THEATR-126 IMPROVISATION
12397 – COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS

INSTRUCTOR: Matt Gourley
TERM: Fall 2014
CREDIT HOURS: 2.00
MEETING TIME: MW 10:15 - 12:15
CONTACT: matt.gourley@canyons.edu

PREREQUISITE: None
LOCATION: STCN-130
OFFICE HOURS: W 2:30-4 in STCN-130

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Introduces the history, theories, principles, and practices of theatrical improvisation, including exercises, games, and situational scenes designed to hone performance skills.

REQUIRED TEXT:

TRUTH IN COMEDY: MANUAL OF IMPROVISATION

- Edition: 1994
- Author: HALPERN
- ISBN: 9781566080033
- Publisher: MERIWETHER
- Estimated Student Price:
- Print, rental (if available): $8.80

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Hicks: Chicago Comedy
- Johnstone: Impro
- Sweet: Something Wonderful Right Away
- Coleman: The Compass
- Libera, ed: The Second City Almanac of Improvisation

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

LECTURE: Analyze and critique improvisational scenes according to the principles of improvisation.

LAB: Perform an improvisational scene, sketch or scenario applying principles of improvisational performance.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

As with any class at COC, you will learn critical thinking and will be able to apply concepts at college level. You will meet these additional objectives along the way:
LECTURE:

1. Explain the basic history of improvisational training in America.
2. Differentiate key terms and concepts of improvisational acting.
3. Examine qualities of successful improvisation.
4. Explain the importance of applying principles of improvisation to scene work.
5. Appraise improvisation performances.
6. Analyze self and others’ ability to demonstrate the basics of improvisational acting.

LAB:

1. Demonstrate the ability to work within an ensemble.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of improv fundamentals through exercises and scene work.
3. Create original improvisational scenes through effective development of scene, story, environment and character.
4. Formulate improvisational style utilizing ‘who, what, where, and when.’

GRADING SCALE:

This course is point-based, with 100 total possible points.

- Participation 25 points
- Performance Skills 20 points
- Midterm Performance Skills Exam 15 points
- Midterm Written Exam 15 points
- Final Performance Skills Exam 15 points
- Written Improv Performance Critique 10 Points

PARTICIPATION:

Get involved. Don’t be afraid to fail. You are expected to attend class and to participate. You can’t learn improv just by reading a book. Class participation is the only way to assess how well you’re learning the theory and developing the skills necessary for improvisation. Also, improvisation is an ensemble effort. No one should feel exempt from or above any particular exercise. There are two ways you are expected to participate: in exercises and scenes as well as in discussion of the lecture material and scene content. If you’re in doubt about whether you’re participating enough, then please participate more.

PERFORMANCE SKILLS:

About a third of the way through class I will meet with you individually and discuss what areas of improvement I’m looking for in your scene work/participation. At the end of the semester I will assess whether you have taken steps to address those elements.

PERFORMANCE SKILLS EXAMS:

You will be given two written exams in which you will be asked to comment on fellow students’ scene work choices and details.
MIDTERM WRITTEN EXAM:

You will be given a multiple-choice exam on the general history and fundamentals of improvisation.

WRITTEN IMPROV PERFORMANCE CRITIQUE:

You will write a critique of one performance of a professional improv troupe of your choosing. I will provide you with suggestions of some groups whose performances you may want to attend. Distance from Santa Clarita varies, as does the cost. You will be evaluating the performance in terms of the skills and vocabulary learned in class. I will provide further details during the semester. Spelling and grammar matter! HINT: Increase your critique grade by getting help from a real, live person. Visit The Learning Center (TLC), adjacent to the Library. Learn more about the TLC here: http://www.canyons.edu/offices/tlc/

HOW I WILL HELP YOU SUCCEED:

My main goal as your instructor is to help you succeed. In this class, success is defined as improvement, progress, and innovation. Mistakes are viewed as a necessary part of the learning process.

- Mistakes are okay and even welcomed as long as you’re learning.
- I want you to understand the process of your work, not just memorize the rules.
- I really want you to enjoy learning new things.
- I will recognize you for trying hard.
- I will give you time to explore and understand new ideas.

ABSENCES AND TARDINESS:

All classes begin at their respective start times. Arrive ahead of time so that you are settled in and ready to warm up right at the start time. Excessive tardiness will lower your participation grade. When you are absent, you will not receive participation credit for any work you miss, and you cannot make up these credits, since the class will have moved on.

ASSIGNMENTS:

You must complete assigned readings and written assignments on time if you want full credit. I will accept assignments one class late for half credit. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out whether I have given an assignment, what it is, and to hand it in on time. If you are absent on the due date, you must deliver the assignment at the first class session to which you return. You cannot make up a missed group exercise.

EXAMS:

There are no make-ups for any exam. In the event of an emergency, and at my sole discretion, I may give a make-up exam at the TLC. Should an emergency occur, official documentation by an outside authority (physician's letter, hospitalization, police report, etc) is mandatory. You must notify me prior to the exam via email. If you are absent for the final, you’re out of luck; there is no make-up final under any circumstances.
SUBJECT MATTER:

While I ask you to work from the top of your intelligence, it is unavoidable in comedic improvisation that foul language and risqué, or otherwise controversial subject matter will arise from time to time. I cannot prohibit such behavior nor be responsible for you taking offense when it occurs. I do appreciate you using any adult content for character development and not for the sake of a joke, shock value, or a cheap laugh.

CLASS CONDUCT:

Your full attention is required throughout each class, even when you are not engaged in performing an exercise. You will learn from watching your fellow students and from listening to discussion comments. You will discover that you can develop a good eye for the required techniques with careful observation of your peers’ work.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Lack of honesty in the classroom is considered a very serious offense. Any form of cheating on tests, turning in of work which is not one’s own (plagiarism), talking during tests, furnishing false information to instructors or knowingly misrepresenting one-self to the college is grounds for disciplinary action. The consequences of cheating are severe and may include the possibility of expulsion. Disciplinary action can include the following: warnings, reprimands, probation, suspensions, expulsion, restitution, and loss of financial aid.

INSTRUCTOR BIO:

Matt Gourley has performed with The Upright Citizen’s Brigade, Second City, Improv Olympic, and ComedySportz and has been featured on Comedy Central’s Drunk History, slurring his way through thoughtful retellings of Watergate and the Alamo. Other television credits include Attack of the Show, Ghost Ghirls, NBC’s World Cup Comedy, and Quick Witz. A classics enthusiast, Matt has appeared at numerous Shakespeare festivals throughout the country. Some of his favorite roles include Mercutio, Bottom, Orlando, and Horatio. Matt also co-created the popular Superego podcast as well as the Superego web series for Adult Swim.