



**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.



