



March 2022

**Course Title:** SCWR 370 601 1065: Comedic Improv for Filmmakers

**Instructor:** Dionna Griffin-Irons, phone: 312-802-0242

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**Class Time & Day:** Tuesdays, 1:30pm –4:45pm

**Location:** **Second City Training Center - 230 W. North Ave. 2nd Floor Room 207**

**Office Hours:** Mondays Tuesdays and Wednesdays 1:00pm - 3:00pm (by appointment)

**FINAL:** Monday 06/07/2022, 1:30pm

### 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 in comedic storytelling. Students experience what it means to be part of the greater whole, create freely without self-judgment, and develop fundamental tools of play that will make them better communicators and filmmakers. These creative tools will be used for pitches, ideation and creation of comedic stories.

### Course Overview:

- Structured activities around individual and group experiential play, discovery, character development, with thoughtful discourse among students and the instructor on improv philosophy, curated archive scenes and its application to film and storytelling.
- Each class implements a creative (communication) tool, assigned reading, journal reflection, interview, and/or archive scene for reflective response and deconstruction.
- Students are challenged to develop a variety of ideas into comedic premises and sketches that explore their unique voice, development of characters, relationships, and topical ideas while exploring their humor and sensibility, that highlights their voice and truth
- A final project culminates with a group presentation that includes a show running order, original written blackouts, sketches and choice of scenic games.

### Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Understand and identify the fundamentals of improvisation in comedic scenes
- Recognize the building blocks of a comedic premise and sketch
- Demonstrate the ability to collaborate and move scenic ideas forward
- Create characters and relationships that represent point of view and perspective
- Construct and pitch simple scenic writing ideas using improv strategies
- Identify and develop comedic tools and scenic games in storytelling

### Term Projects and Assignments:

1. A 500 word written critical review of a live improv comedy show (Paper 1 20%)  
-Deconstruct the show, characters, “game of the scene”, and patterns. What worked well for humor and storytelling? How does this storytelling relate to your comedic sensibilities?
2. Multiple scene pitches (improvised object work, character, and environment) (Pitches 10%)  
-One pitch for three characters (live and/or recorded)  
- Up to three pitches for a solo and/or two person scene
3. A 3-5 page paper on a select SC archive show and/or TV/ film series (Paper 2 20%)
4. A performance of self-generated material. A ½ hour demonstration of short form improv games with peers. (Performance 25%)
5. Weekly reflection writing, group engagement and discussion ( Collaboration and Participation 15%)

**Textbooks:** There is no required textbook although readings, scripts and screenings will be a regular part of the class. Copies will be provided by the instructor on D2L.

### D2L

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

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home/829658> 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, course outline, video lectures (if applicable), discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc. 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 be uploaded to D2L. If you are having any technical difficulty, please reach out so that I can support you.

### Grading:

Class Attendance 10%

Collaboration and Participation 15%

Show Performance 20%

Weekly Pitches, Improvised Assignments 15%

Paper 1 - 20%

Paper 2 - 20%

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:**

Attendance and participation is mandatory for this class. We are building a creative ensemble. 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 ensemble work, collaboration, research and/or discussion boards is highly encouraged and required for key assignments. Be present and share your creative voice and work.

## A note from the instructor:

This syllabus is designed to cover a variety of improvisation and comedic tools to inspire your creative muse and charge your writing muscles to ignite your comedic voice.. We create and “write on our feet” in class. As such, I create spontaneous ideas, scene initiations and character games “on the fly” based on what I read and hear from YOU. These moments are not included in this document. We will adjust content and move things around as needed. I’m delighted to be your guide. Trust the process.

Note: We will be wearing masks per instruction from DePaul University for the first two weeks of class for extra safety.

## COURSE OUTLINE:

### Week 1, March 29:

Philosophy of Improvisation

Second City History Group Quiz

Ensemble, Permission, Risk, Rules

Warm Up - Spolin games

Demo - Group Mind, Object/Environment, “Yes, And” exercises

Satire at Second City

Assigned Reading: Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out

### Week 2, April 5:

Characters Drive the Story

#### Relevant Exercises and Lecture

What Makes a Good Scene?

Warm Up - Silent Scenes, Environment

Demo - Agreement, Give and Take, Mirror Principles

Viewing: Second City archive scene

#### Course Assignment

Assigned Reading: Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out

Writing prompt 1

Experimenting with environment and object work (Silent Scene w/Activity)

Upload to D2L

### Week 3, April 12:

Establishing Cinematic Worlds with Environment and Character

#### Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:

Connection to Space and Environment

Warm Up - Initiations

**Demo** - Scenic Games, Active Listening in Two-person Scenes

Viewing: Second City archive scene

\*Emotional Reaction

### Course Assignment

Assigned Reading

Writing prompt 2

**Pitch #1** Ideate and Pitch up to three Characters for yourself

Upload Character pitches to D2L

Upload Silent Scene with Music added to D2L

### Week 4, April 19:

Utilizing Character Emotion in Storytelling

**Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:**

Warm-up exercises

**Demo** - Black Out samples

**Pitch #2** Ideate and Pitch Two Person Scene and/or Blackout Ideas

\*Explore and Heighten, Raise the Stakes, Exaggeration Discussion

### Course Assignment

Writing prompt 4

Additional Pitches and Improvised Scenes

Upload Scene pitches to D2L

Assigned Viewing and Reading > The Comedy Toolbox

\*Second City show!

