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# IMPROVISATION ONSTAGE!

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### **Improv class final essay**

Improv is a fantastic concept that is very relevant in everyday life whether people want to believe it or not. The true beauty in improv is not the laughs that emerge from the audience, but in the practice of it. Simply just putting yourself out in the tremendous discomfort of an improv scene is a feat in itself. However, if we are talking about laughs and the comedic part of improvisation, the comedy comes from the realism of each scene. The biggest mistake many people make is the seeming necessity for swearing, drug references, and obscene actions in order to make others laugh. The true comedy of improv comes from the relation to real human interactions and tendencies. The fact is, real life is funny. So actually, if your life does surround drugs and swearing (which I do not recommend), then by all means you will be funny in a scene that involves that because that is your reality. On that note, improv brings a root of functionalism with it. Functionalism, developed by William James (father of American psychology), is the function of behaviors and how adaptable they are to an environment. Improv is incredibly functional to a real life environment.

We, as a class, had talked about why we think this class deserves to be a part of the CSB/SJU curriculum and its credibility of being a four-credit class. As with any other argument, there are pros and cons to it. The cons being that we have little homework assigned and the overall focus for students in the class is roughly three hours a week on average. This hurts our ability to say that this class is a credible course for true university education, but, as I said before this class does bring an important aspect that most, if not all other classes at CSB/SJU do not bring, functionalism. Practicing improv is so functional to real life, that one can actually

make the argument that you get more out of an improv class for your confidence than any other course at CSBSJU. If I go to class and am lectured on brain functions involved with opiate drugs, did I take more away from that class than I did at a normal improvisation class?

Absolutely not. Improv class necessitates participation in the most accountable way involving inflection and changing of voice, moving your body, and thinking quickly. After improv class, you walk to a place that you have a relationship with and everyday, you improvise what your relationship is to certain places, people, or concepts. Everyday this changes based on the uncertainty of human life. Improv brings this real-life uncertainty and makes it into a practice. What better class to take when trying to improve confidence, especially social confidence?

I would recommend this course to a friend because of its functionality of true life behaviors and what this functionality had shown me through this class along with my prior experience in the Attention-Starved Children is that my life experience is my comedic material. In my life, I have always done voices and crazy characters that I always thought were very funny. In improv comedy specifically, finding true value in your own comedy is one thing, but when you can bring audiences into your own weird little world is even greater and is what I am still working on as an improvisational comedy performer. I never have a problem with making others laugh based on what I think is funny, but sometimes I let my negative self-talk get in the way of the value I am learning which is that what you think is funny will always be your best stuff, because if you don't enjoy it, then the audience will not either. Overall, I would love for my friends to take this course to enhance their self-image and more importantly, see the value in the discomfort of not knowing what will happen in the next five seconds while on stage in front of an audience.

As far as what should change in the course, I will specify only one issue that I see and this only comes from my experience in the Attention-Starved Children (ASC). There are improv comedy rules and regulations that are imperative to creating a humorous scene that flows nicely. Basically, what I wished was more highly held as rules were things that should have not been allowed under any circumstances. The first of which would be asking questions. Asking questions can kill an improv scene especially when there are numerous in one scene. This was cracked down on intermittently, but not enough for us to really get better at it. Another would be negation of another's objectives in a scene. The shutting down of another's ideas by saying "no" or disagreeing completely ruins the flow and energy of a scene. This was also intermittently touched on, but should have been held to a higher standard. Lastly, drug references and swearing were a large problem in our class, but our professor did a good job cracking down on that. All in all, I just wished some factors of improv were held to a higher standard in our class because they ring true to being successful in my career with ASC.

However, this issue was a minor pinprick for me in this class and was my only problem with the class as a whole. I can make a list about five times larger regarding what I want not to change.

Overall, what I loved the most about the class was the unity it fostered between classmates. Our professor, Kaarin Johnston, helped us to be comfortable being vulnerable on stage. More specifically, I asked Kaarin for individual support and I got more than just that. She took me under her wing as a comedy coach as well as a life coach and could see through my tough exterior when she knew I was dealing with some confidence issues underneath. That cannot change, or the high quality of the class will diminish immensely.

This course definitely satisfies the criteria of a fine arts course because of our constant performing in front of ourselves and our two live performances. As far as an experiential learning credit, I honestly would say that it may not cross that threshold. I would say that it would if we had trips to watch professional improv troupes, otherwise I do not think that it satisfies criteria for experiential learning.

My goal in taking this class was to enhance my improv comedy skills so I could build my confidence enough to hopefully bring my career beyond CSB/SJU and into bigger stages in Chicago (second city and/or comedy sportz) or wherever else. I wanted to consistently put myself out there and get coaching so I could really be the best I could be while in college. I have gotten better and built more confidence in this class and through ASC as well. Kaarin facilitated a very individually supportive environment that helped me really jump out of my comfort zone and delve into my weaknesses and enhance my strengths regarding improv. This class did much more than just build my confidence in improv, it built my confidence in everything else too.