

They want you to be poor. And I'll tell you why: so that you recognize only the one who feeds you, and whenever *he* wants to unleash you against one of his enemies, you'll leap at them savagely.

Aristophanes, *Wasps*, lines 703–705 (translated by yours truly)

Course description

A major part of life in ancient Athens and Rome was the array of religious festivals that took place throughout the year and often included the performance of drama, both tragedy and comedy. The performance of and attendance at comedy was a civic, community ritual, and the religious festival of which it was a part was a civic, community feast. Another major part of life in ancient Athens and Rome for all but the elite was food insecurity: not being sure where your family's next meal will come from or whether you'll have enough money to pay for food.

In this class, we will read the surviving comedies of ancient Greece and Rome and examine how they portray food insecurity and what they can tell us about the experience of the average person living in these societies. At the same time, we will learn about our own community—three out of every four children in Winston-Salem, after all, lack secure access to regular meals—and we will explore how engagement with this ancient literature can help us address the problems of our own time.

Learning goals

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- describe the features of four authors of Greek and Roman comedy.
- relate the humor and issues of ancient comedy to modern society and your own life.
- interpret the themes of food insecurity, poverty, and local history in ancient comedy.
- analyze how ancient humor works and the challenges of making it accessible to modern audiences.
- design, in teams, an adaptation of a scene from ancient comedy.
- assess your own learning and your team's effectiveness.

To help me assess your progress towards these goals, you'll complete these sorts of assignments:

- readings of ancient comedy, and written responses to the readings.
- in-class skits and discussions.
- a service learning project volunteering with a local food-security organization.
- program notes and “punch-up pairs” that model the process of adaptation.
- public performance of a memorized, staged, costumed scene of ancient comedy.
- self-evaluations, group processing assignments, and teambuilding exercises.

- a written project narrative documenting your semester-long ancient comedy experience.

Grading schema

You begin this course with 0 points, and gain points by participating in class, completing assignments successfully, and working well with your group. Your final grade will be calculated by the usual 10-point scale, and can be as high as 100 points, as follows:

A.	30 homework assignments @ 1 point each	30 points
B.	attendance and participation	5 points
C.	2 in-class informal “skits” @ 2 points each	4 points
D.	public performance of a scene by your group	10 points
E.	participation in a community service project	10 points
F.	performance project records, consisting of:	
G.	group conduct charter	3 points
H.	performance “take” proposal paragraph	3 points
I.	annotated prop list	3 points
J.	annotated script	10 points
K.	program notes (draft)	4 points
(K.)	program notes (final)	5 points
L.	performance reaction paper	4 points
M.	group efficacy reflection	4 points
(F.)	final submission of project records	5 points

Course policies (this syllabus subject to change with notice)

1. IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY OR OTHER NEED that may require an accommodation for taking this course, then please contact the **Learning Assistance Center (336.758.5929)** within the first two weeks of the semester. The LAC and I are committed to confidentiality in these matters.
2. PLAGIARISM. Don’t do it! Don’t do any sort of breach of academic integrity. For this course, that means that your writing and your thoughts should be your own. Also, you should do the readings on your own. This means that you should not use someone else’s notes, online summaries, Cliff’s Notes, or the like. If you look at an outside source (whether it’s the intro to your textbook, dreaded Wikipedia, or scholarly publications) you need to mention it in your writing. This applies regardless of whether you’re quoting directly (in which case, use quotation marks!), paraphrasing, or building off something that sparked your interest. Finally, unless I tell you that an assignment is groupwork, you shouldn’t be working with classmates or anyone else.
3. ACCEPTABLE COLLABORATION exists, though: your groupwork should obviously be done together. And if you want to ask questions or talk about the readings or other assignments, **post publicly to Twitter with the class hashtag, #wfucomedy!** I’ll be keeping an eye on the

hashtag, so you'll likely get a prompt response from me, a classmate, or both. I am impressed by students who show motivation and interest by sharing interesting thoughts or questions!