### Week 5, April 26:

Building Your Relationships

**Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:**

Warm-up Exercises

Scenic games, line drills, idea generations

**Demo** - Switch Games to highlight Edits and Beats in a Scene

### Course Assignment

Writing prompt 5

Attend Second City show TBD

Show Review Paper Due to D2L the following week

Break Out comedy viewing (additional viewing option)

### Week 6, May 3:

Exploring More Environment with Relationships

#### Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:

Warm-up Exercises

Comic Toolbox Discussion with SC archives

**Demo** - Scenic and Line Games, Tag games

Group Work - Comedic Premises

### Course Assignment

Writing Prompt 6

Second City revue paper due

Upload to D2L

Assigned Reading: The Comic Toolbox

### Class 7, May 10:

Point of View, Beats and Theatricality

#### Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:

Warm-up Exercises

Comic Devices, Conflicts and Worlds

**Demo** - Topical News, Social Media and Social Issues > Pad Set/Montage

Group Work - New scene pitches using Comic Tools and relevant news for characters.

\*A portion of class time may be devoted to spontaneous blackout and mobile filming.

### Course Assignment

Writing prompt 7

Assigned Reading: The Comic Toolbox

Revisions on blackouts/comedic premises

**Pitches 2** - Using material generated from class, upload up to three inspired ideas for characters, scene ideas. Write the beginning beats of the scene. Up to three pages

Upload to D2L

\*A portion of class time may be devoted to scene development and casting with mobile filming as needed.

### Class 8, May 17:

Structure to Support Scenes

**Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:**

Warm-up Exercises

Demo - Review Comic Toolbox

Group work/Discussion - What is the Story Arc, Transformation, Conflict?

Grad/undergrad group work collab

Comedic scene and story in a Running Order

Archive and series episode viewing featuring Second City alum

**Course Assignment**

Writing prompt 8

Upload new character work generated from group discussion and review

Revise any past scene pitches - Upload to D2L

Connect with a grad peer for direction and feedback of work.

Add scene ideas on discussion board and solicit feedback from 2-3 peers

**Class 9, May 24:**

Curating the Comedic Elements & Structure

**Relevant Exercises and Lecture/ Demo:**

Warm-ups - Game review, running order discussion

**Demo** - Creating an RO and rehearsing intros, presentations

Create Games List

Group work on structure and RO

\*A portion of class time may be devoted to RO structure and scene development/casting needs.

**Course Assignment**

Writing prompt 9

Upload a draft Running order of a devised 30 minute sketch show to D2L

Post a version of your RO on the discussion board for peer viewing and feedback

Memorize your RO and intros

**Week 10, May 31**

Structuring a Show

**Relevant Exercises and Lecture/Demo:**

Warm-up Exercises w/ Ensemble leads

Setting the Show

Collect ROs

Final Presentation discussion & Group Work

**Course Assignment**

Writing prompt 10

Make up work due  
Memorizing RO and Intros  
Finalize any work with peers as needed.

### **Week 11 June 7:**

Final Class Presentation Part II (as needed)  
Final Papers due 5:30PM  
Upload to D2L

### **Assignments and Pitches (15% 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. Review each week on D2L for specific details for readings/viewings, and writing assignments. This also includes required online viewing of archive scenes throughout the course. Please inform your instructor immediately for makeup if you are not able to complete an assignment to avoid penalty or reduction of points or percentage from grade. If there is a communication or problem with D2L, please inform the instructor immediately to rectify.

### **Collaboration and Participation (15% of final grade)**

Collaboration is integral to our creative process. You are encouraged to take individual risks in the exercises and “dare to discover” the unknown with your peers. Improvisation is built on initiation, support and agreement. You will learn by doing and not aiming for perfection. Instead aim to support and build together. Share your voice, ask questions, and be an active participant. Late assignments and lack of participation may affect your grade and outcome of the intended class goal.

**Final Term Project/Presentation (20%) Due: Tues. June 7 at 1:30pm by submitting to D2L. Please cc [dgriffin-irons@secondcity.com](mailto:dgriffin-irons@secondcity.com) as a backup if needed.**

### **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.

### **COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions**

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty and staff are expected to (1) wear a mask as required at all times while indoors on campus; (2) refrain from eating and drinking in classrooms; (3) keep current with their COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions; (4) stay home if sick; (5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing; (6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who do not abide by the mask requirement may be subject to the student conduct process and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office. Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

**Respect for Diversity and Inclusion** at DePaul University as aligned with our Vincentian Values At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore "what must be done" in order to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each human person. We value diversity because it is part of our history, our traditions and our future. We see diversity as an asset and a strength that adds to the richness of classroom learning. In my course, I strive to include diverse authors, perspectives and teaching pedagogies. I also encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. I am open to having difficult conversations and I will strive to create an inclusive classroom that values all perspectives. If at any time, the classroom experience does not live up to this expectation, please feel free to contact me via email or during office hours.

**Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns** Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need.

For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at <http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

### **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>

### **Withdrawals**

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 and exercises.

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.