



January 2018: Improvisation for Comedic Storytellers

Instructor: Matt Hovde

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Class Time & Day: Tuesdays, 1:30pm - 4:45pm, Room 207

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12pm - 1:30pm (Second City Training Center, 4th floor)

Course Description and Overview:

This course focuses on building a foundation for comedy improvisation as it pertains to creating cinematic stories. Students will develop the skills to work in a collaborative environment steeped in the tradition of Chicago-style techniques and philosophies. Fundamental improvisational concepts such as give-and-take, surrender, support, mirror, explore-and-heighten, environment, object work, scenic structure, character and choices, will be explored in-depth and applied in scenes.

This is an experiential class - meaning the skills are best learned in action. There will be discussion on the theory behind the fundamentals, but to learn creation one must...create. The environment is supportive, constructive, and playful, and feedback is often offered in real-time. We will put an emphasis on process as opposed to product, so while laughter is our currency, there is no pressure to "be funny." Instead, we will practice and develop skills in how to use this art form to explore the human condition through a series of theatrical exercises, scenes, and games. The approach will honor the original work developed by Viola Spolin while incorporating modern technique and perspective.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Collaborate effectively in service of the ensemble
- Apply the vocabulary of improvisation
- Demonstrate the ability to start a scene and move it forward
- Construct characters and premises that evoke truth in the human condition
- Identify scenic structure containing a beginning, middle, and end

Textbooks: There is no required textbook needed for this course.

D2L

You will be using D2L for this course. To log on, go to:

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home/650286> and enter using your campus connect login and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, weekly assignments, etc.

Grading:

Class Attendance and Participation:	30 points
Assignments:	40 points
Final In-Class Demonstration and Paper	30 points

A 100-93

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D 69-60

F 0-59

Attendance:

In class attendance and participation is mandatory for this class. An unexcused absence will result in a reduction in the overall grade. Two instances of tardiness (arriving more than 15 minutes late or departing before class is finished) will count as one absence. If you are ill and contagious, please do not come to class, but you must notify the instructor prior to the class in order for that absence to be excused. You get one of those, if needed. If you have longer term health issues, please reach out to the Dean of Students office to discuss options. Excuses provided after the fact will not be accepted.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Ensemble, Group Mind, and Play

Exploration of:

The Chicago style

Collaboration

Adopting the mindset of play

Active listening

Agreement

Yes, and
Starting Scenes

Week 2: Ensemble, Story, Scene Work

Surrender and Trust
Leading/Following
Sharing Focus
Group Creation
Non-Verbal Communication
Basic Scene Work

Week 3: Building Blocks of a Comedic Premise

The Who, What, Where
The ?
Core scene structure
Comedic Lenses and what makes a scene interesting

ASSIGNMENT: Create a premise grid. (10 points)

Week 4: Deeper Who, Emotion, Connection

Establishing relationship
Emotional expression
Emotional variance
Surrender
Connecting to your scene partner

Week 5: Character as a building block

Defining Character
Character Generator techniques
Internal/External Characters
Point of View

ASSIGNMENT: Character Description. (10 points)

Week 6: Deeper Where/What

Hot Seat
Object Work

Establishing a location
Collaborative scene painting

ASSIGNMENT: Location Description. (10 points)

Week 7: More Where, Explore and Heighten

Connecting Character to Environment
Using emotion
Exploring Verbal details
Exploring physical details
Heightening Stakes/Games

Week 8: Relationship

Status
Relatable premises
Variations on relationships
Coached Explore and Heighten
Connecting to scene partners
Sustaining Characters

ASSIGNMENT: Relationship Description. (10 points)

Week 9: Beats.

Review 5 points
Finding beats in scenes
Scene Tag
Using improv to explore structure
Collaborative development

Week 10: Putting it all together, Final Demonstration

Establishing strong first beats
Games
Terminology Review
Final Demonstration (to be outlined by Instructor)
Attendance of Touring Company Show as part of final project. Attendance Mandatory.
Show is 8pm-10:45pm on Monday, March 11, Second City Mainstage

Assignments (40% of final grade)

There are four written assignments that must be completed, each worth 10 points. They must be turned in before the next class begins. Late submissions will not be accepted. Documents must then be saved as a PDF and submitted to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link. If there is a communication or problem with D2L, please inform instructor immediately to rectify.

Attendance, Collaboration and Participation (30% of final grade)

Attendance has been covered. Collaboration is contingent to your commitment to the process and working successfully with your peers. Lack of participation is not acceptable. Sharing your voice by asking questions and supporting your peers during improvisation group work engages you in the process as an active participant. Negative, destructive, or disrespectful behavior toward the ensemble or individuals will result in a lowered grade. Feedback on these issues will be offered in real time.

Final Term Project (30% of final grade)

There are three components to your final project:

1. An in-class demonstration outlined by the instructor during week 10 (10 points)
2. Attendance at a Second City Touring Company show during Week 10 (10 points)
3. A written analysis of elements of Improvisation as reflected in the touring company show. The instructor will provide a list of prompts to guide the analysis, and may include some balance of objective observation and personal taste/point of view. This paper will be due the week of finals. (10 points)

Changes to the Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Please see <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx> for additional information.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at

<https://offices.depaul.edu/oaa/faculty-resources/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar.

Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at:

<http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (<http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>). Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

Retroactive Withdrawal

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM.

The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter

Winter Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter

Spring Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

Summer Terms: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

Students with Disabilities

DePaul University is committed to ensuring equal access to its educational and extracurricular opportunities for students with disabilities. The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) offers reasonable academic accommodations and services to support our students. We also serve as a resource to the many university departments that have a responsibility to accommodate students.

Please see <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx> for Services and Contact Information.

