



**September 2021**

**Course Title: SCWR 370:Comedic Improvisation for Filmmakers**

**Fall Quarter 2021/2022**

**Instructor:** Catharine Savage

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**Class Time & Day:** Mondays, 5:45pm - 9pm Room 207 - The Second City Training Center

**Office Hours:** Thursdays 10:30am-12:00pm, online

### **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, storytellers, and filmmakers.

### **Course Overview:**

While this course includes discussion and analysis of the fundamentals of improvisation and scenic creation, improv is best understood during the exploration of play itself. That improvised play will take place in a supportive and pressure-free environment where students will be able to put into practice the techniques created by Viola Spolin. These techniques teach skills that have been utilized for decades to create dynamic, organic comedy as well as strengthen listening, communication, and collaboration.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- Understand the fundamentals of improvised scene work as taught by The Second City
- Demonstrate the ability to create collaboratively

- Employ the tools of active listening and scenic exploration
- Recognize the inspiration and building blocks of a comedic premise
- Execute the first beat of an improvised scene

**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 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-90

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D 60-69

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. 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**

Each class may include lecture/discussion, participatory exercises and demo, group collaboration, and archive scene viewing. Additional viewing or reading may be uploaded on D2L.

**Week 1:** Course Introduction - Ensemble, Group Mind, and Play

Discussion: History of Improv & The Second City  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Yes And, Ensemble/Group Mind  
Agreement  
Sense of Play  
Collaboration

**Week 2:** Listening, Give & Take, Scenic Story  
Discussion: Discovery vs. Invention in Storytelling  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Listening, Focus  
Non-Verbal Communication  
Giving and Taking Focus/Sharing Focus  
Basic Scene Work

**Week 3:** Building Blocks of Scene Work  
Discussion: What Makes a Scene Funny  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Establishing Who, What, Where as Foundation  
Who, What, Wear to start scenes  
Three Lines Scenes  
**Homework: Premise Creation**

**Week 4:** Establishing the “Who” - Character Creation  
Discussion: Character as Comedic Engine  
Warm Up  
Exercise: POV, Emotion  
Discovering Point of View  
Emotion as Motivation  
Character Connection to drive scene

**Week 5:** Exploring the “Who” - Character Exploration/Discovery  
Discussion: Character Journey and Relationship  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Relationship to Other Characters/Transformation  
Surrendering to partner’s initiations  
Reacting to discovery  
Character transformation is scenic transformation  
**Homework: Character Monologue**

**Week 6:** Creating from “What” and “Where”  
Discussion: Location/Action as Comedic Tool  
Warm Up

Exercise: Scene Painting, Activity Serving Scene  
Scenes w/ Monologue Characters  
Establishing and using a location  
Action in scenes

**Homework: Location Description**

**Week 7:** Relationship

Discussion: How to use relationship to mine comedy  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Status, Variation on Relationships  
Sustaining Character

**Week 8:** Scenic Beats

Discussion: Beats and Heightening  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Heightening as Transitions  
Strong Beginnings  
Coached Explore and Heighten

**Homework: Beat Sheet**

**Week 9:** Beat Sheets

Discussion: 5 point scene structure  
Warm Up  
Exercise: Improvising with a beat sheet  
Stay open to play and discovery with a beat sheet  
Collaborative premise generation

**Week 10:** Attend Second City Show

Resident/Tour Co Show Attendance - Day/Time TBD - Final Paper will be a written analysis of the scenic premises included in this show (Further paper details will be provided by instructor)

**Final Paper - Premise Analysis of SC Show due by class time on Monday, November 22**

**Week 11:** In-Class Demonstration

Discussion: Bringing all scenic elements together  
Warm Up  
Final Scenic Demonstrations (to be outlined by instructor)

### **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 the instructor immediately to rectify.

### **Attendance, Collaboration and Participation (30% 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.

### **Final Term Project (30% of final grade)**

The final project contains three elements:

- 1) Attendance of a Second City revue during Week 10 (10 Points)
- 2) An in-class demonstration in week 11 which will be outlined by the instructor (10 Points)
- 3) A written analysis of the scenic elements included in The Second City revue. The instructor will provide prompts to inform the paper's focus, which should reflect both objective identification of scenic elements learned in class and subjective observations and opinions of the scenes performed in the SC revue. This paper will be due week 11. (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.

### **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. We strive to include different perspectives and teaching pedagogies and encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. We are open to having difficult conversations and 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 the instructor via email or during office hours.

## **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 [Online Teaching Evaluations | Assessment & APRC | Leadership Resources | DePaul University Academic Affairs](#) for additional information.

## **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.

## **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at [Academic Integrity | Faculty Resources | DePaul University Academic Affairs](#)

## **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: [Policies and Procedures](#)

## **Incomplete Grades**

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. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at

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

## **Withdrawal**

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system [HERE](#). 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 Term: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

## **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 [Policies & Procedures | Office of the Secretary](#)

## **Students with Disabilities**

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations:

- Loop Campus (312) 362-8002
- Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677
- Email: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu)

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see [Center for Students with Disabilities | Departments | About | Division of Student Affairs](#) for Services and Contact Information.