School for New Learning

1. **Program Identifier: SNL BA**

2. **AI 247 Stage Improvisation and Game Playing**
   Winter 2017

3. **Faculty:** John Starrs
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4. **Hours:** 5:45 – 9:15 pm
   Mondays, 01/02/2017 - 03/13/2017

5. **Location:** Loop Campus

6. **Course Description:** This class will afford the student the opportunity to practice improvisation through the medium of a "Theatre Games Workshop." These games provide a structure by which and through which spontaneity can happen on stage. The Workshop provides the "Where" (Setting), "Who" (Characterization), and "What" (Story, plot, action), as well as the "What's beyond" (off stage setting and action). All these make up the theatrical playing, the trial and error of dramatic learning and imaginative problem solving. Competence in improvisation helps students to develop a number of skills that are important in workplace environments. Students in the course learn to solve problems together, reach goals together, and have fun together. Improvisation helps students to be productively spontaneous. Through their work in the course, students learn to trust their intuition as it comes to the fore in meeting a challenge or in arranging a meeting. Finally, the individual emerges from the course with an amazing confidence, particularly in the area of public speaking. Along with the Workshopping, the student can expect to look at the history and sociology of this form as well as at learning through imagination.

4 Credit Hours

7. **Learning Outcomes, Competencies, and/or Objectives**
   Students should leave the course with an enhanced awareness of themselves at play, on stage and off. The student can expect to be familiar with the ancient and recent history of the forms and with a context for this kind of theater and the student should sense imaginative learning as a palpable experience. More confidence in public situations will be a bonus. Identify what students will know and be able to do by course end, overall and specifically by competency and/or outcome. These will include the college or program approved
competencies or outcomes for the course. Program coordinators will determine the order in which outcomes and competencies are listed.

Competencies Offered:
A-1-X: Written by student/faculty.
A-2-A: Can create an original work of art, explore its relationship to artistic form, and reflect on the creative process. Reminds us to reflect on the creative process at each step of the way and then in retrospect. This meta-process is most important.
A-3-D: Can assess the assumptions and implications of a significant thinker's ideas about work or leisure. Calls upon the student to read "significant thinkers" on the subject of leisure or the subject of work and to summarize their thinking on possibly contrasting subjects, and to be aware how this theory affects the student's own ideas.
A5 Can define and analyze a creative process. Creativity as process. See Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theater*, pp. 3-17

8. Learning Strategies & Resources
Learning strategies will include some lecture (I hope not too much); discussion of readings from texts, Leisure, Commedia dell’arte, history of Compass and Second City and more. Group work on each of the competencies to come up with presentation of group findings, and Workshop.
Self assessment:
Questions to be examined in writing, will be assigned after mid-term. Readings will be suggested from Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater*. Research into the meaning of the word 'leisure' and history of the Commedia dell’arte will be assigned. Techniques and criteria for evaluating each competence: the primary need is for participation, because the heart of the course is a "hands on" theater games workshop.

9. Learning Deliverables
Evidence the Students Will Submit:

A-3-D Students will follow a group process that should lead them to an understanding of this competence and a method of communicating this knowledge to the rest of the class and to the instructor. All resources and papers found along the way as well as an orderly collation will also be submitted.

A5 Students will research the subject of Creative Process and report to rest of the class. Describe all graded assignments and deliverables, their due dates, their required components, and their link to specific course competencies/outcomes. For online courses provide the absolute deadline for the course closure after which no additional work will be evaluated. For cross-over courses, distinctions between graduate and undergraduate assignments and deliverables must be identified.

The A-2-A sketch presented toward the end of class with a short list of the where (the setting), who (the characters and the actors from the class), and what (the beginning of
the stage action). The sketch will be discussed by class instructor in terms of where, who and what and the successes, joys and shortcomings of the place. This work is primarily experiential.

A-1-X student/faculty written interpreting this theater art form.

10. **Assessment of Student Learning**
   **Criteria for Assessment:**
   A. Self-assessment is the primary way we will assess progress and proficiency and competence in this class. Students will prioritize assignments, group work and workshop processes (leading to the product of the student sketches). They will decide what is most important, what is least. The instructor will guide the grading process but will not grade unless he feels there has been a mistake or an under- or over-estimation. The instructor will step aside from but oversee the assessment, evaluation, and grading.
   B. Overall participation in the workshop and group processes will be considered very important. The outcomes have much to do with how the student understands spontaneity, theater games, and improvisation on an experiential level. All assignments have to do with this experiential knowledge but will cover other forms of learning and will repeat important concepts in various ways.
   C. Narration gives us a way to assess the various forms of learning as well as attempts made by the student which may contain successes the student is not aware of. Narration covers approach, interest, level of awareness, sharing, caring for the others in the groups and the class, individual style, and abilities which may not appear directly connected to the subject matter and evolution of this matter.

11. **Grading Criteria & Scale**
   Instructor does not weight each course requirement as such. Participation is most important. This course is primarily a workshop and experiential learning is essential. Theater games are the tools of this workshop. Students are encouraged to get up on their feet and move and play. Play is everything in this work; in play we find and enjoy spontaneity.
   Self-assessment becomes the manner of grading. When students reach spontaneity, they know it and grade themselves accordingly. Self assessment is reviewed by Instructor.

12. **Course Schedule**
   **Session 1**
   Introduction: Imagination and the Improvisation Workshop. Groups chosen to begin a process of comprehending and presenting competencies.

   **Session 2**
Non-Verbal Communication on Stage. Games and exercises. Group meetings. Readings assigned.

Session 3
What was/What is: Commedia dell’arte/Compass/Second City/Leisure. History discussed. Groups meet.

Session 4

Session 5

Session 6

Session 7

Session 8
Storytelling, Begin Sketches. Group presentations due.

Session 9
Student Sketches will be conceived, directed and acted.

Session 10
Student Sketches will be conceived, directed and acted.

The schedule/outline is subject to change during the course dependent on class progress and this will be communicated both in class and by email as necessary.

13. Course Policies
This course includes and adheres to the college and university policies described in the links below:

- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Incomplete Policy](#)
- [Course Withdrawal Timelines and Grade/Fee Consequences](#)
- [Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability](#)
- [Protection of Human Research Participants](#)
14. Course Resources
   University Center for Writing-based Learning
   SNL Writing Guide
   Dean of Students Office

15. Instructor Brief Bio
   John Starrs is an actor, story teller and performance poet. His graduate study in theatre took place at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. He has performed in Washington, NYC and in several theatres and poetry venues in Chicago. Mr. Starrs performed in the first touring company of The Second City. He worked with Bobby Curie in Hyde Park in their own company. He played in a show directed by Paul Sills, the founding Artistic Director of The Second City.

   Insert brief overview regarding instructor qualifications and experience as it relates to the topics, outcomes, and/or competencies of this course.