

## 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 communication, creativity, imagination, self-expression, and the collaborative spirit.

This course may be taken for credit twice.

## Learning Objectives

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

1. Apply the "rules of improv" as they relate to relationship, storytelling, and performance;
2. Practice being present in their mind, body and spirit;
3. Evaluate improv performances for content and quality;
4. Empathetically discover human nature through character exploration;
5. Perform confidently in unscripted material;
6. Evaluate their own performance and participation with the intent of self-growth;
7. and relate the improvisational theatre tenets to their own personal and professional lives.

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

## Course Notes

Classes must be attended live and in-person (medical status withstanding), due to the collaborative, experiential, and performative nature of improv.

## 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, or at an on-campus location as schedules allow.

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

Blackboard will be updated regularly with announcements, readings, etc. Please check often. Blackboard help for students is at [studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu](http://studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu).

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### **Required Readings**

Students will be given pdfs and/or links throughout the semester which they are expected to read and retain for discussion. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

### **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.

### **Supplemental Readings**

- *Letters to a Young Artist* by Anna Deavere Smith
- *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
- *Improv Nation: How We Made A Great American Art* by Sam Wasson
- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* by Keith Johnstone

### **Supplemental Viewing/Watching/Listening**

- Live improv shows – there are several on-campus groups, and off-campus theatres; suggestions upon request
- TV shows with stage improv such as *Middleditch & Schwartz* and *Whose Line Is It Anyway*
- Improvised narrative film and television, such as Christopher Guest mockumentaries, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Murderville*, *Last One Standing*, among others
- Improv-centered podcasts such as *Comedy Bang Bang*, *The Hills of Baldwin*, *Spontaneanation*, *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*, among others

### **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.
- Family Member Monologue – You will write, rehearse, and perform a 45 second-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 truthful.
- Stranger Monologue – You will observe a stranger for at least 10 minutes – observe their physicality, vocal qualities, attitude. Write, rehearse, and perform a 30 second monologue as that person. Be specific.
- 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.
- Extended Team Improv (Midterm) – You will perform with teammates in an extended improv. Extended focus will be needed. Exact format to be announced.
- 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. Sharing of shows and group outings are encouraged!

- Final Jam – You will participate (choose format, announce, improvise) in a full "Improv Jam" performance. Final Jam may be recorded for you to view as part of our post-mortem, with the caveat that filmed improv is never as good as live improv.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
In-class exercises – presence, focus, attitude, willingness (2/class)	26
Character Monologue (Family Member)– written and performed	5
Character Monologue (Stranger)– written and performed	5
Self-Reflections (6 points each)	12
Live Improv Show Response	8
Midterm Team Extended Improv – comprehension, willingness, application of learned techniques	20
Final Jam – Skill level, growth, commitment, application of learned techniques	24
<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 as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time, and should be formatted for clarity and readability. Late assignments will not be awarded full points. Do not send links to Google Docs.

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.

### 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!

### Learning Experience Evaluation

Learning Experience Evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with me to offer any feedback on the course.

## Attendance

Being absent, late, or leaving early disturbs the important ensemble nature of this class, and in-class activity points will be deducted. You must be present and ready to work at the start of each class.

However, your health and the health of our community eclipses all! If your Covid-19 (or other virus) status precludes you from attending class in-person, I will attempt to conduct class as hybrid, and request you attend class LIVE via Zoom, with Camera On. I will not open the Zoom classroom unless you notify me via email before class begins. Travel and other scenarios are not grounds for attending via Zoom.

Extracurricular activities do not excuse you from class work. (Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university are exempt, with pre-submitted official documentation. See SDA Statement on Productions, ISPs, and Extra-Curricular Commitments below.)

## Classroom Norms

Devices – Engagement with cell phones and other electronic devices during class is prohibited. Cell phones should be left on silent in your backpack/bag (not pocket), away from your work in class. This is to encourage your focus, presence, and respect to your peers. Use of cell phones in class will negatively affect your in-class activity points for the day.

Attire – Improv is physical and can get sweaty; dress accordingly. Your clothing and shoes should allow you to move freely and comfortably. 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.

Eating – Open food and drink is not permitted in any SDA classroom. Absolutely no chewing gum, please dispose of before class.