4. **CLASSROOM CIVILITY** is important. We can and often should disagree on intellectual points, but we must do so respectfully. So don't talk over people, don't make personal attacks, avoid offensive language, and use active listening to engage with your classmates. Civility is especially important in your groups, and you'll need to ensure that everyone in your group is heard, is engaged, is respected, and is contributing her/his fair share. Finally, be civil to me: come to class on time, be prepared, do your homework and reading, don't text or play on your phone during class, and be lenient on me while I learn everyone's names. And **come to me** if you feel disrespected by me or a classmate: you won't be punished for sharing your concerns!
5. **ETIQUETTE**: all assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class. I prefer that you type all assignments, but for homework you may handwrite if you absolutely must. (All other writing **must** be typed.) Either way, sign your name at the top—to signify that you have completed the assignment without any unauthorized assistance from people or Cliff's Notes-style summaries or the like—and if you sign your name inscrutably, write it legibly beside your signature. When you're turning in a groupwork assignment, each group member must sign, to indicate that each member feels the work is representative of both the combined effort of the group over all and each member's individual effort. This class is discussion-focused, not lecture-heavy, so do not bring laptops unless you have cleared it with me (outside of class) first.
6. **NO LATE WORK** will be accepted, though if you will be absent from class (try not to do this!), e-mailing me your homework before class time is an acceptable alternative. **No make-up** assignments except as required by university policy (as, for instance, for necessary absences of student-athletes). To succeed in this course, you should **study** for 2–3 hours on your own for every hour spent in class—this means 2–3 between each class, around 6–9 hours per week total. **Attendance** and active participation is mandatory, but more importantly, is necessary for you to get the most out of this class!

Overview of themes and readings

- introduction to course, to comedy, to food insecurity and local history
- introduction to Aristophanes: the intersection of politics, religion, and community concerns
- poverty in ancient Athens and modern Winston: *Assembly-Women*, *Acharnians*, *Clouds*, *Wealth*
- hungry Heracles: *Frogs*, *Birds*
- politics and policy: *Knights*, *Wasps*, *Lysistrata*, *Peace*, *Thesmophoriazousai*
- civic ritual and civic action, then and now: between Aristophanes and the soup kitchen
- introduction to New Comedy (Menander, Plautus, and Terence)
- food insecurity, poverty, and sex workers, continued: *The Woman from Samos* (M), *Truculentus* (P), *The Rope* (P), *The Little Carthaginian* (P), *The Sisters Bacchis* (P), *The Mother-in-Law* (T)
- the parasite: *Curculio* (P), *Asinaria* (P), *Phormio* (T)
- the unsustainable institution of slavery: *Captivi* (P), *The Brothers* (T)
- conclusion: comedy and social justice

Assignment details (additional details for some assignments may be provided later on)

Type everything. If you can't type and print your homeworks, write them neatly, but I really prefer typed. All other work must be typed. Sign your name—and if it's a group submission, all group members must sign their names—and if your signature isn't legible, include a legible version along with it. Your signature indicates that you've completed the assignment in a manner consistent with academic integrity and the standards for the course, and on groupwork your signature additionally indicates that you feel the submission reflects your individual efforts, the contributions of each of your group members, and the group's overall combined productivity.

