

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## **Improv 2: Advanced Improv THTR-322 (2 units)**

**Section 63049**

**Spring 2018**

**Wednesdays 4-5:50pm**

**Location: PED 208**

**Kirstin Eggers, Adjunct Faculty**

**Office: MCC 214**

**Office Hours: By appointment. Please email to schedule.**

**Email: kgeggers@usc.edu**

**Phone: (c) 323.898.7388**

### **Course Description and Overview**

*“In the long history of humankind (and animalkind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” — Charles Darwin*

In this workshop course, we will continue the study of the rules and structure of improvised comedy scene work, with an emphasis in improvised comedic character development and advanced improvisational performance techniques. Students will explore various avenues of modern improvisational comedy, for use in varied mediums, and will search for continued ways to pioneer new improv performance experiences. Lastly, we will work to form a true ensemble — a cornerstone in successful comedic performance.

Prerequisites: THTR 101 or THTR 122

### **Learning Objectives**

This course is designed to educate students on the techniques of performing improv for comedic purposes. By the end of the course, students should have a better sense of the use of improv as a tool for performance, writing, and storytelling in general, as well as an appreciation for improv as a performance art in and of itself. Students will embrace relationship and character commitment as the road to successful comedy, rather than pushing the need to “be funny.” Students will amass a body of characters and techniques, a positive mindset for the collaborative and creative process, and a sense of the importance of braveness, boldness, and discipline to carry into both their personal and professional lives.

*“I’m not funny. What I am is brave.” — Lucille Ball*

### **Required and Supplementary Materials**

#### **Required Viewing**

You will be required to attend at least one live improv show of your choice, and turn in a written evaluation of the show.

On-campus, there are several student groups that perform regularly. Off-campus, notable improv theaters include UCB, The Groundlings, Impro Theatre, iOWest, The Second City, NerdMelt, among others. You are welcome to do your own research as well. The show you attend must be over the course of the semester, not something you have seen previously in your life.

## Required Reading

You may be given handouts and/or web links throughout the semester which you are expected to read and retain for discussion.

## Recommended Reading

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Improv* by Keith Johnstone
- *Steal Like An Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative* by Austin Kleon

## Recommended Viewing/Watching/Listening

- *Whose Line Is It Anyway* episodes
- Improvised (or semi-scripted) movies and television, such as Christopher Guest-directed movies, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Bajillion Dollar Properties*, *The League*, *Reno 911*, among others
- Improvised character podcasts such as *Comedy Bang Bang*, *Spontaneanation*, *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*, among others

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

**Participation** — Attendance, punctuality, and enthusiastic participation is critical to your success in this class, as a respectful member of an ensemble, and the weekly learning and rehearsal process. There may be no unexcused absences. **Failure to attend or being late will be reflected in your grade.**

**Written Assignments** — Unless otherwise specified, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqegggers@usc.edu) before the specified date and time. Late assignments will not be accepted.

**Devices** — No cell phone or electronic devices of any kind may be used in class, unless specifically instructed. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to your peers. You must leave phone/device in your bag, silenced. Bags and backpacks may be quarantined in a designated classroom corner. Unauthorized use of devices will affect your grade.

**Attire** — Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way, whether by unwanted exposure or physical limitations. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet — no flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged. As you know, improv can get crazy — dress accordingly.

**Eating** — Food and drink is not permitted in any SDA classroom, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

**Classroom** — Please help restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

## USC SDA Grading Criteria

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade, determined using the following scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Below Average</u>	<u>Inadequate</u>
A = 95-100 pts	B+ = 87-89 pts	C+ = 77-79 pts	D+ = 67-69 pts	F = 59 or below
A- = 90-94 pts	B = 83-86 pts	C = 73-76 pts	D = 63-66 pts	
	B- = 80-82 pts	C- = 70-72 pts	D- = 60-62 pts	

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade. The grade is translated into a GPA using the following scale: A indicates work of excellent quality; B of good quality; C of average quality; D of below average quality; and F indicates inadequate work.

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (April 6).
- I am happy to discuss your work at any time.

### Grading Breakdown

Class Participation — Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness	15 points
Ensemble Work — Contribution to a supportive environment	5 points
Live Improv Show Response, written and turned in	5 points
Character Monologues — written and performed (5 points each)	10 points
Warm-up Leader	5 points
Original Improv Creation (+ written explanation)	10 points
Four Through the Door (midterm)	20 points
Final Workshop — Enthusiasm, growth, application of learned techniques	25 points
Final Self-Reflection	<u>5 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

*Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure may change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You will be informed of any changes as much as possible.*

Every class will begin with group warm-ups.

#### Week 1 — January 10 — Welcome/Introductions

Begin ensemble work. Review rules of Improv. Syllabus review.

Homework: read *Bossypants* handout.

#### Week 2 — January 17 — Tenets/Basics of Improv

Continue to review improv basics. Games/exercises to support basic improv structure.

#### Week 3 — January 24 — Begin Character Work

●**DUE TODAY: Family Member OR Stranger Monologue, written, memorized and performed.**

Monologue presentation. Begin character based improv.

#### Week 4 — January 31 — Physicality/Voice Exploration

Character work continued, including gibberish and over-the-top work. Introduce Misfit Monologue.

Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Warm-up leaders begins.

#### Week 5 — February 7 — Character Work

●**DUE TODAY: Misfit Monologue, written, memorized and performed.**

Monologue presentation. Further character work, within scenes.

#### Week 6 — February 14 — Character Work in Scenes

Continuation of character work in scenes. Prep for midterm.

**Week 7 – February 21 – MIDTERM: Four Through the Door**  
●**MIDTERM: Improvised character exercise “Four Through the Door.”**

**Week 8 – February 28 – Improv Types**  
Introduction to Improv types. Scenework/gamework, continued.

**Week 9 – March 7 – Games: Character/Experts/Styles**  
Learn and rehearse more games for performance, with emphasis on character, expert, and style games.  
**Original improv game presentation begins.**

– **SPRING BREAK** –

**Week 10 – March 21 – Games: Guessing/Timed/Energy**  
●**DUE TODAY: Written Response of Live Improv Show, emailed before 4pm.**  
Discuss shows we attended. Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on guessing, timed and energy-driven games. **Original improv presentation, continued.**

**Week 11 – March 28 – Additional Improv Types Exploration**  
Explore long-form and narrative improv techniques. **Original improv presentation, continued.**

**Week 12 – April 4 – Rehearse for Final Workshop**  
Review and rehearse games. Catch-up and coverage as needed.

**Week 13 – April 11 – Rehearse for Final Workshop**  
Review and rehearse games. Catch-up and coverage as needed.

**Week 14 – April 18 – Rehearse for Final Workshop**  
Establish show list and callers. Rehearse.

**Week 15 – April 25 – Final Workshop???**  
●**Workshop Details TBD.**

**FINAL – Wednesday May 2 – 4:30-6:30pm** (per university-assigned final exam schedule)  
●**DUE TODAY: Final Written Evaluation, written in class.**  
Discuss, evaluate. Post-mortem. Write Final Self-Evaluation, prompts given in class.

#### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section II.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>. Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: <http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html>.

#### **Statement on Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section II, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1000-behavior->

[violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/](#). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

### **Disruptive Student Behavior**

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

### **Support Systems**

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 - 24/7 on call  
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255  
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center  
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance - (213) 740-5086  
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support  
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs  
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710  
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student, ex: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC  
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information  
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety - 213-740-4321 (UPC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.  
Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>