

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Improv 2: Advanced Improv
THTR-322 (2 units)
Section 63049
Spring 2019
Wednesdays 4-5:50pm
Location: PED 208

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers
Office: MCC 214
Office Hours: Please email to schedule.
Email: 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 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 their personal, professional, and performance 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. The show should preferably be a type of improv with which you are unfamiliar. On-campus, there are several student groups that perform regularly. Off-campus, notable improv groups/theaters include UCB, The Groundlings, The Black Version, Impro Theatre, Second City LA, 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
- *Life Unscripted: Using Improv Principles to Get Unstuck, Boost Confidence, and Transform Your Life* by Jeff Katzmann, MD and Dan O’Connor

- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* 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*, *The Hills of Baldwin*, *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 are no excused absences or tardies. Although attendance is not the only factor in your participation grade, please note that being absent for more than 15% of classes, or being late (or leaving early) for more than 25% of classes, or a combination thereof, will automatically lower your final grade. Additional points may also be deducted for missed in-class work.

Written Assignments — Unless otherwise specified, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqegggers@usc.edu) as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time. Late assignments will not be awarded full points.

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/drink is not permitted in SDA classrooms, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

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

Grading Criteria

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

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 5).
- I am happy to discuss your work or grade at any time.

Grading Breakdown

Class Participation — Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness 15 points

Ensemble Work — Contribution to a supportive environment	10 points
Opening Reflection (written)	5 points
Warm-up Leader	5 points
Costume Monologue	5 points
Four Through the Door (midterm)	15 points
Live Improv Show Response (written)	5 points
Original Improv Creation (+ written explanation)	10 points
Final Workshop — Enthusiasm, growth, application of learned techniques	20 points
Final Reflection (written)	5 points
Final Character Interview	<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 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 — January 9 — Welcome/Introductions

Begin ensemble work. Review rules of Improv. Syllabus review.
Homework: read *Bossypants* handout.

Week 2 — January 16 — Tenets/Basics of Improv

● **DUE TODAY: Opening Reflection, emailed before 4pm — 300+ words — What draws you to improv? What do you hope to get out of this class? What personal traits do you feel help you with improv/performing and what might hold you back? What are your strategies for working through that?**

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

Week 3 — January 23 — Begin Character Work

Continue to review improv foundations, with emphasis on longer scene work. Begin character exploration.

Week 4 — January 30 — Physicality/Voice Exploration

Character work continued, including gibberish and over-the-top work. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Warm-up leaders begins.

Week 5 — February 6 — Character Work/Scene Work

● **DUE TODAY: Bring one costume piece.** Costume Monologue presentation. Further character work, within scenes.

Week 6 — February 13 — Character Work/Scene Work

Continuation of character work in scenes. Prep for midterm.

Week 7 — February 20 — Four Through the Door

● **MIDTERM (part 1): Improvised character exercise “Four Through the Door.”**

Week 8 — February 27 — Four Through the Door

● **MIDTERM (part 2): Improvised character exercise “Four Through the Door.”**

Week 9 — March 6 — Improv Types

● **DUE TODAY: Written Response of Live Improv Show, emailed before 4pm.**

Discuss shows we attended. Introduction to Improv types — discuss and explore short-forms, long-forms, narrative, genre, alt, etc.

— SPRING BREAK —

Week 10 — March 20 — Improv Types/Original Improv

Improv type exploration, continued. Original improv presentations begin.

Week 11 — March 27 — Original Improv

Original improv presentations, continued.

Week 12 — April 3 — Original Improv/Rehearse for Final Workshop

Original improv presentations, continued. Catch-up and coverage as needed.

Week 13 — April 10 — Rehearse for Final Workshop

Review and rehearse games. Catch-up and coverage as needed.

Week 14 — April 17 — Rehearse for Final Workshop

Establish show list and callers. Rehearse. Learning Experience Evaluations.

Week 15 — April 24 — Final Workshop

Final Workshop — 5pm — details TBD.

FINAL — Wednesday May 1 — 4:30-6:30pm (per university-assigned final exam schedule)

● **DUE TODAY: Final Reflection, due by 11:59pm. Prompts TBD.**

Discuss workshop. Character interviews.

*“Improv is the only belief system I’ve ever experienced
that directly works on how to be. Just how to be. — Ilana Glazer*

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. 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>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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. 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. 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. 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: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-4321 - HSC: (323) 442-1000 - 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu