

## **Classics 126 (Ancient Comedy: A Funny Thing Happened) - Interim, 2004**

Rationale for General Education Credit: Oral Communication

*1. An oral communication course must provide explicit instruction in effective oral communication through assigned readings, lectures, class discussions, and/or other instructional features of the course.*

Having just finished a two-year teaching stint in the Great Conversation program, which accomplishes the ORC goals through a combination of orthodox and unorthodox means, I have in mind to do something similar in the interim course that I will teach this January. I designed the Ancient Comedy course back in 1994 and taught it in 1995, 1996, and 1999; it has always been aimed at giving first-year students an appreciation of ancient Greek and Roman comedy not just as poetic literature, fit to be read in the confines of a classroom, but also as dramatic extravaganzas, meant to be spoken and sung in open-air theaters. With the resources of the Art Barn Video Production Studio now available right next door to Old Main, it seems an ideal time to shift the emphasis of the course even more toward oral communication, without sacrificing the attention it pays to literary studies (ALS-L).

Ancient comedies, by their very nature, dramatize oral communication of all sorts--from logical arguments to impassioned pleas, from angry rebukes to amorous serenades. Since, however, they do not provide "explicit instruction" in that subject, I will ask the students to purchase an inexpensive book that addresses the topic of public speaking. At the moment I am thinking of trying out a paperback called *Painless Speaking* (Barron's Educational Series), which "explores the uniquely human act of oral communication, including elements in our culture that shape the way we speak. It explores finding one's voice, understanding the basic unit of speech communication (an utterance), learning the art of conversation, reading aloud from fiction and nonfiction texts, and instruction in public speaking, which entails composing, practicing, and delivering a speech. Students will find guidelines for self-evaluation of a public speech." I will add selections from that book to the reading assignments, and include ideas from it among the topics for class discussion, during the first week of the term.

*2. An oral communication course must emphasize speaking and listening as principal and integral means of learning. The course must provide several opportunities for students to practice their oral skills in course assignments, and it must provide students with specific feedback on the development of these skills.*

Oral reading: Students will read representative plays by the comic dramatists Aristophanes, Meander, Plautus, and Terence, in English translation. Most of the class time will be devoted to discussion of the literature, both by the class as a whole and in small groups. Every student will also have one opportunity to present a three-minute oral reading (prepared ahead of time) of a passage chosen from one of the texts assigned for that day. Students should introduce their reading by identifying the source of the passage; they may also mention their reason for choosing it or in some other way set the stage for the reading. (The introduction should last no longer than two minutes.) The other students in the course will each fill out an anonymous, one-page form evaluating the quality of the student's oral reading. Later, in a conference with the student, the instructor will evaluate the student's oral contributions to the class and summarize the feedback collected from the other students. The quality of a student's oral presentation will be factored into his or her grade for class participation (10% of the final grade).

Performance: Students will be divided into a number of groups (e.g., six groups of five). Each group will be asked to perform a selected scene from one of the ancient comedies being read and studied in the course. Immediately after each performance the whole class will spend a few minutes evaluating the effectiveness of the performance in terms of delivery, acting, and staging. Each of the students who saw the performance will be asked to submit, both to the instructor, and to the group who performed the scene, a one-page written critique. In a conference with each group the instructor will offer further suggestions for improvement. Each group will then perform its scene again, this time in the Art Barn Video Production Studio, where staff will be available to help students create a storyboard and make a video of their performance. At the end of the term the whole class will watch and evaluate each of the videos. 40% of the final grade for the course will be based on the quality of the performances, both live and recorded.

3. *Oral communication courses may emphasize any of the modes of communication, including presentations, small group debates or discussions, and/or one-on-one communication.*

As outlined above, this course emphasizes communication via (1) large-group and small-group discussions, (2) individual oral readings of passages from ancient plays, and (3) group presentations in the form of dramatic performances, both live and on tape.

#### SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Classics 126 - Ancient Comedy: A Funny Thing Happened (Interim, 2004)

- Jan. 5: Introduction
- Jan. 6: Aristophanes' *Acharnians* + selections from *Painless Speaking*
- Jan. 7: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* + selections from *Painless Speaking*
- Jan. 8: Aristophanes' *Clouds* + selections from *Painless Speaking*
- Jan. 9: Quiz on Aristophanes
  
- Jan. 12: Menander's *Dyskolos*
- Jan. 13: Menander's *Samia & Aspis*
- Jan. 14: Quiz on Menander
- Jan. 15: Live performances of scenes from Aristophanes & Menander
- Jan. 16: Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*
  
- Jan. 19: Plautus' *Menaechmi*
- Jan. 20: Plautus' *The Haunted House*
- Jan. 21: Plautus' *The Pot of Gold*
- Jan. 22: Quiz on Plautus
- Jan. 23: Live performances of scenes from Plautus
  
- Jan. 26: Terence's *Eunuchus*
- Jan. 27: Terence's *Hecyra*
- Jan. 28: Terence's *Adelphoe*
- Jan. 29: Videotaped performances of scenes
- Jan. 30: Final exam

Grading:	3 quizzes = 30% (each 10%) Final exam = 20%	Live performance/video = 40% Oral reading, class participation = 10%
----------	--	---

Required Primary Texts (all paperbacks):

Aristophanes, *Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds*, translated by Jeffrey Henderson (Focus Classical Library, 1988, 1992, 1997)

Menander, *Plays and Fragments*, translated by Norma Miller (Penguin Classics, 1987)

Plautus, *Four Comedies*, translated by Erich Segal (Oxford University Press, 1996)

Terence, *The Comedies*, translated by Betty Radice (Penguin Classics, 1965, 1967, 1976)

Required Secondary Text (paperback):

Elizabeth, Mary, *Painless Speaking* (Barron's Education Series, 2003)

Information about the Course:

This Level I course is designed for first-year students and has no prerequisites. It meets the General Education requirements for Literary Studies (ALS-L) and Oral Communication (ORC).

The scope of the course is broad: it examines the development of the literary genre of comedy in Greece and Rome from the fifth to the second century B.C. Class periods are devoted to close study and discussion of the primary texts, with examination of their language, themes, and structure and consideration of the authors' aims and biases. Modern English translations of the Greek and Latin texts are used. Works are read in roughly chronological order, making it easy to follow the historical path that Classical comedy took.

Because this literature was intended to be performed, the course also considers how the plays were staged in antiquity and in subsequent centuries, up to the present day. Each student has the opportunity to give a three-minute oral reading of a chosen passage and to participate in the live performance of a selected scene and in the production of a video. Learning how to evaluate others' communication skills, as well as one's own, is an important goal of the course. No previous training or experience in acting, film-making, or public speaking is expected.