

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## Improvisation and Theatre Games

### THTR-122 (2 units)

Section 62638

Fall 2018

Thursdays 12-1:50pm

Location: MCC 112

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Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment. Please schedule via email.

Email: [kqeggers@usc.edu](mailto:kqeggers@usc.edu)



## 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 experiential workshop course, we will learn and build upon the tenets and rules of theatrical improvisation, with ultimate emphasis on applying these to one's own life. Through theatre games, and improvised experiences and performance, students will work toward freeing themselves physically, vocally, and emotionally, to stimulate creativity, imagination, self-expression, and the collaborative spirit.

This course has no prerequisite(s), and may be taken for credit twice.

## Learning Objectives

Through theatrical games and improvisational experiences,

We will learn and participate in effective storytelling, relationship-building and presentation,  
We will strive to be present, and open to both our own and others' creative impulses,  
We will bravely respect our own innate ability to imagine deeply and create new details,  
We will invite a sense of wonder and play to our relationships with our work and others,  
We will work to be confident, and yet exploratory, in our physicality, voice, emotions and words,  
We will explore human nature through character work, both written and performed,  
We will collaborate with our fellow actors, inviting their own sensibilities and additions,  
We will consistently perform in front of each other, and evaluate our efforts, and  
We will discuss how to frame our classwork to apply to a positive life perspective.

## Supplementary Materials

### Required Viewing:

You are 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, Second City LA, among others. I will email you early in the semester with links to suggested theaters and shows, and you are welcome to do your own research as well. The show you choose to 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
- *Life Unscripted* by Jeff Katzman, MD and Dan O'Connor
- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Impro* 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 film and television, such as Christopher Guest mockumentaries, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Bajillion Dollar Properties*, *The League*, *Reno 911*, among others
- Improvised podcasts such as *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*, *Spontaneanation*, *Comedy Bang Bang*, among others

## **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Class attendance and participation is the most important part of your success in this class. Weekly attendance and punctuality is crucial for building an ensemble, understanding games and exercises, and respecting your fellow actor.

Absences are not permitted. **Failure to attend, being late, or leaving early will be reflected in your grade.**

There will be written assignments over the course of the semester. Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqeggers@usc.edu) as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time. Late assignments will not be accepted. Written assignments should be in MLA format.

### **Additional Policies**

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 the ensemble. 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 participation points for the day.

Please wear clothing and shoes in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way. You will get sweaty, be prepared. 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.

No food or drink is allowed in SDA classrooms, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

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. Course final grades will be 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	

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (November 9).
- I am happy to discuss your work at any time.

### **Grading Breakdown**

Class Participation – Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness to participate	15 points
Ensemble Work – Contribution to a supportive environment	5 points
Live Improv Show Response, written and turned in	6 points
Character Monologues – written and performed (6 points each)	12 points
Self-Evaluations – written and turned in (6 points each)	12 points
Midterm – Comprehension, willingness, application of learned techniques	20 points
Personal growth and improvement – personal and teacher assessment	5 points
Final Jam – Skill level, growth, commitment, application of learned techniques	<u>25 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

### **Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

*Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure will 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 – August 23 – Welcome/Introductions**

Intro to warm-up and theatre exercises. Begin ensemble and relationship work. Syllabus and expectations review.

**Homework:** read handout from *Bossypants*.

**Week 2 – August 30 – Tenets/Basics of Improv**

The Only Lecture – please bring materials for taking notes. Followed by exercises focused on “YES, AND” – agreeing and adding information.

**Homework:** write Self-Evaluation/Goal-Setting. Prompts given in class.

**Week 3 – September 6 – Storytelling, Status, Space Work, Relationship**

• **Assignment Due: Self-Evaluation/Goal-Setting, emailed as PDF before Noon.**

Exercises focused on space work (using the space/stage and “pantomime”), telling individual and group stories, beginning character work through Status, and learning to quickly establish relationship.

**Week 4 – September 13 – Physicality & Voice Exploration**

Beginning character work with voice and physicality, including gibberish and over-the-top work.

**Homework:** Write a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of their catchphrases, physical or vocal tics, how they carry themselves – how they walk, sit, stand, move. Your monologue should be very specific. Challenge yourself to be big and yet truthful. You will be performing this next week.

**Week 5 – September 20 – Specific Character Work**

• **Assignment Due: Family Member Monologue**

Presentation of family member monologues. Further character work, within scenes.

**Homework:** Observe a stranger for at least 10 minutes (set your timer!). Get close and far. Observe their physicality, listen to their voice. Write a 30 second-1 minute monologue playing that stranger – what is happening to them that day? Be specific.

**Week 6 – September 27 – Character Work in Scenes**

• **Assignment Due: Stranger Observation Monologue**

Perform Stranger Monologues. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Continuation of character work in scenes.

**Week 7 – October 4 – Review and Practice Improv Basics**

**Week 8 – October 11 – Midterm Exam Exercise**

In-class performance of to-be-determined improv format, with ensemble as a whole.

**Week 9 – October 18 – Games: Character/Experts/Styles**

Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on character, expert, and style games.

**Week 10 – October 25 – Games: Guessing/Timed/Energy**

Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on guessing, timed and energy-driven games.

**Week 11 – November 1 – Games, cont'd. Rehearse for Final Improv Jam**

Discussion of shows. Discuss format for Final Improv Jam. Continue to learn games as needed. Rehearse in small groups.

**Homework:** Last chance to attend a live improv show of your choice, evaluate and respond. Prompts given in class.

**Week 12 – November 8 – Rehearse for Final Improv Jam**

- **Assignment Due: Written Response of Live Improv Show, emailed as PDF before Noon.**

Rehearse in both small groups and large group.

**Week 13 – November 15 – Final Rehearsal for Final Improv Jam**

Together, determine final Improv Jam format. Final rehearsal.

**Week 14 – Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS**

**Week 15 – November 29 – Final Improv Jam!**

Perform improv for each other, and possibly guests. Jam will be filmed to watch and evaluate during our assigned Final time.

**FINAL – Tuesday December 11 – 11am-1pm (per university-assigned final exam schedule)**

- **Assignment Due: Final Written Evaluation, written in class.**

Watch playback of our Improv Jam, with the caveat that improv is never as good filmed as it was live. 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 11.00), 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 11, Behavior Violating University Standard <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-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/departments/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](http://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>