University Mission Statement:
Our mission is to serve as a leading center of Christian thought and action providing an excellent education from a biblical perspective and global context in pivotal professions to equip Christian leaders to change the world.

School of Communication and the Arts Mission Statement:
Our mission is to graduate emerging leaders and scholars who demonstrate excellence and innovation in thought and action in their respective fields and who, through their educational experiences here, will transform and redeem media and the arts.

Department of Theatre Arts Mission Statement:
Our mission is to educate and train undergraduate and graduate students to incisively examine and effectively communicate, through intellectual analysis and the realization of live performance, the great truths of the human condition as perceived through the lens of a Christian world view.

COURSE SYLLABUS

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & THE ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS

THE 775.01 (3 CREDIT HOURS)
IMPROVISATION
SPRING 2011

COURSE LOCATION: ON-CAMPUS
TUESDAY/THURSDAY – 3:00 PM – 4:50 PM
COM 128
SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: L. Derek Leonidoff, Guest Artist
Mark Paladini, Supervising Instructor

Phone: Leonidoff: 323.788.3492 (personal cell phone)
Paladini: 757.352.4691 (office)

E-mail: dleonidoff@regent.edu, mupaladini@regent.edu

Office Hours: As needed – Call to make an appointment

INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS/BIOGRAPHY

A lifetime student of improvisation, L. Derek Leonidoff is a graduate of The Improv Olympic Training Center, as well as the famed Second City Conservatory, and he is currently studying at The Groundlings. Along with his extensive improv direction and teaching credits, Derek has performed with over a dozen professional improvisational comedy ensembles including “Cup of Tea,” (Improv Olympic cage match winner - 27 weeks running,) “Cog” (featured troupe – L.A. Improv Festival,) as well as founding the troupes, “Slaphappy!” “The Dumbwaiters,” and Regent Universities “VIP’s (Varsity Improv Players.)” Light on his feet, and always ready to jump in, Derek’s energetic improv performances have earned him the comparisons of Gene Wilder and Ben Stiller. And his knowledge and experience with this unique art form has had him serving as a guest artist teaching students at Regent University since 2007.

Some of Derek’s recent work includes Dream Work’s upcoming film I am Number Four, directed by D.J. Caruso and produced by Steven Spielberg and Michael Bay. Letters to God directed by David Nixon, opened in spring 2010 in theaters nationwide and Denzel Washington’s Unstoppable directed by Tony Scott last November. Partial credits are listed on www.imdb.com - L. Derek Leonidoff.

Derek recently wrote, produced, and stared in For Sale by Owner, a film which won top honors at the 48 Hour Film Festival including “Audience Favorite.” This is the second time Derek’s team received this award. Last year’s My Hero is a film that’s quickly becoming an underground favorite.

Derek can also be seen as the father, "Bob Belmont" in The Knock Knock Show, Produced by CBN and now airing on The Smile Channel as well as the starring role of "Ron Fervent" in the hit independent film, Moving recently seen on Sundance. Other recent credits include The New Detectives for the Discovery Channel, The FBI Files The Learning Channel, and Sexual Considerations – an afterschool special for CBS. He is a veteran of dozens of national and regional commercials and industrial films. Some Derek’s extensive theatrical credits include “Albert Peterson” in Bye Bye Birdie, Christmas Carol and Nicholas Nickerby (national tours,) and the award winning one-man show, The Wreck of the Dictator.

BEST TIMES AND METHODS FOR CONTACTING THE PROFESSOR

I am more than happy to meet with students any time. Simply call or email to schedule an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is intended to provide MFA students with a basic overview of modern improvisation techniques as taught by Viola Spolin, The Second City, The Groundlings, and The Improv Olympic. These core skills are useful to the performer and the director, as well as the instructor. Special emphasis
will be placed on techniques used to build an actor’s confidence and creativity, as well as the spiritual parallels between our faith, and this unique art-form.

Additionally, this class offers an introduction of improvisation as it has been used by the instructor in professional auditions and performances pertaining to commercials, documentary style pilots, as well as improv and sketch comedy troupes.

**Rationale/Course Overview**

Even for the finest actors, there are moments where split second choices make all the difference in performance. Learning to be comfortable in those choices is the whole point of learning Improvisation. This course frees the actor to make the right choices-- by committing to the unknown, getting out of her head, and being in the present moment. That freedom allows the actor to create more vibrant, real performance in both improvised and written scenes.

**Integration of Faith**

We have been given the creative power of God. The arts are just one way we express it. But in correlation with this course, one of the reasons I believe improv is so fascinating to behold is its “electric spontaneity.” On stage, Improvisers create characters, dialogue, and in some cases entire plays on the spot, using only their imagination and perhaps a suggestion from the audience. It’s fascinating and entertaining to watch, and just as much fun to perform because of the way we are wired. We love creation. Watching it and performing it is our glimpse at Genesis 1:3: “Light be.”

