

March 2020

Course Title: SCWR 470 601: Improv Comedic Storytellers

Instructor: Dionna Griffin-Irons, phone: 312-664-4032 ext. 3577

Email address: dgriff27@depaul.edu, dgriffin-irons@secondcity.com @dionnagirons

Class Time & Day: Tuesdays, 1:30pm –4:45pm (Online)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30 - 12:30pm and 3:30pm - 5:30pm (virtual online access until Second City locations are re-opened)

Course Description:

This course lays the foundation for successful improvisation in the current Chicago style, starting with the formation of the ensemble and exploring various elements of the creative process. Students experience what it means to be part of the greater whole, create freely without self-judgement, and develop tools of play that will make them better communicators and filmmakers.

Course Overview:

- Online structured activities around individual and group experiential play, discovery, with discourse among student and instructor on Second City's legendary process and improv philosophy
- Each class implements a creative (communication) tool, assigned reading and/or archive scene selection featuring Second City alumni that is deconstructed in a variety of critical responses for filmmaking
- Students are challenged to expand their comedic sensibility engaging in a variety of highly interactive improv exercises based on Viola's Spolin's work and by exploring Second City's creative processes, work created on the resident stages by alumni to further understand the abundance of ideas for devising comedy and comedic stories. Our methods include utilizing individual self awareness and group mind through active manipulation of Who/What/Where, (Exposition) to form new ideation and develop "out of the box" narratives for comedic premises that can be used in filmmaking
- A final in-class demonstration (pending space return availability) or online presentation is required. Students are invited to attend or watch a live two act Second City revue by a resident ensemble cast.

This course includes up to three invited Second City guest actors and/or performers, directors from the resident stages to share their knowledge and tips for crafting comedy and social/political satire with a moderated online Q & A.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Understand the fundamentals of improv scene work as taught by Second City
- Recognize the building blocks of a comedic premise
- Demonstrate the ability to create collaboratively using Yes And...
- Employ the tools of active listening, surrender and creative play
- Execute the first beat of an improvised scene
- Construct and identify components of a Second City revue with critical analysis on Second City archive scenes

Textbooks: There is no required textbook needed for this course. Recommended and assigned readings, interviews, podcasts and/or handouts will be provided by the instructor each week.

D2L

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

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home/650286> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, video lectures (if applicable), discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc. Zoom meetings are held weekly for online classes meeting each Tuesday at 1:30pm. If you are using a mobile app, please be sure to download the app prior to class to give you access and limit technical difficulty.

Assignments will include weekly video submissions and improvised activities taking place during the video conference. Additional improvised scene work will be scheduled in organized Break Out sessions using zoom technology.

Grading:

Class Attendance 30%

Collaboration and Participation 20%

Assignments 20%

Final In-Class or Online Demonstration and Paper 30%

A 100-93

A- 90-92

The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in an EXCELLENT manner.

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a VERY GOOD manner.

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a SATISFACTORY manner.

D 69-60

The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a POOR manner. (A grade of D will not fulfill the requirements in a major field of concentration)

F 0-59

The instructor judged the student NOT to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course.

Attendance:

Online attendance and participation is mandatory for this class. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class, arriving more than 15 minutes late to class or departing before class is formally dismissed, will constitute a reduction in your overall grade. Absent students will be required to participate in a make-up assignment where they will respond to a specific exercise or topic posted by the instructor. Weekly participation in group forum discussion boards is also required from assignments outlined by the instructor.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Hybrid Online Learning

This course will be delivered using a hybrid model, featuring a blend of asynchronous and synchronous online learning. For the asynchronous portion of the course, the lecture, scene readings, and assignments of the week can be accessed on your own time via the D2L Content page and must be completed by an assigned due date. For the synchronous portion of the course, you will log in using a Zoom Video Conferencing link provided by the instructor for

weekly small group discussions of the assignments and lectures. These one-hour meetings are held within the class period time frame of Tuesdays 1:30pm – 4:45pm Central Time.

