

THTR 122: Improvisation and Theatre Games

2 Units

Fall 2019–Thursdays–12-1:50pm

Location: MCC 112

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment – please schedule via email.

Email: kqeggers@usc.edu

Phone: (c) 323.898.7388 – emergencies only, email preferred.

Course Description

“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin

In this experiential workshop course, students 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, emotionally, and mentally, to stimulate creativity, imagination, self-expression, and the collaborative spirit.

This course may be taken for credit twice.

Learning Objectives

Through theatrical games and improvisational experiences, students will:

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

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Reading: Students will be given handouts and/or web links throughout the semester which they are expected to read and retain for discussion.

Required Viewing: Students are required to attend at least one live improv show of your choice, and turn in a written response to the show.

On-campus, there are several student groups that perform regularly. Off-campus, notable improv theaters include UCB, The Groundlings, Impro Theatre, The Second City, among others.

Recommended Reading

- *Life Unscripted: Using Improv Principles to Get Unstuck, Boost Confidence, and Transform Your Life* by Jeff Katzmann, MD and Dan O'Connor
- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *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 film and television, such as Christopher Guest mockumentaries, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Bajillion Dollar Properties*, *The League*, *Reno 911*, among others
- Improvised-centered podcasts such as *Comedy Bang Bang*, *The Hills of Baldwin*, *Spontaneanation*, *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*, among others

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Class attendance and enthusiastic participation is the most important part of your success in this class. There are no excused absences – an absence is an absence. If you do find yourself missing class, you must follow up with me or classmates to keep up to date.

Though attendance is not the sole aspect of your participation grade, please be aware that missing 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 in this course.

Written Assignments – You will write two self-reflections throughout the semester. Prompts will be emailed to you and discussed in class.

You will write one response to a live improv show. 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.

A Joint Educational Project (JEP) may be available for this course – you will be informed as soon as possible.

The bulk of the coursework takes place in class experientially, as is the nature of improv – you must learn by Being Here Now.

"Improv is the only belief system I've ever experienced that directly works on how to be. Just how to be." – Ilana Glazer

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation (presence, focus, attitude, willingness)	15	15
Ensemble Work – contribution to a supportive environment	5	5
Character Monologues – written and performed (6 points each)	12	12
Self Reflections (6 points each)	12	12
Live Improv Show Response	6	6
Midterm – comprehension, willingness, application of learned techniques	20	20
Personal growth and improvement – personal and teacher assessment	5	5
Final Jam – Skill level, growth, commitment, application of learned techniques	25	25
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be 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

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (November 15).
- I am happy to discuss your work and/or grade with you at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy

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. Written assignments should follow MLA guidelines. Late assignments will not be awarded full points.

Performance Assignments will be presented in class.

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 grade.

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.

Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class. We do not take an official break in the hour and fifty minutes of class – you should be prepared to stay in the room. In the event of an emergency, observe respectful theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors – never leave or enter the room during a scene.

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

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

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 are asked to remain flexible, and you will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Every class will begin with group warm-ups.

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
WEEK ONE	Thurs Aug 29	Welcome/ Introductions Introduction to warm-ups and theatre exercises. Begin ensemble work. Syllabus review. Class boundaries discussion.		Read handout from <i>Bossypants</i> .
WEEK TWO	Thurs Sept 5	Tenets/Basics of Improv The Only Lecture – bring materials for taking notes. “YES, AND” exploration.	<i>Bossypants</i> handout read for discussion.	Write Self-Reflection #1. Prompts given in class/ emailed. Reflection should be a minimum of 500 words, and emailed as a pdf attachment before Sept 12 @ noon.

<p>WEEK THREE E</p>	<p>Thurs Sept 12</p>	<p>Storytelling, Status, Space Work, Relationship</p> <p>Exercises focused on space work (using the space/ stage and “pantomime”), telling individual and group stories, beginning character work through Status, and establishing relationship.</p>	<p>Self-Reflection #1. Prompts given in class/ emailed. Reflection should be a minimum of 500 words, and emailed as a pdf attachment before 12pm.</p>	
<p>WEEK FOUR</p>	<p>Thurs Sept 19</p>	<p>Physicality & Voice Exploration</p> <p>Beginning character work with voice and physicality, including gibberish and over-the-top work.</p> <p>Tenets of improv, continued.</p>		<p>Write and rehearse a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of their catchphrases, physical and vocal qualities, how they carry themselves – how they walk, sit, stand, move. Your monologue should be very specific. Challenge yourself to be big and yet truthful.</p>
<p>WEEK FIVE</p>	<p>Thurs Sept 26</p>	<p>Specific Character Work</p> <p>Presentation of family member monologues. Further character work, within scenes.</p>	<p>Perform a 1 minute monologue you wrote, playing a family member you know very well.</p>	<p>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 monologue playing that stranger – what is happening to them that day? Be specific.</p>

WEEK SIX	Thurs Oct 3	Character Work in Scenes Perform Stranger Monologues. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Continuation of character work in scenes.	Present Stranger Monologues.	
WEEK SEVEN	Thurs Oct 10	Review and Practice Improv Basics		Prepare mentally for Midterm – review rules of improv.
WEEK EIGHT	Thurs Oct 17	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS		
WEEK NINE	Thurs Oct 24	Midterm Exam Performance In-class performance of to-be-determined improv format, with ensemble as a whole.		
WEEK TEN	Thurs Oct 31	Games: Character/Experts/Styles Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on character, expert, and style games.		

WEEK ELEVEN	Thurs Nov 7	Games: Guessing/ Timed/Energy Learn and rehearse more "games" for performance, with emphasis on guessing, timed and energy- driven games.		Last chance to attend a live improv show of your choice. You will evaluate and respond – 500 words minimum. Prompts given in class/emailed, early in the semester.
WEEK TWELVE	Thurs Nov 14	Rehearse for Final Improv Jam Discuss shows we attended. Discuss format for Final Improv Jam. Rehearse in small groups. Learn more performance games as needed.	Written Response of Live Improv Show, emailed as PDF before 12pm.	
WEEK THIRTEEN	Thurs Nov 21	Final Rehearsal for Final Improv Jam Together, determine final Improv Jam format. Final rehearsal.		Prepare mentally for Jam – review calling assignments, formats, rules. Invite guests.
WEEK FOURTEEN	Thurs Nov 28	THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS		

WEEK FIFTEEN	Thurs Dec 5	Final Improv Jam! Perform improv for each other, and possibly guests. Jam will be filmed to watch and evaluate during our assigned Final time. *Learning Experience Evaluations must be completed.		
FINAL	THURSDAY DECEMBER 12 @ 2pm	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.	Final Written Reflection, written in class.	

EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPs

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

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