**Degree Program Outcomes**

The MFA in Acting degree program has five primary student learning outcomes. At the end of this program, it is our expectation that every MFA student will:

- Demonstrate mastery of objective-driven acting technique at a professionally competitive level.
- Demonstrate objective driven acting as the cornerstone of performance in diverse literary genres.
- Articulate and defend artistic choices in the language of acting craft, ensuring their relevance as informed collaborators in the creative process.
- Demonstrate healthy, effective, character-driven work in the applied disciplines of voice and movement.
- Effectively integrate and apply biblical principles of the Christian faith to both academic and creative work.

**Course Outcomes**

It is expected at the conclusion of this semester that all students will demonstrate the following:

- Given rules and instruction based on the various modern improv acting schools (Viola Spolin, The Second City, The Groundlings, The Improv Olympic,) students will be able to perform improv.
- Students will have a through knowledge of exercises and techniques used in improvisational theater, as well as modern “short-form,” and “long-form” improv games.
• Students will have knowledge of the history of improvisation, and where it stands as an art-form in our current culture.

• Students will be able to reflect on the uses of improv and theatre games for the development of acting technique.

• Students will be able to reflect on the use of improv to solve problems in a theatrical setting.

• Students will be able to reflect on the uses of improv and theatre games to support their spiritual beliefs.

• Students will be able to integrate improvisational technique into an audition.

• Students will be able to lead each other in improvisations and theatre games.

• Students will be able to reflect and respond to reflections on the class discussion board.

These outcomes will be evaluated through the assessment tools/course requirements outlined below.

SECTION 2 – COURSE REQUIREMENTS

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS


SUGGESTED READING


COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

• Students must attend class and participate in class activities.
• Students must have access to a computer, to Regent University email and the Regent University blackboard site.
• Students must read the assigned textbooks and participate in class discussions. Students will observe improvisation exercises and provide constructive feedback or side-coaching when prompted.
• Students must post a reflection or a response to another student’s reflection on the class discussion board. This will be due once a week on the following Tuesday afternoon at 3:00 p.m.
• Students will create a unique character for use in improv and sketch comedy using the instruction and technique explained throughout the course.
• Students are required to turn in a written essay comparing their faith and the various theories on improvisation. Essays should consist of five paragraphs including an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs of support and a final paragraph that serves as the conclusion.
• Students will be required to participate in a final improvisational presentation working as both performers and leaders.

GRADING WEIGHTS
• Class Attendance/Participation 50%
• Discussion Board Reflections 10%
• Character Development and Presentation 10%
• Faith & Improvisational Theory Essay 20%
• Final Presentation 10%

* Students are allowed three absences; students must clear further absenteeism with instructor.

GRADING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Score</th>
<th>Maximum Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-100</td>
<td>93-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>85-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>81-84</td>
<td>78-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>75-77</td>
<td>71-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75-74</td>
<td>68-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>71-74</td>
<td>65-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-70</td>
<td>61-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65-64</td>
<td>0-60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION 3 –POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND RESOURCES

EVALUATION, GRADING AND SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be assessed based upon the student’s execution of the skills demonstrated and discussed in class and in the text. The goal behind each exercise or performance will be explained at the time the assignment is made. Evaluation will then be based on how successfully the student has met the goal. Individual feedback from the instructor will provide the necessary insights for continued improvement as the semester progresses.

All assignments, both written and performed, must be presented on the assigned date. As a general policy, no work will be postponed or accepted late. It is imperative for an actor seeking a career in the theatre to learn how to deliver a quality product regardless of personal circumstance. Theatre is a calendar-driven art form and business. There is only one opportunity to perform once the curtain has gone up. As such, the no-late work policy of this course attempts to help students cultivate this important discipline, better positioning them for professional success. That being said, exceptions to this policy may be made at the instructor’s discretion when mitigating circumstances arise. However, such exemptions should not be expected.

University Withdrawal - Students who have not attended or logged into a class, will, at the end of the second week of the session/semester—in accordance with university practice—be assumed to have unofficially dropped and will be administratively dropped from that class.
Incomplete Grades Policy - Students desiring an incomplete must submit their request to the course instructor and academic dean prior to the end of the term. An incomplete grade will be given in a regular course only for legitimate deficiencies due to illness, emergencies or extraordinary reasons acceptable to the professor, including equipment breakdown or shortages, and not because of neglect on the student’s part. Incompletes require the final approval of the school dean or his/her authorized representative. A regular grade will be given by the instructor if all requirements for the course are submitted by the end of the following academic term. The instructor will submit the new grade to the Registrar’s Office no later than two weeks after the beginning of the subsequent term. If all work is not submitted by the end of the term following the granting of the incomplete, a grade of FX (NP for pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically unless a Request for Extension of Incomplete has been approved and submitted to the Registrar’s Office. The FX shall be counted as an F in the computation of the GPA. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and pay the full current tuition for the course.

