



Spring 2022: 371-601 / 471-601 Comedic Improvisation for Filmmakers II

Instructor: Catharine Savage

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Class Time & Day: Wednesdays 1:30-4:45pm

Office Hours: Mondays 9:30-11am, zoom

Course Description and Overview:

Strong character work is essential to creating memorable comedic content. This course gives students a wealth of tools to create a variety of cinematic characters, and will build confidence in improvising and writing them, which we will come to see as linked toolsets.

Additionally, the course will help students understand how improvisation helps us to describe characters for written treatments common in the business. They will continue to build on the fundamental skills of collaboration, play, and active listening while bringing more of themselves into their writing.

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 Objectives:

- Create characters from a variety of starting points and techniques, including external and internal foci
- Demonstrate sustainable characters that are based in truth and have a three-dimensional emotional life
- Distinguish between a character's point of view, the actor's point of view, and the scene's point of view
- Recognize the difference between roles and behaviors in scenes
- Develop a repertoire of characters that can be integrated into scenes

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: 15 points

Final Written Project: 15 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

Additional note about grading:

Students in this graduate class may opt to change the grading basis for any or all of their courses to Pass/D/Fail. A grade of Pass (P) will indicate that the student's work met expectations for a grade of at least C-. Work that would merit a grade of D+ or D in the traditional grading basis would still earn a D+ or D. Work that does not merit a passing grade will earn a Fail (F). The Pass/D/Fail grading option may apply to any graduation requirement.

Attendance:

Attendance and participation is mandatory for this class. It's a "do stuff" class, so to learn the skills you have to be in class doing. An unexcused absence will result in a reduction in the overall grade. Three instances of tardiness (arriving more than 15 minutes late or departing before class is finished) will count as one absence. If you are ill or need a wellness day, notify the instructor prior to the class in order for that absence to be excused. You get one of those, if needed, without impacting your participation grade. If you have longer term health issues, please reach out to the Dean of Students office to discuss options, and see below for the policy on Covid.

Respect for each other in our ensemble:

We owe it to each other to create an environment where we all feel welcomed, heard, and supported in our growth. Behaviors which target marginalized groups or individuals will not be tolerated. As we explore creative content, it is possible we will touch on subjects which are challenging. We must strive to embody empathy, civility, and mindfulness, and use those moments as opportunities to examine intent and impact.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Ensemble, Introduction to Character, Emotion

Defining Character Role vs Behavior Emotion

Subtext

Scene skills diagnostic

Week 2: External Characters, Characters in TV/Film Bibles

Body
Energy
Mirror
TV Character breakdown
Coaching
Pitching improv scenes

ASSIGNMENT 1: Write a character breakdown from a pilot of a TV show you haven't seen before. (10 points)

Week 3: Internal Characters
Wants
Playing characters inside of a premise

Week 4: Internal Characters part II, TV/Film Ensembles
More wants
Self Monologues

ASSIGNMENT 2 (in class): Create an ensemble show and improvise scenes from it. (10 pts)

Week 5: Play
Scene work reps
Game in character work

ASSIGNMENT 3: 2 Written Character Monologues (10 pts)

Week 6: Persona Characters
Characters with a leading thing

Comedy Q&A

ASSIGNMENT 4: Podcast/Video Character Monologue (10 pts)

Week 7: Genre Characters
Tropes
Physicality
Cliche
Breaking Cliche

Week 8: Point of View
Satire
POV - author, character, scene
I believe (or not)
Writing for others

ASSIGNMENT 5: Write a scene from the in class exercise (10 points)

Week 9: Flex and Reps.
Review concepts
Extra reps in areas of need
Pushing your range

Week 10: Putting it all together, Final Demonstration

Additional Character reps

Final Demonstration (to be outlined by Instructor)

Assignments (40% of final grade)

For this quarter, I am building in a flex element to the assignments. There are a total of 5 assignments over the course of the quarter. You will need to complete 4 out of the 5, for up to 10 pts each. In other words, you get to opt out of one assignment, if you need/want to, with no penalty to your grade.

If you would like to do all the assignments (which I encourage), I will give you credit for the 4 highest scoring of the assignments, and you'll get a +1 point on your final overall course grade.

At home assignments should be turned in before the next class begins, unless prior arrangements have been made with me. Despite these being unusual times, the profession of writing is a deadline business, so I want us to emulate that in our approach to this class. If stuff comes up, reach out, but let's strive to think of ourselves as writers-on-demand, who can find a way to get stuff in on time.

Documents must 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. 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 two components to your final project:

1. An in-class demonstration outlined by the instructor during week 10 (15 points)
2. A written assignment that will be due the day of the scheduled final exam (there will be no final exam). (15 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.

Covid Protocols

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).

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>

Original Work

All assignments are to be completed by students in their own words and voice. You may not copy from the internet or any other source. Plagiarism is never acceptable, and in the world of comedy it is especially egregious, as the whole point is to develop your own comedic voice. If your work is found to be taken from someone else, you will earn a zero for that assignment and must meet with the instructor before continuing the class.

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

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.