Break – We generally do not take an official break during class. Please be prepared to stay in the room and active as both a performer and audience member for the entire 110 minutes of class. In the event of an emergency for which you must leave the room, observe theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors.

Strike – You are expected to restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

*"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.*

Most classes will begin with group work and warm-ups, exploring foundations of presence, physicality, focus, relaxation, concentration, imagination, storytelling, playfulness, and ensemble-building.

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
1	Wed Jan 11	Welcome/Introductions Introduction to warm-ups and theatre exercises. Begin ensemble and presence work. Syllabus review.		Read selections from <i>Bossypants</i> and <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> .

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
2	Wed Jan 18	Tenets/Basics of Improv The Only Lecture — please take notes! Class boundaries discussion. “YES, AND” exploration.	<i>Bossypants</i> and <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> read for discussion.	Write Self-Reflection #1. Prompts and detailed assignment description posted on Blackboard.
3	Wed Jan 25	Storytelling, Status, Space Work, Relationship Exercises focused on space work (using the space/stage and “pantomime”), telling individual and group stories, beginning character work through Status, and establishing relationship.	Self-Reflection #1, posted on Blackboard before class.	
4	Wed Feb 1	Physicality & Voice Exploration Beginning character work with voice and physicality, including gibberish and over-the-top work. Tenets of improv, continued.		Write and rehearse a 45 second - 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 truthful.
5	Wed Feb 8	Perform Family Member monologues. Further character work, within scenes.	Perform a 45 second - 1 minute monologue you wrote, playing a family member you know very well.	Observe a stranger for at least 10 minutes (set your timer!). Observe their physicality, listen to their voice. Write a 30 second monologue playing that stranger — what is happening to them that day? Be specific.
6	Wed Feb 15	Perform Stranger monologues. Continuation of character work in scenes.	Perform Stranger Monologues.	
7	Wed Feb 22	Practice open scenes, with details of character, location, story, etc.		
8	Wed Mar 1	Review and Practice Improv Basics		Prepare mentally for Midterm — review rules of improv.
9	Wed Mar 8	<u>Midterm Exam Performance (Extended Team Improv)</u> In-class performance of to be-announced improv format, with ensemble as a whole.	Midterm (Extended Team Improv) Today	
<b>Spring Break!</b>				
10	Wed Mar 22	Discuss Midterm. Games: Character/Experts/Styles Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on character, expert, and style games.		

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
11	Wed Mar 29	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. Prompts and detailed assignment description posted on Blackboard.
12	Wed Apr 5	Discuss Live Shows we saw.  Learn and rehearse more "games" for performance.	Written Response of Live Improv Show, posted on Blackboard before class.	
13	Wed Apr 12	Discuss format for Final Jam.  Rehearse in small groups. Learn more performance games as needed.		
14	Wed Apr 19	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?
15	Wed Apr 26	<u>Final Improv Jam!</u> Perform improv for each other, and possibly guests.  *Learning Experience Evaluations must be completed before class.	Final Jam Today	Review first self-reflection.
<b>FINAL</b>	<b>MONDAY MAY 8 — 2-4pm</b>	Discuss Improv Jam, Postmortem. Possible watch playback. Write Final Self-Reflection, prompts given in class.		Happy Summer!

*"Improvors connect for the same basic reason you and your friends connect. Say you meet someone. You like something about them and they like something about you. Your mutual interest begets mutual play. Play begets cooperation and mutual understanding, which, trampolined by fun, becomes love. Love is the highest form of play." – Sam Wasson*

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## SDA Statements On...

### **Productions, ISPs, and Extra-Curricular Commitments**

SDA productions, ISPs and extracurricular activities do not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

(Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.)

### **Student Support & Reporting Form**

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

### **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture**

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite (engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

#### **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 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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

#### **Statement for Students Needing Accessibility Services**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX), [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

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

In case of a declared emergency or 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, [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu).

### **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 & 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 [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)  
Title IX – 213-821-8298 [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.*

#### **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.*

#### **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 / Dept. of Public Safety**

Emergency: 213-740-4321 – 24/7 on call  
Non-emergency: 213-740-6000 — 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.*