In Progress Grades - In Progress grades shall be given when work is not completed by the end of the term for the following academic work: independent studies, internships, practica, portfolios, theses and dissertations. An IP is also an appropriate grade for courses in which the completion of course requirements for ALL students extends beyond the academic term in which the course is offered. An IP may be continued to a maximum of two terms when the student requests and extension and the approved form is submitted to the Registrar’s Office prior to the end of the first term. If the requirements for removal of the IP grade are not completed by the end of these two terms, a grade of FX (NP for pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically. Exceptions may be made for dissertations, which may continue without penalty. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and pay the full current tuition for the course.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Regent University recognizes the importance of class attendance and participation for students’ learning. While attendance alone does not guarantee learning, engagement with the class through regular attendance and participation is essential to learning, both to the individual student and to the class itself as all benefit by others’ contributions. At Regent University, class attendance, understood as the act of being present, is considered to be separate from participating in the class, understood as active engagement through discussion and other forms of interaction. Both are valuable to student learning.

Like other institutions of higher education, Regent University is required to maintain accurate attendance records by the U.S. Department of Education.

A participation grade will be assessed by the instructor based upon the student’s daily commitment to growth and positive contributions to classroom work. Contributing factors include promptness, concentration, the ability to incorporate feedback into work, volunteering, progress, attitude and willingness to take risks. The student’s approach and commitment to classroom exercises and work sessions with the instructor are integral to the assessment of this grade. In this course, the grading percentage assigned to the participation grade is significant. This reflects the experiential nature of learning involved in a movement class and the value placed on daily participation in the explorative exercises. Therefore, it is particularly important and expected that students attend all classes.

Students are allowed three absences from class for illness and other emergencies with no grade penalty. Subsequent absences lower the student’s final grade by one full letter grade per absence. However, if you are unable to attend class on any given day I would appreciate a call in advance of class to let me know you will not be attending. This will allow me to make other arrangements if necessary. I can be reached on my cell phone. If I am not available, please leave a message on my voice mail explaining the reason for your absence and a phone number where you can be reached. This is not a requirement, but it is a
courtesy I appreciate. I am always concerned about your welfare and want to stay apprised of any way in which I can be of assistance to you.

**Three late arrivals constitute an absence.** After fifteen minutes, a tardy is considered an absence. If class has begun, please enter as quietly as possible. Under no circumstance should a student enter the classroom when another student is performing. Please be aware of what it is you are interrupting by your late arrival.

**CLASS GUIDELINES**

- Physical exercises of the course will require you to wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing to class each day.

- I expect you to undertake an exercise in class at my instruction, without questioning its purpose. This is in keeping with letting go learning to trust. If you have any questions, please postpone them, but do not suppress them. I’m happy to answer them later. There will be dedicated times to process work in class, and I am available to meet with you individually. If you remain unclear about any of the work or have questions about anything we’ve covered, please take the initiative to ask questions. Do the exercise first, then ask. The one big exception is this: *If it hurts, don’t do it.* Stop and let me know right away so that we can make the appropriate adjustments.

**UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating involve the intention to deceive, mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying representing actions contrary to the behavioral norms that flow from the nature of God. As such, use of another author’s material must always be properly documented and clearly cited. It is also expected that all work turned in during the semester will be the result of that semester’s scholarship. Academic dishonesty, in any form, may constitute failure of the course. Every student is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship and research.

Students are expected to be familiar with the university’s policy on academic integrity found in both the University Student Handbook and School of Undergraduate Studies Catalog (http://www.regent.edu/general/catalog/) and to follow it. As an academic and Christian community, Regent University takes seriously the call for integrity and penalizes breaches of academic integrity.

Students should be aware that submitted papers may be checked using Safeassign (Blackboard’s plagiarism detection feature). This feature will determine the percentage of the submitted paper that matches other sources and will generate a report. Scores below 15% include quotes and few common phrases or blocks of text that match other documents, these papers indicate no evidence of the possibility of plagiarism. Scores between 15% and 40% include extensive quoted or paraphrased material or may include plagiarism and will require further review. Scores over 40% indicate a high probability the text in the paper was copied from other sources and should be reviewed for plagiarism. The professor or instructor will contact the student if plagiarism is a concern.

