I. Course objectives

A. General: This course has two chief objectives: 1) analyzing and defining humor, laughter, joking, and comedy; and 2) understanding this subject within the third year seminar focus on authority, values, and aesthetics.

1. Nature of the beast

Scholarship has offered various ways for understanding humor and laughter: from physiology and anthropology to psychology, sociology and even morality and ethics. Literary humor has generated another body of explanation among Westerners beginning with the examination of the plays of the classical Athenian writers Aristophanes and Menander, the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus and the satires of Juvenal and extending to the revival of comic production in the renaissance with Machiavelli and most of all with Shakespeare. The rise of the popular press beginning in the eighteenth century spawned the production of new types of visual humor and new forms of literary comedy, not least of all political cartoons. In the twentieth century, movies, television and video have provided an almost infinite field for study - to cite only one example, Wes Gehring’s Screwball Comedy: A Genre of Madcap Romance.

The first object of this course this semester will be to explore some of these theoretical explanations of humor. If always looking towards our own explanations, we will read five books that answer some of the following questions: What makes people laugh? How universal is laughter? In what ways is laughter place-bound or culture bound? What is the difference between male and female sources of humor? What is the significance of national expressions of humor? In what ways does laughter define who we are as groups, tribes, and nations? What does laughing mean? What are the different expressions of humor? What, if anything, bind them together, what separates them? What is the relationship between tragedy or horror on the one hand, to laughter on the other?

2. Authority, Values, and Aesthetics

While dealing most directly with the nature of humor, its sources and implications, the course also aims - if often indirectly - to understand laughter in the context of the third year theme. Some of the concerns from theories of laughter apply to this part of the course as well. Sexual humor will provide one way of understanding authority and values, for example. Thus, if males and females laugh at different things in different ways, how is this a reflection of gender authority? What would become of this classic source of laughing (gender differences) in a society freed from sexual differentiation? Is there any natural authority that governs why we laugh and smile? How does laughter violate social values about respect for all peoples? Is it wrong to laugh those who fail to fit standard values of size, shape, dress, and deportment? What does it signify to smile at a transsexual cross-dresser? A man missing a front tooth? An old guy wearing bow ties and errings? By extension, what counter values are suggested at the failure of laughter at such circumstances?

In dealing with this larger objective, the course will emphasize authority, and to a less extent, values. It concerns itself still less with aesthetics. This, again, involves the nature of the beast. What is the perfect joke? What is the model jest? What is the flawless skit? What is the exemplary comic situation? What is the ideal comedy? What, in short, is Comic Beauty? Aristotle devoted much thought to tragedy, little to comedy. The bias persists. Why do comedies never win Academy Awards? Indeed, the paucity of our own generalizations here relate both to the difficulty of such questions, and the absence of theoretic work in this area. We will, however, rate the subjects we examine always looking towards formulating an aesthetics of humor.
B. Writing and Expression
Besides these content objectives, the course also emphasizes conceptualizing and thinking but also expression - both literary and oral. As a seminar, it demands active discussion and participation. It involves considerable written work as well and improving both forms of expression constitute a critical component of this course. It also aims to improve both forms of expression, especially writing and argumentation. Both play an a critical role in determining student grades.

II. TEXTS
[gary larson book??]
1. Apte
5B. Morreall, John, TAKING LAUGHTER SERIOUSLY
(8 countries)
All students must read Books 1-4 and either 5A or 5B. Book 6 contains 8 chapters and students must read one of these chapters each.

III. SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS
Note, this is a working schedule. If the Honors College offered this course last year, no such course is offered anywhere else IN THE WORLD (!), and consequently, the schedule might change according to the progress of the course itself. What follows, then, outlines most generally what will happen and when. Stay tuned for fast breaking changes. For example, in the fall last year our class discovered a Muslim comedy show, "Allah Made Me Funny," and we all attended. Even so, in the spring we discovered a theater troupe in Broward was producing Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors - a play we were reading, and the class attended that as well. Also note, we will be responsible for seeing five (or so) comic movies this semester. We will watch these together and outside of class; class meeting time will be reduced accordingly.
Aug 30 Syllabus/Introduction
Sept 1 What’s so funny?
6 Laughter and the Human Condition
8 The Course Last Year
13 Two Essays in Humor
15 Apte

MOVIE COMMITTEE

20 Apte
22 Apte
27 Apte
29 Apte

Oct 4 Apte
6 Apte
11 Cohen
13 Cohen
18 MOVIE TIME
20 Movie Discussion
25 Mulkay
27 Mulkay
Nov 1    MOVIE TIME
3 Movie Discussion
8 Haig
10 Haig
15 MOVIE TIME
17 Movie Discussion
22 Buckley

THANKSGIVING
29 Morreal

Dec 1    Ziv
6 MOVIE TIME
8 Final Discussion

IV. WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
   A. Book Reports
      You will submit a formal 2-3 page book report/review on all the books required in the semester.
   B. Movie Reports
      You will submit a formal review/essay on every movie required in the course.
   C. Comic Strips/Cartoons
      At the beginning of the course, you will pick a comic strip, political cartoon, or some other form of graphic humor. You will track this strip through the semester at least once a week. You will use this collection to make generalizations about the nature of humor. Over the course of the semester, you will be required to report on your work. This will provide the basis of one paper this semester.
   D. Final Writing Assignment
      Due on the last day of class or soon after, this will be a major writing assignment/report/term paper of around 8 pages.

V. QUIZZES
   Every time you have an assigned reading, you will be tested with a short quiz. Such quizzes are assigned in order to encourage you to 1) keep up with the material, 2) read the material on time, 3) prepare you to discuss the reading matter with some care in class on the assigned dates, and 4) guarantee your attendance. Discussion accompanies each reading, and you should be prepared to discuss any of the material assigned on the proper date. Failure to take the quiz on the assigned date merits a zero. Do not expect make-up quizzes except in the case of grave emergency, and advance warning to the professor.
   In the circumstance of emergency make-up quizzes, you must make up within a week of the missed test.

VI. GRADING
   Quizzes and Participation. . . . . 1/3
   Essays. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 2/3
   The quizzes constitute a significant portion of your grade. Given the seminar-dialogue nature of the course, you will also be graded on your active participation in discussion.

VII. ATTENDANCE
   You are expected to attend every class meeting and to come on time. You will be allowed one absence; otherwise your grade will drop with each session missed. If you must miss class unavoidably, you should confirm with your professor about taking your quizzes. Note, too: On every occasion of a reading assignment, the professor will quiz you on the material you read. Do not count on make-up quizzes unless you make prior arrangements with the professor.
VIII. ACADEMIC HONESTY
Submit only your own work. If you have any questions about what is yours, what belongs to another person, check with Pyron

IX. WORK AND COURSE SCHEDULE
This course requires considerable reading and writing. As most of this material is new to you, you should allow even more time for conceptualizing and thinking through connections that arise out of the readings and discussions. As the course itself is experimental and innovative, you will get no ready answers or pat solutions to the issues it raises. This means it will require even more brain time on your part. Here is a grave warning then: allow plenty of time if you want to pass and do well. In this regard, be particularly conservative your employment and class schedule this semester. As general rule, one course is roughly the equivalent of ten hours of employment - ten hours of work equaling one course. By this measure, if you are taking a full load of courses you already have a full plate. If you hold down even a 20-hour work week in addition, you are handling the equivalent of seven courses or a 70-hour work week. Only slaves, medical interns and lawyers maintain this sort of schedule. As for students, geniuses and trojans might manage this sort of load. If the Honors College has its share of both, count on neither as you make your schedule. Take no comfort in having operated like this in the past. This course demands a lot of you; be prepared to run hard and fast over muddy ground this semester.