

**THTR 322— Improv 2: Advanced Improv**  
2 Units  
Spring 2021 — Thursdays — 3-5:50pm PT  
Location: see Zoom link via Blackboard

**Instructor: Kirstin Eggers**  
**Zoom Office: <https://usc.zoom.us/my/kirstin.sda>**  
**Office Hours: By appointment — schedule via email.**  
**Email: [kqeggers@usc.edu](mailto:kqeggers@usc.edu)**  
**USC Slack: @Kirstin Eggers**

### **Course Description**

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

In this workshop course, students will continue the study of the rules and structure of improvised comedy scene work, exploring the use of improv as a tool for performance, writing, and storytelling in general, and improv as a performance art in and of itself. Though the class will encourage a comedic atmosphere, rather than pushing the need to "be funny," the class will embrace relationship and character commitment as the road to successful comedy. 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.

Prerequisites: THTR 101 or THTR 122

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Apply the fundamentals of improv and performance fluently
2. Assess their own performance work, and others' performance work, with the intent of growth
3. Create innovative applications of the artform and study of improv
4. Generate varied comedic characters
5. Perform a wide range of improvised formats and techniques with confidence

*"I'm not funny. What I am is brave." — Lucille Ball*

### **Course Notes**

Due to the collaborative, experiential, and performative nature of improv, classes must be synchronous for your success – you must attend online class LIVE.

### **Communication**

Please email me at [kqeggers@usc.edu](mailto:kqeggers@usc.edu) any time with questions or concerns. Emails will generally be returned within 48 hours on weekdays. I can also meet with you via my Zoom personal meeting room. Slack may at some point be an acceptable way to get in touch with me as well.

I also ask that the class as a whole have a communication group, platform of your choice, so you can easily get in touch with each other.

### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

Students will use Zoom with Audio and Video. To fully engage with all in-class activities, Video On and Unmuted are necessary settings. However, students may use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets to improve audio quality.

### **USC Technology Rental Program**

If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please submit an application at [studentbasicneeds.usc.edu](http://studentbasicneeds.usc.edu).

### **USC Technology Support Links**

Zoom information for students: [keepsteaching.usc.edu/tools/zoom](http://keepsteaching.usc.edu/tools/zoom)

Blackboard help for students: [studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu](http://studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu)

Software available to USC Campus: [software.usc.edu](http://software.usc.edu)

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### **Required Reading**

- *How to Be the Greatest Improviser on Earth* by Will Hines (please obtain hardcopy via USC Bookstore or bookstore of your choice)
- PDFs and/or links throughout the semester. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

### **Required Viewing**

Students are required to attend at least one live online improv show of your choice, and turn in a written response to the show. There will be an active Blackboard thread (or GoogleDoc), on which we can suggest online improv shows for each other.

### **Supplemental Reading**

- *Letters to a Young Artist* by Anna Deveare Smith
- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual* by Ian Roberts & Matt Walsh
- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Improv: Improvisation and the Theatre* by Keith Johnstone
- *Improv Nation: How We Made A Great American Art* by Sam Wasson
- *Life Unscripted: Using Improv Principles to Get Unstuck, Boost Confidence, and Transform Your Life* by Jeff Katzmann, MD and Dan O'Connor

### **Recommended Viewing**

- A variety of live online improv shows, especially formats with which you are less familiar
- 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
- *Whose Line Is It Anyway* episodes
- *Middleditch & Schwartz*

### **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Blackboard with ample time for each assignment.

- In-class exercises with enthusiastic participation are the most important part of your success in this class. The bulk of the coursework takes place in class experientially, as is the nature of improv — you must learn by Being Here Now. Points are awarded for presence, focus, attitude, willingness.
- Self-Reflections — You will write two self-reflections throughout the semester, one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end. Detailed instructions and prompts will be posted on Blackboard.

- Warm-Up Leader — Each student will lead the class in an improv "warm-up" that may focus on the concepts of focus, release, playfulness, ensemble-building, imagination, quick thinking, fearlessness, etc. Dates will be assigned. Warm-Up Leaders must be prepared and ready on the specified day.
- Midterm: "Four Through The Door" — You will participate in an extended improvised character exercise called "Four Through the Door," with the goals of experiencing creativity, stamina, and focus. Specific instructions will be discussed in class.
- Live Improv Show Response — You will write one response to a live improv show. The show you choose to attend must be over the course of the semester, not something you have seen previously in your life. You are encouraged to see a type or format of improv with which you are less familiar. Many improv groups and theatres are finding innovative ways to do improv during this time. We will keep a Blackboard thread (or GoogleDoc) with shows/ groups we find to help each other out.
- Original Improv Creation — You will fully invent, formulate, and present an original improv format or game. Depending on the make-up of the class, this may be done in teams. You must also submit a written explanation, and any accompanying visuals needed.
- Final Workshop — As an ensemble, you will create, plan, produce and perform in a full workshop improv show. The workshop show is scheduled for April 29 and is mandatory.
- Final: Character Interview — Using the skills learned over the course of the semester, you will participate in a audition-style improvised character interview. Specific instructions will be discussed in class.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
In-class exercises — presence, focus, attitude, willingness (2/class)	28
Self-Reflections (6 points each)	12
Warm-up Leader	5
Four Through the Door (midterm)	10
Live Improv Show Response (written)	10
Original Improv Creation (+ written explanation)	10
Final Workshop — Skill level, growth, commitment, application of learned techniques	20
Final Character Interview	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

### 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

### Assignment Submission Policy

Performance Assignments are presented in class, and copies of associated written work do not need to be submitted, although you must be prepared.