Class 1, March. 31: Course Introduction: The Intersection of Second City Improvisation and Comedy Filmmaking

Relevant Exercises Lecture/Demo:

Second City history

Viola Spolin influence

Surrender of Ego

Individual Trust and Group Mind, Object Work Activity Solo and Partner

Intro to Mirror, Object work, Space reality

Discussion Forum

Satire at Second City

Read/Listen to assigned SC interviews

Course Assignment:

Read Viola Spolin's Improvisation for the Theatre 3rd Edition pp 3-17, Creative Experience

Read Mick Napier's, Improvise Scene from the Inside Out, "How to Improvise" pp 17 - 20

Journal Entry 1 - Surrender of Ego

Class 2, April 6: Building Blocks of Scenes – Exploring the Who, What, Where (W,W,W)
Creating scene work with improv fundamentals for filmmakers.

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Discussion:

What Makes a Good Scene?

Silent Scenes, Floor Plans, Object work

Building Environment, Details in Storytelling

Give and Take in simple scenes

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 2 - Observe your daily connection to objects and space

Watch Second City archive footage featuring classic scenes (Shower, Chairs, Waiter)

highlighting object work, silent tension, character involvement in space

Show a character in space utilizing connection to environment and object work

Class 3, April 13: Creating Abundant Ideas Using Yes And...Breaking the Rules

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:

Connection to Space and Environment

Exposition in silent scenes
Space Walk/physical exercise on Heightening and Building
Relationships with Active Listening exercises
*Invited Second City guest actor/director

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 3 - What is your connection to environment and space?
Watch Second City alumni interview and archive scene
Read assigned text "Improvise Scene From the Inside Out"
Share feedback in discussion forum

Class 4, April 20: Utilizing Emotion and Creating Simple Characters in Storytelling

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Warm-up exercises
Eye Contact and Active Listening exercises
Yes And... Pitches for scenes and film ideas (Divide into Group work A & B)
Group "Spot" Improv (Physical and Vocal)

Simple Scenes with "Explore and Heighten"
Emotion exercises and group collaboration
Introduction to Characters

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 4 - Agreement: How often do you say, "Yes"?
Watch Second City archive footage and share feedback in discussion forum
Assigned reading on Yes And...philosophy

Class 5, April 27: Getting Grounded in Scene work with Characters for Film and Narrative Storytelling

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Warm-up Exercises
Discovering Characters through Internal devices
Status
Point of View
Wants/Intentions
Discovering Characters through External devices
Centers
Energies
Props, Costumes
Sustaining a Character within a scene

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 5 - Write a character observation of three characters

Listen to SC alum interview

Think about the characters in your life and share post from writing prompt in discussion forum

Assigned reading on Characters by Viola Spolin (Improvisation for the Theatre, 3rd edition)

Assigned reading on Context and Scenes

Class 6, May. 5: Discuss Second City classic archive scenes featuring character work written by SC alum

*Invited Second City guest actor TBA

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:

Warm-up Exercises

Review Character work and scenes in-group discussion

Comedic premise discussion and handout

Characters we love and hate

In class discussion > Divide into break out groups to review comedic premise, character wants/intentions and Who/What/Where

Archive Scenes and Footage for Viewing:

Trailer

Humidifier

Porches

Baseball

Bachelorette

Planter

Art Lovers

MSN

High Rise

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 6 - Brainstorm and write 3 funny stories/sketch ideas

Assigned reading from John Vorhaus's Comic Toolbox on comedic premises

Brainstorm 3-5 comedic premises and upload to D2L submission folder. Share your ideas and process on discussion board

Class 7, May 12: Understanding Where Point of View Comes From for Filmmakers

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Warm-up Exercises

Review of Status, Relationships, Intentions/Wants – Character Discoveries
Where I'm From... Exercise
Tragedy + Time = Comedy (Personal narrative)
Approaches to Truth in Storytelling and Scenes (assigned reading TBD)
*Invited Second City guest actor or director TBA

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 7 - What is my Truth and POV?
Create Where I'm From Poem from writing prompts and upload to D2L submission folder

Class 8, May 19: Exploring Truth and Vulnerability in Comedic Scenes with a Filmmaker's Eye

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Review archive scenes that focuses on Truth and Vulnerability
Montages, Monologues and Rants
Cast scenes, Ensemble Games
Scene work review and analysis

Archive Scenes and Footage for Viewing

Cancer
Billie
Honesty Song
Mother and Son
"Revelation Will Not Be Televised"
Additional Scenes TBD

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 8 - Personal Rant or What Pisses Me Off in the World?
Watch archive scenes and SC interview
Assigned Reading TBD

Class 9, May 26: Incorporating "Scenic Games" to Find the Funny for Filmmakers

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Oscar Winning Moment, Town Hall
Scene Tag, Rewind, Conducted Story with Styles
Simple Scene Drills, Montage Scenes, Living Newspaper
Review any additional past week concepts
*Invited Second City guest actor or director TBA

Course Assignment

Journal Entry 9 - Create a Sample Sketch Show
Watch SC blackouts and scenes
Brainstorm 3 blackout ideas
Assigned Reading TBD

Class 10 and 11(Final Papers Due), June 2 & 9: Final Class Presentation and Wrap-up.
Attend Second City Touring Company Show for Final Paper*.

Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:

Warm-up Exercises

Recap of Improv fundamentals and terminology

Groups will present an in class demonstration and presentation of scenes, pitches and characters for review

*Attend live two act performance of a Second City revue (mandatory attendance or viewing for final paper)

* Writing prompt and guidelines for the final paper will be passed out on this day.

Assignments (20% of final grade)

The instructor will communicate a topic, archive scene and/or exercise for you to write, pitch, discuss and review with specific details regarding character, scenic style, POV. Your response must be presented as indicated by the instructor. If it is a written assignment or pitch, your response must be a minimum of 100 words, double-spaced typed Word document pages. The document must then be saved as a PDF and submitted to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link by the assigned due date or handed in class. There are a total of four assignments due in weeks 3, 5, 6 and 9. There are two required show attendances during weeks 8 or 9. Please inform your instructor immediately if you are not able to attend the required shows. If there is a communication or problem with D2L, please inform the instructor immediately to rectify.

Collaboration and Participation (20% of final grade)

Collaboration is contingent to your commitment to the process, group ensemble and taking individual risks in the exercises and working successfully with your peers. Lack of participation is not acceptable. Improvisation is built on discovery and working collaboratively with the group to achieve a goal. Sharing your voice by asking questions and supporting your peers during improvisation group work engages you in the process as an active participant. Group discussion will be administered with completed assignments that are due upon the arrival of class. Late assignments or failure to submit timely assignments will affect group participation and grade.

Final Term Project (30% of final grade) Due: Tuesday, June 9 at 1:30pm by submitting to D2L. Please cc dgriffin-irons@secondcity.com as a backup.

There are three components to your final project:

1. An in-class group demonstration and collaboration of simple scenic structure outlined by the professor
2. Attendance to a Second City show live (if permissible) or watching a two act Second City revue online.
3. Personal reflection paper identifying three or more improv concepts provided by the professor

The writing portion of your final should be an analysis discussing the improv concepts used on stage and/or learned in the classroom and how these create useful devices in film, storytelling and character narratives. The instructor invites you to share your opinion of the scenes with specific examples of what you witnessed on stage and why you connected with the scene and character point of view and message.

Attitude

A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

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/oa/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

Excused Absence

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss class due to illness or significant personal circumstances should complete the Absence Notification process through the Dean of Students office. The form can be accessed at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/forms.html>. Students must submit supporting documentation alongside the form. The professor reserves the sole right whether to offer an excused absence and/or academic accommodations for an excused absence.

Incomplete

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. CDM policy

requires the student to initiate the request for incomplete grade before the end of the term in which the course is taken. Prior to submitting the incomplete request, the student must discuss the circumstances with the instructor. Students may initiate the incomplete request process in [MyCDM](#).

- All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval.
- If approved, students are required to complete all remaining course requirement independently in consultation with the instructor by the deadline indicated on the incomplete request form.
- By default, an incomplete grade will automatically change to a grade of F after two quarters have elapsed (excluding summer) unless another grade is recorded by the instructor.
- An incomplete grade does NOT grant the student permission to attend the same course in a future 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.

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to attend each class and to remain for the duration. Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student. The overall grade for participation drops one-third after any absence. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course.

Class Discussion: Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the reading to participate in class discussion.

Civil Discourse: DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.