeleinCh2)

Aristotle: Poetics

**Wednesday, 9/26/12: Discussion**

Aristophanes: Lysistrata (300 BC)

Triumph the insult comic dog: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-253uBJap8

Week 5

**Monday, 10/1/12:** **Biological factors**

Readings:

The Psychobiology of humor and laughter (Martin\_ch\_6)

Humor modulates the mesolimbic reward centers (mobbs)

**Wednesday, 10/3/12:**

Buster Keaton: The General (1926)

<http://archive.org/details/TheGeneral1926> (movie, watch before class)…

Week 6:

**Monday, 10/8/12: Development of humor**

The developmental psychology of humor (martinch\_ch\_8)

Resilient youth use humor to enhance socioemotional functioning during a day in the life (humoradolescent.pdf) \*this one sucks don’t use again

**Wednesday, 10/10/12:**

Dave Barry To see your child born is to know the meaning of yucky. (barry)

Harold Lloyd (1923) Safety Last scene http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHNQ9X-drdE

Tom and Jerry: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNE5C0X7Fzs>

**Week 7: Humor and interpersonal relations**

**Mon, 10/15/12**

The Social Psychology of Laughter (martin\_ch\_5)

Contagious laughter and the brain (provine)

**Wednesday, 10/17/12:**

Charlie Chaplin, City Lights (1931)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WivhDJRXCU4>

**Monday, 10/22/12:**

Gender and humor: The state of the art (newgender)

Why women aren’t funny (hitchens)

The interaction of cartoonist’s gender and formal features of cartoons\*(Sampson)

Ford et al (2001). Effects of exposure to sexist humor on perceptions of normative tolerance of sexism

**Wednesday 10/24/12**

**Pearl Williams (1960)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlhalwDKckA>

**Phillis Diller (watch the first 7 videos)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCKQiG4jh0w&feature=autoplay&list=PL945BBBEB9AA9E658&playnext=4>

**Joan Rivers (1966 stand up)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Na3vCieduv8>

**WEEK 8 didn't happen because of Hurricane Sandy**

**Week 9: Election is coming up: Humor in politics**

Monday, 10/29/12:

http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2012/04/11/150424688/not-just-for-laughs-why-humor-can-be-a-powerful-campaign-tool

Politics and humor (politics\_humor)

Political Culture Jamming: The Dissident Humor of The Daily Show With Jon Stewart (Warner)

Wednesday, 10/31/12:

Obama’s white house correspondent dinner 2012:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGeSZw0nM5g>

President Reagan (1980-1988) jokes and wit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qColFjbzoK0>

I WILL BE ADING SOME CLIPS SHORTLY

Some clips from the daily show and Colbert report.

Bill Maher

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5Yek9-nBos&feature=related>

**Week 10: Humor, race, and ethnicity**

**Monday, 11/12/12:**

Theories of ethnic humor (theories of ethnic humor)

Ethnic humor: Subversion and survival (subversionand survival)

**Wednesday, 11/14/12**

Read this blog - http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/

Philip Roth Good Morning (roth)

David Chapelle Killing Them Softly:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwYJOn6zgjg&feature=related

**Week 11: No readings, Monday class only, continue discussion on Humor and Ethnicity**

**Week 12: Persuasive humor: Advertising**

**Monday, 11/26/12: Persuasive humor: Advertising**

**CHINDOGU SHOW AND TELL**: ADVERTISE YOUR CHINDOGU!

Readings:

Humor in Advertisements enhances product liking by mere association (Strick\_et\_al\_2009)

**Watch:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0YwQjY9roE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW6TASDt9r8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p7b5PXJ5CI>

**Wednesday, 11/28/12: Humor and health**

Readings:

Humor and physical health (martin\_ch\_10)

The role of coping humor in the physical and mental health of older adults (Marziali2008)

WATCH: The Great Dictator

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkCx3xQ6XKQ&feature=bf\_prev&list=PLTPG0SIwIqzcz2Mhh\_Y10kQwJu8h5XsKE

**WEEK 13: Laughter when there is nothing to laugh at: The humor of 9/11**

**Monday, 11/3/12: Humor and Tragedy: Laughter after 9/11**

Everything Changes Forever (Temporarily) (Gurney)

Where was King Kong When We Needed Him? (Kuipers)

**Wednesday, 11/5/12: Satire**

The onion issue after 9/11 (onion)

Humor, Terror, and Dissent: The Onion after 9/11 (JaimeWarner)

A Modest Proposal

**WEEK 14: TESTY TIME!**

**Monday, 11/10/12: Test review**

**Come to class with questions!!!!**

**Wednesday, 11/12/12: Test**

Adventure ends, we can all go home now.