Written Assignments should be posted on Blackboard before the deadline date and time. Late submissions will have points taken off. PDFs preferred. Do Not post link to a Google Doc. Formatting for clarity is expected.

Grades will generally be posted to Blackboard within a week. If you fail to turn in an assignment, it will show on Blackboard Grade Center – I cannot follow up with you to ask about missing assignments.

### **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, homework that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

### **Attendance**

In-class exercises are essentially impossible to experience asynchronously, therefore missing more than 2 classes will lower your final grade. Being late or leaving early for more than 3 classes will also lower your final grade.

### **Classroom Norms**

- Please keep attention on the class, not on phones, other internet, other beings in your house, etc. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to the ensemble.
- Please wear clothing in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged.
- Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class, and our break. We will generally take an official break at the approximate halfway point of class. Other than that, you should be prepared to stay active in the class, both as performer and audience.
- Please don't eat or chew gum during class.
- Please stay upright unless the scene/activity calls for otherwise.
- Be honest with yourself about how and where you will do your best learning, and commit to it.

### **Zoom Etiquette**

- You must have Video on, unless the scene/activity calls for otherwise.
- Please keep the Zoom chat quiet during scenes/activities.
- You may be asked to stay UNmuted during certain activities, unless you have ambient noise you can't control.
- Having a quiet, private place in which to play is the most important Zoom setting there is! Preferably with a little space to move around. Improv can get wild, so set yourself up for success by not having distractions or an audience.

### **Synchronous session recording notice**

All synchronous class sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously.

### **Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment**

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

*SCampus Section 11.12(B): Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in*

relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

What happens in class, stays in class!

### Course Evaluation

Learning Experience Evaluations should be completed before the last class session, via the link USC provides.

*"Improv is so freeing because there are no bounds; there's no safety net. You just say something and get an instant response." –Nicole Byer*

### 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	1/21	Welcome/Introductions. Begin ensemble work. Syllabus review. Review rules of Improv. Begin scene work.		Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> , chapters 'Preface,' 'Introduction,' 'Some Terms,' 'Be Present,' 'Be Changeable' and 'Fight Well.'  Opening Reflection. 400+ words on: 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?
WEEK TWO	1/28	Tenets/Basics of Improv. Continue to review improv foundations. Games/ exercises to support basic improv structure.	Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> (chapters 'Preface' through 'Fight Well') for discussion.  Opening Reflection, posted to Blackboard before 3pm.	Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> , chapters 'Be Brave,' 'Top of the Scene,' 'Difficult People' and 'Be Authentic.'
WEEK THREE	2/4	Begin Character Work. Continue to review improv foundations, with emphasis on longer scene work. Begin character exploration. Schedule Warm-Up Leaders.	Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> (chapters 'Be Brave' through 'Be Authentic') for discussion.	Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> , chapters 'Be Funny,' 'Be Healthy,' 'Thoughts on Conventions and Forms' and 'Final Thoughts.'
WEEK FOUR	2/11	Physicality/Voice Exploration. Character work continued, including spectrum of reality work. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Warm-up Leaders begin.	Warm-Up Leaders begin — be ready for your assigned week.  Read <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth</i> (chapters 'Be Funny' through 'Final Thoughts' for discussion.	Bring one costume piece and one virtual background.

Week	Date	Topics/ Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
WEEK FIVE	2/18	Improvised Monologue presentation. Further character work within scenes.	Bring one costume piece and one virtual background.	
WEEK SIX	2/25	Character Work/Scene Work. Continuation of character work in scenes. Prep for midterm.		Prep for midterm — solo character work.
WEEK SEVEN	3/4	MIDTERM (part 1): Improvised character exercise "Four Through the Door."	Midterm Performance	Prep for midterm — solo character work.
WEEK EIGHT	3/11	MIDTERM (part 2): Improvised character exercise "Four Through the Door."	Midterm Performance	
WEEK NINE	3/18	Improv Types. Introduction to Improv types — discuss and explore, short-forms, long-forms, narrative, genre, alt, etc.		Written Response to Live Improv Show, unfamiliar genre strongly encouraged. Min. 600 words, prompts given in class/emailed.
WEEK TEN	3/25	Discuss attended shows. Improv type exploration, continued.	Written Response to Live Improv Show, posted to Blackboard before 3pm.	Prepare and plan presentation and written explanation of original improv format/game for performance purposes.
WEEK ELEVEN	4/1	Original improv presentations begin.	Present Original Improv Format/Games. Written explanation.	
WEEK TWELVE	4/8	Original improv presentations continued. Catch-up and coverage as needed.	Present Original Improv Format/Games. Written explanation.	
WEEK THIRTEEN	4/15	Review and rehearse games/formats. Learning Experience Evaluations. Rehearse. Establish show list and callers.		Prepare for Final Workshop.
WEEK FOURTEEN	4/22	WELLNESS DAY — NO CLASS		
WEEK FIFTEEN	4/29	Final Workshop — 4:30pm — details TBD.	FINAL WORKSHOP READY TO GO.	
FINAL	Tues 5/11 2-4pm	Discuss workshop. Character interviews.	Final reflection, due by 11:59pm, posted to Blackboard. Prompts TBD.	

*"Because what else are we going to do? Say no?  
Say no to an opportunity that may be slightly out of our comfort zone?  
Quiet our voice because we are worried it is not perfect?  
I believe great people do things before they are ready." — Amy Poehler*

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### 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](http://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, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call [studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

- Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

- Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call [studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

- Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298 [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

- Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.
- Non-emergency assistance or information.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298 [usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

- Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776 [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

- Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710 [campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

- Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101 [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

- Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

- Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)