

PRDV 397 Improv for Peak Performance: The Art of Allowing (0.5 Credits)

**Syllabus – Winter 2016**

**Class Time:** Wednesday, 6-9pm (January 6<sup>th</sup> –February 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Class Location:** The Garage, 2311 Campus Drive, Suite 2300

**Instructors:**

Joe Holtgreive, Assistant Dean, McCormick Engineering  
(jjh@northwestern.edu),

Byron Stewart, Applied Theatre Consultant  
(byron@dramaticdiversity.com)

**Office Location:** Tech L268

**Office Hours:** By appointment.

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

Introduce students to the techniques of improvisation, to help free them to trust their instincts and make quick decisions in improvised scenes from life. Learn how these same techniques can be applied to help them meet real life challenges more skillfully.

**Course Description:**

This course is a highly interactive demonstration of how students can apply the philosophies and techniques of improvisation to other aspects of their lives. Through class discussion, theatre games and improv scenes, students develop tools to make them more trusting of their own instincts and to be more “in the moment” with others. Throughout this course, assignments will be given to allow students the opportunity to apply class material in a practical manner. With a combination of lecture/discussion, improvisation skills building, and directed scene work students will:

- Develop basic improv skills.
- Learn how improv can be used as a “workout” that helps shake loose rigid patterns of thinking and doing.

- Learn improv skills that will help students express themselves and to connect to others in a more immediate way.
- Learn the relationship between intention, attention, and awareness.
- Learn how attention can be used as both a tool and fuel to cultivate accurate and productive awareness, creating the conditions for peak performance.
- Learn to incorporate specific improv scene direction.
- Discover how to assess what information most accurately and reliably responds to the needs of the character, the action, and the audience.
- Discover how play stimulates the mind and enhances personal knowledge of one's self.
- Learn to take feedback in a positive progressive manner.
- Work effectively with a partner and in teams.

### **Course schedule:**

This course outline/schedule is tentative. The instructors may need to change the dates, times and assignments as deemed necessary.

### **Pre-work:**

Survey monkey - Personal Goals Questionnaire (due by December 30<sup>th</sup>)

Survey Monkey - Pre-class Survey (due before first class)

### **Week 1**

Reading Assignment - Prologue and Maxims 1-3

Complete the *Substitute zen-like attention for planning* exercise on page 38 of your text.  
Submit - a 500-800 word essay on your reactions/observations of the exercise.

Complete and be prepared to discuss the *Change the location of a familiar activity* exercise on page 51 of your text.

- Maxim #1: Say "yes"
- Maxim #2: Don't prepare
- Maxim #3: Just show up
- Improv games – for skill building
- Scene work – in groups and pairs with feedback



## **Week 2**

### Reading Assignment - Maxims 4-6

Complete the *Study other people* exercise on page 75 of your text. Submit - a 500-800 word essay on your reactions/observations of the exercise.

- Maxim #4: Start anywhere
- Maxim #5: Be average
- Maxim #6: Pay attention
- Improv games
- Scene work

## **Week 3**

### Reading Assignment – Maxims 7-9

Complete the *What would not get done if you were not here?* exercise on page 87 of your text. Submit - a 500-800 word essay on your reactions/observations of the exercise.

Complete and be prepared to discuss the *Make a point of thanking people for thankless jobs* exercise on page 95 of your text.

- Maxim #7: Face the facts
- Maxim #8: Stay on course
- Maxim #9: Wake up to the gifts
- Improv games
- Scene work

## **Week 4**

### **Reading Assignment – Maxims 10-12**

Complete the *Become a guardian angel* exercise on page 125 of your text. Submit - a 500-800 word essay on your reactions/observations of the exercise. Add pictures and/or bring in your work.

Complete and be prepared to discuss the *Experiment with the principle of bricolage* exercise on page 112 of your text. Add pictures or/and bring in your work.

- Maxim #10: Make mistakes, please
- Maxim #11: Act now
- Maxim #12: Take care of each other
- Improv games
- Scene work

## **Week 5**

### **Reading Assignment – Maxim 13**

- Maxim #13: Enjoy the ride
- Improv games
- Final Scenes/Performance

**Course Policies, You are expected to:**

- Attend every class and be on time
- Turn off mobile devices and laptops during lectures
- No eating or open beverage containers
- Participate in class discussions
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes
- Build group trust and an atmosphere of support
- Trust your instincts and have fun

**Required Text book:** Improv Wisdom, Patricia Ryan Madson, Belltower, NY, 2005

**Recommended texts:**

Theater Games for the Lone Actor, a handbook, Viola Spolin, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 2001

Additional course readings will be supplied in various formats: handouts, links or videos -A sketchbook/notebook dedicated to this class is required and will be graded.

**Electronic Communication:** Checking e-mail daily is a requirement of the course. The class has a Box folder for submitting assignments. All assignments should be uploaded in PDF format unless otherwise instructed. If you do not receive an invitation to the Box folder by the second class, it is your responsibility to notify your instructor.

**Attendance Policy:** Students who are actively engaged in class sessions are more likely to be successful. You are expected to attend each class session and to be on time. If you are sick, especially contagious, do not come to class. This is an excused absence. Notify the instructor via e-mail. Students who accumulate 3 or more unexcused absences may be asked to withdraw from class and/or risk receiving a failing grade. After 2 unexcused absences your grade may be adjusted downward one letter grade for each additional absence.

**Grading:**

Attendance, and class participation (50%),

Reaction/Observation Papers (25%),

Final class project/presentation (25%).

### **Late Assignments**

In the **UNLIKELY** event that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, you must let us know at least one class period before the due date in order for an extension to be considered. An assignment that is handed in after class on the due date will be penalized 25% of the total points earned. If the assignment is not turned in by the end of the following class period, 50% will be deducted from the total points earned. The lesson here is turn it in on time! This will help us get things back to you faster. Please note that the last day we will accept work is the final day of class. This is to ensure ample time for grading before the quarter ends.

### **Students with Disabilities**

In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations. For more information, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/disability/>

### **Academic Integrity at Northwestern**

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak with me before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment-at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply. For more information, visit: [http://www.scs.northwestern.edu/student/issues/academic\\_integrity.cfm](http://www.scs.northwestern.edu/student/issues/academic_integrity.cfm)

### **Discrimination and Sexual Harassment**

Northwestern University's Policy on Discrimination and Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy apply to all members of the University community, including students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes that he or she has been discriminated against or harassed on the basis of his or her race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship, or veteran status should contact the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services at (847) 491-7458 or the Sexual Harassment Prevention Office at (847) 491-3745. Additional information about the University's discrimination and harassment policies, including the campus resources available to assist individuals with discrimination or harassment concerns, is available online at: [www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment](http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment) and [www.northwestern.edu/hr/eeo](http://www.northwestern.edu/hr/eeo).