

## Preliminary Web Course Description

\*Please note: This is a preliminary web course description only. The department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.

### School of English and Theatre Studies

Course Code: IMPR 6020	Course Title: Arts-Based Community Making	Date of Offering: <b>F20/W21</b>
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Course Instructor: Dr. Ajay Heblé	Course Format: Graduate seminar
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#### Brief Course Synopsis:

This two-semester course studies the links between improvisation and social practices, and the connections between principles of improvised artistic practices and those of ethical community-engaged collaboration. The Arts-Based Community Making (ABCM) course develops students' critical literacy skills in inter-personal and -cultural contexts; teaches them to 'read' and negotiate systems of power and privilege; and develops their capacity to put these critical skills to work in the context of community-engaged research and collaborative artistic practices. Within a community context, this course teaches students to have initiative, to show leadership, to understand reciprocal community relations and how to make a difference; to become community catalysts by activating their and others' agency; to understand structures of volunteerism, not-for-profit community engagement, and other forms of activating and engaging with community.

Through the assigned readings and case studies, students will become familiar with and able to employ the vocabularies and principles of improvisation in relation to what George Lipsitz insightfully – and provocatively – calls “arts-based community making.” Students will develop and exercise critical skills in interpersonal and intercultural literacy, and develop their capacity to put these skills to work in the context of community-based research and creative projects. Students will learn and then implement, through applied projects, key principles of community-engaged research and arts-based practice.

#### Methods of Evaluation and Weight:

This course takes seriously Paulo Freire's claim that equality and social justice are predicated on students playing an active role in the educational process, that teachers and students are both simultaneously learners and knowledge-producers. In an effort to teach in ways that do not reinforce traditional structures of domination and authority, the precise weights/grading scheme for this course will be arrived at through a collective discussion.

Grades for this course will be based on the following presentations and reports:

1) throughout the year, students will be expected to write a series of short (250-500 word) entries in their commonplace book. These entries will include a critical reflection on core concepts (due Week Three for the end of Module 1), and a report on case studies (due Week Six for the end of Module 2).

2) during weeks Two to Six, we will have collaborative-led student seminars on the assigned texts. Each student is required to participate in one collaborative seminar during this period.

3) during Week Seven, Eight, and Nine, each student will lead a 20-30 minute presentation which identifies a community-based human rights or social justice issue which she/he thinks should be the focus of our intervention. In preparing your presentation, please identify resources that might be available to help facilitate any interventions we might choose to make, think through the ways in which your engagement with work in the field of Critical Studies in Improvisation might enable us to intervene, and discuss possible ways in which the class might collectively “make a difference” through addressing this specific issue. Please submit to me (and to other members of the class) a written abstract for your presentation (no more than 500 words) along with a preliminary reading list/resource list. Our task for Week Ten will be to choose an issue/issues (from the many that will have been presented to us). This issue/these issues will become the focus of our efforts in the second semester.

4) during Weeks Eleven and Twelve, we will have collaborative presentations to a panel of outside “experts.” These presentations should concisely “pitch” and outline the issue or topic you have selected for your community-based project, your preliminary ideas about modes of intervention, ideas about possible resources and partners, as well as challenges you might face in moving forward with your work.

5) during Weeks Fifteen to Eighteen, we will have collaborative in-progress presentations from each break-out group on your final projects. I would ask that each of these projects have a public or community-facing dimension: that is, in designing your projects, try to move beyond the walls of the classroom in an effort to make interventions in the broader community. I would also ask that you use these projects as an opportunity to take the initiative to “do something” about struggles for human rights and social justice. The projects should, in some way, attempt to grapple with the relationship between academic work and activism, and to open up discussion around the question of how teachers and students can best “activate” their knowledge in ways that might edge us towards a more just world. How, that is, can we use the tools of analysis that we’ve developed in Critical Studies in Improvisation? I encourage students to be creative in thinking through and performing their projects, and to structure their materials in ways that are genuinely collaborative and interactive. Feel free to draw on (and to work in partnership with) local resources and social justice organizations (Amnesty International, OPIRG, CFRU-FM, Guelph International Resource Centre, etc.) in the community. On the day of your presentation, please submit to me and to other members of the class, a 500 word abstract summarizing the project’s main interventions and areas of inquiry, and a bibliography of relevant sources. In advance of these in-progress presentations, you will be asked to “pitch” your projects to a panel of outside “experts” who will be invited to class during Weeks Eleven and Twelve. “Expert” panelists will be invited again at a later stage to comment on your work in Weeks Nineteen and Twenty.

6) during Week Twenty-one, we will have three collaborative one-hour seminars where you will present and discuss alternate course outlines for IMPR\*6020, “Arts-Based Community-Making.” Think rigorously about issues such as what we teach (curriculum), how we teach (pedagogical

strategies), and why we teach (sense of purpose). Each group should be prepared to offer a rationale for their particular choices (of texts, assignments, methodologies, etc.) and to recognize the limitations of their efforts. Please submit your alternate course outline (along with a statement of rationale) to me and to the other members of the course during our meeting in Week Twenty-one.

7) Final community-facing project and final reflection piece/essay. In evaluating this project, I will take into account your response to comments/concerns raised by the class and the panel of “experts,” as well as your ability to meet the goals (and challenges) you have set for your group. Each student will be required to write a concluding reflection or report. Use the reflection or report as an opportunity to think through your own rationale for the community projects in which you've been involved, as well as to consider both the anticipated benefits and the limitations of your work. To what extent have the teaching methods and learning strategies employed during your projects been successful? How, in short, has the work you've done in IMPR\*6020 encouraged you to rethink your understanding of the places where we look for knowledge, and to think anew about what constitutes research and teaching?

Texts and/or Resources Required (e.g. Internet access, specific textbook title, lab kit, etc.)

Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation* (Duke University Press)

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum)

bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (Routledge)

Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces: Improvisation and Accompaniment for Social Justice* (Temple University Press)

Ajay Heble, ed. *Classroom Action: Human Rights, Critical Activism, and Community-Based Education* (University of Toronto Press)

Doris Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World* (Duke University Press)

Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia, *The Noam Chomsky Lectures: A Play*

Additional texts and resources may be placed on reserve and/or available online.

This course counts towards the following distribution requirement(s) for students who registered at the University prior to the Fall of 2018: N/A

Information about mode of delivery (synchronous/asynchronous/other details):

Alternative Delivery Synchronous: the course will be taught remotely. For the fall semester (unless otherwise specified), we will meet online.

\*Students who registered at the University of Guelph after Fall 2018 must fulfill the “new” major and minor requirements. Students who registered at the University of Guelph prior to Fall 2018 must fulfill the requirements of the Calendar in effect when they first enrolled unless they have filed a Schedule of Studies Change Request to change to the 2018-2019 calendar. For more information, please consult the major and minor checklists at <https://www.uoguelph.ca/arts/sets/undergraduate/english/current-student-information>.