- A. HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS will be due almost every class period. With one or two exceptions, they will consist of your thoughtful, written responses to prompts related to the reading. **Write in complete sentences!** Be a critical thinker! Here are some guidelines for what critical thinking is about: <http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/Critical%20Thinking-short.pdf> — they may be useful. **Prompts will be uploaded to the course's (dreaded) Sakai site.** Contact me ASAP if you ever have difficulty locating or accessing a prompt file.
- B. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: come to every class, on time. Contribute meaningfully.
- C. SKITS (2): twice during the semester, you and a classmate will perform a scene, or part of a scene, from a play previously read. You don't have to memorize it, but you should get together outside of class to practice—this should be a **staged reading**, not a first look, and should as appropriate involve stage action, adaptation, improved jokes, improvisation, and the like. It should be about 5 minutes long, so you may have to cut, excerpt, or otherwise adapt longer scenes. The performance doesn't have to be perfect, but it should be fun, funny, and practiced. Your classmates or I may ask you questions about performance choices, too.
- D. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE: this is the culmination of the semester. In groups that I will assign in February, you will select a scene from one of the comedies we have read, discuss its staging and interpretation, adapt it for your audience, block it, **memorize it**, rehearse it, design/obtain props and costumes (and possibly scenery), and then perform it for a packed crowd of your peers (or slightly-younger-than-peers) who love Greek and Roman things. The assignments that comprise the project records (F., below) will help you and your group prepare for the Big Event, and you will have ample time in and outside class to plan, rehearse, and rehearse more.
- E. COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT: we will not just examine the issues, we will **act** on them. During the semester, we will volunteer with organizations working to reduce food security in Winston-Salem.
- F. PERFORMANCE PROJECT RECORDS: here's where you'll document the entire process of getting to the public performance (D., above), from start to finish. Think of this as a sort of portfolio or dossier, in which you explain to me all of the interpretive, analytical, creative, and sundry intellectual decisions that you and your group made. Almost all of the individual components, described hereafter, will be due at some point in the semester prior to your performance. For your complete project records, **you must revise all of the previous components according to the feedback** I have given throughout the semester. The final submission of the project records will be due via email by the exam period of our class, which will not ac-

tually include an exam.. Writing of any kind is an iterative process: plan, draft, polish, seek feedback, revise, polish, and so on. By revisiting and revising the work you have done earlier in the semester, you will *synthesize* the various components of your learning into a perfect, wonderful, whole. You will also need to **introduce the final submission** with an “executive summary,” an overview of your project and its successfulness.

- G. GROUP CONDUCT CHARTER: once groups have been formed, you and your group members will work together to develop a Group Charter that governs your procedures, productivity, and conduct. It must be agreed upon by consensus and signed by all group members. I will provide you with examples and will be on hand to consult as you put it together. Think of it as by-laws, or founding principles, or a constitution to help you and your group function effectively and stay on track.
- H. PERFORMANCE “TAKE” PROPOSAL PARAGRAPH: here’s where you and your group select a scene, explain why you chose this scene (and how your group went about choosing it), describe what your interpretive “take” will be on the scene (e.g.: a modern sitcom retelling; a Victorian-era melodrama; a masked rendition with singing), and preview how you’ll adapt the scene for your specific audience. So it might be a long paragraph, or two paragraphs. This will allow me to do initial quality control on your plans.
- I. ANNOTATED PROP LIST: I’ve secured some money from the Dean so that each group can have some props. This means that your group needs to decide what prop(s) will best enhance the scene you are doing and the way you are doing that scene. So, this will be a list of props that you would like, ranked in order of importance, with a (complete) sentence or two explaining the import of each prop to your scene.
- J. ANNOTATED SCRIPT: you’ll be adapting your scene from the texts we have read in class, but since you will be *adapting* it, you have to have your own script. The “annotations” here include matters of blocking, props, stagecraft, scenery, and emotions—but also an explanation of what changes you made, and why you made these changes.
- K. PROGRAM NOTES: a paragraph or two that explains *for your specific audience* what they need to know to appreciate your group’s performance. This should include a very brief background on the play’s plot and characters, an accounting of your “take” on the scene, and any other interpretive, social, historical, or comedic issues you think are relevant and important. You will submit a draft to me, and then will revise your draft in response to my comments (remember: writing is an iterative process!), so that I can compile a program book for each performance.
- L. PERFORMANCE REACTION PAPER: reflect (in complete sentences!) on your own group’s performance. Do you feel it was successful? How did the audience respond? What worked best? What worked least? What challenges did you face in adaptation? What would you change if you were doing it again? What did you learn? What will you remember about this experience in five years?
- M. GROUP EFFICACY REFLECTION: write two pages or so reflecting on your group’s effectiveness across the semester. Are you happy with how things went, and how things turned out? Are you satisfied with your own performance? Did your group abide by the Group Charter? How well did the Group Charter work? What was the group dynamic like? What roles did you each play? What would you do differently yourself? What would you try to get your

group to do differently? How can you apply what you learned about groupwork this semester to other classes, to your career, and to the rest of life?