

MOR 498 Leadership through Improvisation and Role Play

Syllabus – Spring 2024

M/W 2:00 to 3:50 pm – Room JFF 328 – Section 16671R – 4 Units

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Course Description

This course, co-taught by Marshall and the School of Dramatic Arts, provides students with the opportunity to understand the leadership process and develop their leadership skills through improvisation and role-playing exercises. Throughout the course, students will learn how improvisation and role play can enhance key leadership competencies, such as presence, communication, authenticity, empathy, and emotional intelligence. They will also gain an understanding of how improvisations and role-playing exercises can contribute to crucial leadership processes, including motivating and influencing others, leading teams, and navigating cross-cultural settings. Throughout the course, students will meet twice every week. The first weekly session will be led by Marshall and will focus on essential leadership concepts and processes. The second session will be conducted by the School of Dramatic Arts and will center on interactive theater exercises. Through role-playing and improvisation, students will have the opportunity to put leadership concepts into practice and develop their skills in a dynamic and engaging way. Overall, this course promises to be a unique and engaging experience for students looking to develop their leadership skills in a dynamic and exciting way.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Lead and make decisions in an open, agile, and flexible way.
- Foster creativity in groups.
- Interact spontaneously with others in leadership contexts.
- Communicate effectively in changing environments.
- Self-reflect on their own leadership development
- Explain the connections between their leadership development and improvisations

Required Materials

Selected readings from the following books included in the course pack:

- HBR's Ten Must Reads (2011), On Leadership. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Goffee, R. & Jones, G. (2019). Why should anyone be led by you? Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Course pack can be purchased for \$21.46 by clicking on the following link:

<https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1132201>

Readings on improvisation and presence (posted on Blackboard):

- Rules of Improvisation from Bossypants by Tina Fey
- Presence from Letters to a Young Artist by Anna Deveare Smith.

Prerequisites and/or Recommended Preparation:

None

Course Notes:

All copies of lecture slides and other class information will be posted on Blackboard.

Grading Policies:

CR — credit (passing grade equivalent to a C- (70%) quality or better)

NC — no credit (less than 70%, the equivalent of a C-)

Course Requirements:

Midterm Improv Exercise	20%
Final Jam Improv Exercise	20%
In-class Exercises	20%
Weekly Reflections*	40%

***AI Policy:** to maintain the integrity of the introspective process inherent in weekly self-reflections, students are required to personally author these reflections. The use of AI in crafting these reflections is strictly prohibited, as it undermines the development of self-analysis and personal insight, which are key outcomes of this course. Any use of AI in self-reflections will be considered a violation of academic integrity.

Description of course requirements:

Midterm Improv Exercise (20%): An improvisation exercise will be performed with teammates in an extended improv. Exact format will be discussed in class. Points are awarded for presence, focus, attitude, and willingness. **Appendix 1** includes a generic rubric for assessing improvisations.

Final Jam Improv Exercise (20%): Students will participate (choose format, announce, and improvise) in a full "Improv Jam" performance. Details will be discussed in class.

In-class Exercises (20%): Students are expected to actively participate in all class activities. 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 both on Monday and Wednesday sessions.

Weekly reflections (40%): Every week, by Sunday night (11:59 pm), students submit a brief reflection on their leadership development. The self-reflection prompt is as follows:

Reflect on your experiences from the week's leadership article, lecture, and improvisation session:

1. **Insight:** What is one key leadership insight you gained this week?
2. **Experience:** Describe a moment from the improvisation session that influenced your understanding or practice of leadership.
3. **Application:** How might you apply this week's insight or experience to your own leadership development?

Please keep your reflection concise and focused, aiming for clarity and brevity **within a 250-word limit**. Focus on the most impactful aspects of your learning and how they contribute to your leadership growth.

Course Schedule:

Week Starting on	Monday	Wednesday	Reading
1/8	Introduction to Leadership	Improv Day	HBR: What Makes a Leader
1/15	MLK Day: No Class	Improv Day	HBR: What Leaders Really Do
1/22	Leading with Passion and Imagination	Improv Day	HBR: The Work of Leadership
1/29	Leading with Presence	Improv Day	HBR: Crucibles of Leadership
2/5	Leadership Workshop #1	Improv Day	HBR: Level 5 Leadership
2/12	Communicating Leadership	Improv Day	HBR: In Praise of the Incomplete Leader
2/19	President's Day: No Class	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.1 (Be Yourself, More, with Skill)
2/26	Leading Authentically and Responsibly	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.2 (Know and Show Yourself Enough)
3/4	Leading with Empathy and Emotional Intelligence	Midterm Improv Exercise	WHY: Ch.3 (Take Personal Risks)
3/11	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	
3/18	Leadership Workshop #2	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.4 (Read and Rewrite the Context)
3/25	Influencing and Motivating Followers	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.5 (Remain Authentic but Conform Enough)
4/1	Leading Teams	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.6 (Manage Social Distance)
4/8	Leadership Workshop #3	Improv Day	WHY: Ch.7 (Communicate with Care)
4/15	Leading Inclusively and with Cultural Intelligence	Final Jam Improv	WHY: Ch.8 (Authentic Followership)
4/22	Leadership and Storytelling	Leadership Workshop #4	WHY: Ch.9 (The Price and Prize of Leadership)

Additional information:

Attendance. Students are expected to attend all classes. If a student needs to miss a class, the absence must be reported to the instructor prior to the class.

Course Communication: Blackboard. A Blackboard website has been created for this course at blackboard.usc.edu. You should check Blackboard on a regular basis. The course syllabus, PowerPoints, lecture notes, assignment information, and additional course materials will be posted on this site throughout the semester. Since e-mails sent to the class originate from the Blackboard system, it is your responsibility to ensure that my emails are forwarded to your preferred email account such as your personal Gmail account.

Open Expression and Respect for All. An important goal of the educational experience at USC Marshall is to be exposed to and discuss diverse, thought-provoking, and sometimes controversial ideas that challenge one's beliefs. In this course we will support the values articulated in the USC Marshall "[Open Expression Statement](https://www.marshall.usc.edu/about/open-expression-statement)" (<https://www.marshall.usc.edu/about/open-expression-statement>).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, comprises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Appendix 1

This rubric is intended to assess improvisations that involve two or more students in the context of the leadership through improvisation course. The rubric is designed to be flexible and can be adapted to fit the specific goals and objectives of the improvisation being evaluated.

	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds	Score
Leadership	Students do not demonstrate decision-making, problem-solving, delegation, motivation, or other relevant leadership	Students demonstrate decision-making, problem-solving, delegation, motivation, or other relevant leadership skills.	Students demonstrate sophisticated decision-making, problem-solving, delegation, motivation, or other relevant leadership skills.	20%
Creativity	Students do not generate and develop creative ideas in their improvisation.	Students generate and develop enough creative ideas in their improvisation.	Students generate and develop many creative ideas in their improvisation.	20%
Adaptability	Students do not adapt to unexpected situations nor others' styles.	Students adapt to some unexpected situations or others'	Students always adapt to unexpected situations and others' styles.	20%
Communication	Students do not communicate effectively in changing situations by using clear verbal and non-verbal language.	Students communicate effectively in most changing situations by using clear verbal and non-verbal language.	Students communicate effectively in all changing situations by using clear verbal and non-verbal language.	20%
Reflection	Students do not contribute to the group assessment of performances immediately after the improvisation, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.	Students contribute to the group assessment of performances immediately after the improvisation, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.	Students actively and insightfully contribute to the group assessment of performances immediately after the improvisation, clearly identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and creative achievable opportunities for improvement.	20%
Points possible				100%