

**SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY  
THEA 3304 ADVANCED ACTING - IMPROVISATION**

FALL 2016  
Tuesday/Thursday  
9:30am – 10:45am  
FAB 105 Studio Theater

Bret Scott, Asst. Professor  
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Regular Office Hours:  
9-10AM MWF, on walk-in basis  
All others by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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All acting is reacting. In order to react, you must listen.

But for a scene to take place, something has to happen, right? Otherwise you've just got a bunch of actors on the stage all...listening...to each other. In most cases, the playwright takes care of this by writing objectives and dialogue for the actors to follow – the action of the scene is known before you ever enter the scene, and you (ideally) have rehearsed your dialogue, blocking, and action.

But in improvisation, there is no script. No one knows what's going to happen next.

So you walk out onto a blank stage knowing nothing. If you don't listen, you can't know how to react. But if you don't do *something*, your partner has nothing to react *to*. This bit of circular logic is the central conflict in improvisation – what I like to call the beautiful art of making stuff up.

The goal of this class is to place you, the actor, so squarely “in the moment” that you'll always know exactly how to react to your scene partner, whether you are working with a script, or, as we say in improvisation, “without a net.”

You'll be spending most of your time on stage in ensembles of seven or eight, and together we'll explore this thing called “improv.”

**Student Learning Outcomes**

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*The graduating student will demonstrate*

- 1) Knowledge of eras and contributions made throughout Theatre History and Musical Theatre History.

*Additionally, the graduating student with a concentration in Acting/Directing will demonstrate:*

- 2) The ability to express themselves creatively through appropriate theatrical performance
- 3) The ability to analyze a script.
- 4) The ability to work creatively with actors and technicians in mounting a laboratory theatrical production.
- 5) The ability to apply standard requirements to all aspects of technical production.

*Additionally, the graduating student with a concentration in technical/design will demonstrate:*

- 6) The ability to apply all approaches to the theatrical design and rendering of the design.
- 7) The ability to address all technical aspects of a theatrical production.

*Additionally, the student will be able to:*

- 8) Describe the theater process and compose a functional definition of the theatre event.
- 9) Describe the close link between theatre and religion.
- 10) Name the basic responsibilities and roles of the playwright, director, actor, and designer in the theatre production
- 11) Have a basic understanding of the difference between tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, epic, and absurdist theater.
- 12) Describe the uniqueness of the theatre art.
- 13) Understand and describe the elements necessary to bring about a unified production.
- 14) Identify a variety of theater spaces.
- 15) Know the names and works associated with key figures in the theatre.
- 16) Demonstrate an understanding of acting, directing, playwriting, or design in the areas of set, sound, or makeup.

## **REQUIRED TEXT**

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*Improvise. Scene from the inside out* Napier, Mick, 2015.

Meriwether Publishing Ltd; Second edition

ISBN-13: 978-1566081986

ISBN-10: 156608198X

## **COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

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- 1) Your positive attitude is the difference between success and failure in art, in life, and in this class.
- 2) You will be on time. Which means, at minimum, five minutes before start of class.
- 3) You will be on your feet EVERY class. Dress to move in clothes you're willing to sacrifice – you'll be on the floor, in the air, carrying each other, etc. What this means, practically:
  - a. Men: No shorts. Take a shower.
  - b. Women: if you wear a skirt or dress, wear bike shorts underneath.

- c. BOTH: NO flipflops, NO open toes, NO high heels. No loose jewelry. Tie your hair back and get it out of your face.
- 4) Come to class ready to play. If that means getting up an hour before and guzzling coffee, do that.
- 5) Refer to Mick Napier’s “Advice and Guidelines for improvisers” *Improvise*, Napier, pp 88-97.

### **PREREQUISITES**

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Whatever theater classes are required to qualify for Advanced Acting status – see catalog or Prof. Dona Roman if necessary.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of this class, students will:

- Demonstrate a working vocabulary of terminology of improvisation
- Demonstrate beginning mastery of long-form improvisation
- Articulate the skills needed for a successful improvisational scene.
- Evaluate and critique improvisational work from the standpoints of both art and craft.
- Synthesize the elements of improvisational work as they apply to scripted acting.