**STUDENT CONTACT INFORMATION**

Because instructors often need to reach students, all students are required to keep their mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone numbers up to date in GENISYS.

http://www.regent.edu/general/student_orientation/tutorials/genisys.cfm

**DISABILITY STATEMENT**
The student is responsible for contacting Director of Student Life at 757.352.4867 to request accommodations, provide necessary documentation, and make arrangements with each instructor. The following website is designed to help our disabled students learn of their rights and responsibilities with regards to disability services. The site also has resources for faculty to become better informed of their responsibilities towards the disabled students in their classes.

http://ww.regent.edu/disabilities

Additional Resources

Please review the following links for additional information regarding University policies and other helpful resources:

- **Academic Calendar and Registrar Information:** http://www.regent.edu/admin/registrar/academiccalendar.cfm
- **University Bookstore:** http://www.cbamatthews.com/regent/
- **Plagiarism Policy:** http://www.regent.edu/acad/schedu/pdfs/honor_code.pdf
- **Regent Library:** http://www.regent.edu/lib/
- **Student Services:** http://www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/
- **Technical Support/University Handbook:** http://www.regent.edu/it/helpdesk/

SECTION 4 – COURSE SCHEDULE AND EVALUATION

Course Schedule

The following calendar is subject to change.

**Book Abbreviations:** Truth in Comedy = TIC, Improvisation for the Theater = IFT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>The History of Improv/Modern Improv</td>
<td>Read TIC – Foreword, Intros, &amp; Ch.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/6</td>
<td>“The Rules” – Modern Improv Technique</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due Read IFT Ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>Overcoming Fear – “Yes And…”</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due Read TIC Ch. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13</td>
<td>Listen and Embrace – “Yes And…” cont.</td>
<td>Read TIC Ch. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/18</td>
<td>Building an ensemble/Discovery</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Hyper Awareness/Being Reactive</td>
<td>Read TIC Ch. 3 &amp; 8 Read IFT Ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/25</td>
<td>Scene Foundations pt. 1</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27</td>
<td>Scene Foundations pt. 2</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>Scene Foundations pt. 3</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Adding Information in a Scene Pt.1 – Emotion OBSERVATION CHARACTER ASSIGNMENT</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>Adding Info Pt. 2 – Environment/Stage Movement/Spacework</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>Adding Info – Pt. 3 – Characters in improv</td>
<td>Read TIC Ch. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/15</td>
<td>Character cont. – Building a Character</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Due/Character Observations Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17</td>
<td>Character cont. MAGAZINE CHARACTER ASSIGNMENT</td>
<td>Character Observations Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/22</td>
<td>Adding Info – Pt. 4 – Dialogue</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/24</td>
<td>Character Presentations</td>
<td>Magazine Character Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Modular Week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>Modular Week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>Game Day – Improv and Theater game practice</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>Game Day cont. – Improv and Theater game practice TALK ABOUT FAITH AND IMPROV ESSAY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15</td>
<td>Game Day</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17</td>
<td>Game Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>Game Day</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>Professional improvisational comedy troupes – formats, auditions, stages, etc, and creating scripted work from improvisation</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29</td>
<td>Auditioning with Improv</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>The use of improv as a creative tool for actors, directors, and writers…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>Long Form Improvisation / How to run an Improv Workshop</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting Faith and Improv Essay Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>Long Form Improvisation/ Faith and Improv discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>Prep for Final Performance – BUSINESS DRESS DAY</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>Prep for Final Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>Prep for Final Performance</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26</td>
<td>Prep for Final Performance</td>
<td>Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/28</td>
<td>Final Performance</td>
<td>Final Message Board Reflection Posting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS**

Becoming Christian leaders includes learning how to evaluate others by providing honest evaluations that include positive affirmation and constructive feedback, as appropriate.
Consequently, university policy requires that all students submit a formal student evaluation of teaching form at the end of the academic term. This mandatory requirement must be completed before students will be able to access their final course grade. This form is only available in an online format. Prior to the end of the course, students will receive an e-mail indicating that the form is available. Instructions on accessing the evaluation will be included. Since these evaluations are only available for a limited time, students should complete the evaluation as soon as they receive the e-mail notification that the evaluation form is available. Instructors will not have access to course evaluations until after grades have been submitted and will only have access to anonymous summary data. Students are also encouraged at any point during the term to offer comments that may be helpful to the improvement or refinement of the course. Students can access the online evaluation system at: http://eval.regent.edu/regentsurvey/students.cfm. If you have questions about the online evaluation please contact evaluation@regent.edu.

This syllabus is subject to change without notice.
Last updated: 8/13/10

Regent University, School of Undergraduate Studies
1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA, 23464
Phone (888) 718-1222
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All students are required to read and have a thorough understanding of the syllabus. Any questions or concerns need to be addressed to the instructor.

Please sign here to indicate that you have read and understood the requirements outlined in this syllabus.

Student signature __________________________ Date __________________________