

Mondays: 4:00-6:45 pm



ENG 461-01

Senior Seminar: Comedy and Identity

Spring 2026

Dr. Miriam Chirico

“Life is a tragedy for those who feel, and a comedy for those who think.”

--Jean de la Bruyère

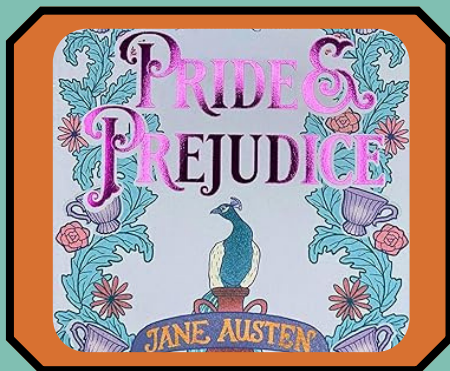
Study Comedy? Isn't that a contradiction? Didn't E. B. White famously say, “Explaining a joke is like dissecting a frog. You understand it better, but the frog dies in the process.”

But – YES we can study comedy!

We can study comedy as a means of discovering what comedy says about our society and about our individual selves.

Comedy provides us with the means to satirize society, to give us a release of pent-up emotions, and to celebrate who we are as imperfect yet joyful human beings. Comedy – particularly stand-up comedy – provides the individual with a narrative structure to express and examine the self.

We will read what philosophers and literary critics have said about comedy and use their ideas in our quest towards understanding its essence. We will read plays, watch movies, and study stand-up comedy in order to answer some fundamental questions: “what is a comedy?” and “how does comedy express the self?”



Course Expectations

Please be prepared to read theory, practice telling jokes, and to “kill” the proverbial frog. This course is the capstone experience for English which means students prepare a research proposal in the spring and will write a research paper in the fall. As always in life, a sense of humor helps!