### **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

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- 1) Terminology / Definitions Quiz
- 2) Mid-Term Paper
- 3) Full participation in class discussion / critique
- 4) Final Performance

### **Materials Required:**

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None

**CLASS DATES: Assignments and Deadlines**

*Note that these dates and the details of each class are subject to change at the instructor's discretion, as class progress warrants.*

DATE	TOPICS/ACTIVITY	READING
8/23	Syllabus. Expectations. What is improvisation? Group mind exercise – Read Mick's <i>Advice to Actors</i> aloud and discuss.	Napier PP 1-13
8/25	Trust Us, This Is All Made Up	
8/30	Scenes	
9/1	Scenes	Napier 14-36
9/6	Montage	
9/8	Montage	
9/13	Intro Harold	Napier 37-47
9/15	Openings	
9/20	Openings	
9/22	Group scenes	
9/27	Group scenes	
9/29	Harold	
10/4	Harold	
10/11	Harold	Napier 47-57
10/13	Scenes	
10/20	Group Scenes	Napier 58-71
10/25	Harold	
10/27	Harold	
10/28	Harold	
10/30	Harold	
11/1	Short Form	Napier 72-87
11/3	Short Form	
11/8	Scenes – Taking care of yourself	
11/10	Scenes – Taking care of yourself	
11/15	Harold	
11/17	Harold	
11/22	TBD	
11/24	NO CLASS – HAPPY FOOD COMA DAY	
11/29	Harold	
<b>12/1</b>	<b>Dead Day – NO CLASS</b>	
<b>12/5</b>	<b>MONDAY 8AM - FINAL EXAM</b>	

## **GRADING**

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Assignments are valued as follows:

1) Quiz	5%
2) Midterm Paper	25%
3) Participation and attendance	25%
4) Final Performance	45%

### **Grading Criteria:**

A = Exceptional. Demonstrates mastery of material beyond expectation. Professional quality of work. Highest level of scholarship.

B = Above average. Demonstrates mastery of material. Work is of better-than-expected quality, but not quite professional. High level of scholarship.

C = Average. Demonstrates proficiency with material. Work is of amateur quality. Ordinary level of scholarship.

D = Below Average. Less than proficient with material. Work shows errors, careless mistakes, or is just plain wrong. Poor scholarship.

F – Failure. Material incomplete. Work grossly negligent or incomplete. No evidence of scholarship present.

### **LATE PAPERS**

Deadlines are an inescapable part of responsible, professional, adult life. Late papers will lose a letter grade for each day that the paper is late.

If you discover, *a week or more in advance*, that you have multiple deadlines converging on the same day, you may request a change in deadline. Such a change may be granted at the instructor's discretion. Once the deadline has passed, it's too late to ask for exceptions. Manage your time and deadlines wisely.

### **TARDINESS / ABSENCE POLICY**

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Attendance is 25% of your grade. That's the difference between an "A" and a "C"...or a really easy way to earn an "F."

### **TARDINESS**

Class **BEGINS EXACTLY AT THE APPOINTED TIME**. It is your responsibility to be prepared to begin **BEFORE** the class starts.

Three instances of tardiness is equivalent to one absence. See below for the class absence policy.

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO DENY ENTRY TO STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT PRESENT AT THE START OF CLASS\* – ON THE HOUR. **PLAN ACCORDINGLY**. ON-TIME is EARLY!

\*Exceptions will be made only for those with classes located in RAS whose end time makes on-time arrival impossible.

Punctuality is essential in this business. Tardiness will not be tolerated.

Absence Policy, from the Sul Ross State University 2012-2014 Course Catalogue:

## **CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Regular class attendance is important to the attainment of the educational objectives of the University. Each instructor will keep class attendance records, and the instructor's policy on class attendance will be explained at the beginning of the semester or term.

The instructors will drop a student from a course when the student has a total of nine absences. A student will be dropped for excessive absences in remedial courses after nine absences.

An absence is defined as non-attendance in fifty minutes of class; for example, non-attendance in a one and one-half hour class will constitute one and one-half absences and non-attendance in a three hour class will constitute three absences. An absence because of participation in an official University activity is considered to be an authorized absence.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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*Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1973. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility services. Students seeking accessibility services must contact Mary Schwartze M.Ed., LPC in Counseling and Accessibility Services, Ferguson Hall, Room 112. The mailing address is P.O. Box C-171, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832. Telephone: 432-837-8203.*