

# Course Syllabus

## Improvisation

MUS 181, Winter 2022, UC Irvine

Instructor: Michael Dessen

Class meets: Monday 11am-1:50pm, MM 218. Note that for the first two weeks we are required to meet remotely; click Zoom in the Canvas menu for the link.

Office hour: Mondays, 2pm-2:50pm, or by appointment if you cannot make that time. Location is CAC 3023, or when remote, using the same class Zoom link.

How to contact instructor or students: Click "Inbox" in the main Canvas menu, create new message, select this class, then start typing a name in the address field. Alternately, find them under "People" in our Canvas course space menu, click their name and then the envelope icon.

Important note about Canvas Notifications: Please be sure to set these up so that you receive both Messages and Announcements as soon as they are posted, since I will use these tools (and sometimes email) to communicate important updates about the class.

## Course summary and goals

Welcome! In this course, we will explore improvisation, both on and off our instruments. The class structure and environment will support students with no prior improvisation experience while also enabling others (such as jazz majors) to study areas new to them. Coursework includes study/response assignments, individual and collaborative performance assignments, and a quarter-long Project students will design around their interests. Weekly 3-hour class meetings will be used for both discussions and performance practice.

Just before the start of the quarter, we received news that classes must meet remotely for the first two weeks. We will improvise creatively in response to shifting constraints! Most important, please know that the overall goals and strategies of the course will remain consistent:

- Through study assignments and class discussions, you will deepen your understanding of how and why improvisation matters in a diverse range of musical practices, and develop your capacity to think critically about the nature of musical experience.
- Through performance practice in and outside of class, you will expand your sonic vocabulary and improve your ability to create music on your instrument in real time, including in collaboration with musicians from backgrounds different than yours.
- Through a Project you will design and carry out in stages over the entire quarter, you will explore

an area of your own interest related to musical improvisation, and gain experience doing original research and/or creative work.

## Coursework and grading details

### Study Assignments (25%) and Creative Practice Assignments (25%)

Both types of assignments will be given weekly up until the final few weeks of the quarter. Study Assignments will introduce a wide range of topics and mini-case studies, and will require viewing/listening/reading and a brief written reflection. Creative Practice Assignments will involve individual practice exercises, outside-of-class sessions with an assigned duo or trio (different each week), and also a brief written reflection.

Instructions, submissions and grades for both of these assignments will be done through a weekly Canvas Assignment (<https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/assignments>). I encourage you to keep your written reflections (and any other related study or class notes) in an ongoing document so that they accumulate like a journal over the quarter, but you should always submit the week's assignment responses via the text input field for that particular Canvas Assignment, so that it is marked as submitted by the deadline. Assignments will be graded following the simple Rubric attached there. Please note that these assignments are usually *due by midnight on Sunday* (not the start of our Monday class time). Canvas will automatically grade down late submissions by 20% per day; meeting the weekly deadline is important because we will discuss each week's assignments in class.

### Project (25%)

You will design an original, quarter-long Project that can be on any topic relevant to musical improvisation. Projects may be either individual or collaborative, and may be based in either creative practice, research/writing or a combination of the two. The final outcome can be a research paper, a performance, a lecture presentation, or any other form that is approved as part of the proposal process.

We will discuss the Project more in class at the beginning of the quarter, and instructions for each submission are detailed on the page Project assignment instructions (<https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/pages/project-assignment-instructions>). The first step will be submitting initial brainstorming ideas, and based on my feedback as well as an individual meeting with me in week 3, you will then create a more detailed proposal. Once your proposal is finalized, you will complete a first draft and then the final work, which will be shared in our exam week meeting.

Each of these four submission stages will receive a grade, with point weights increasing over the quarter.

## Attendance and participation in class meetings (25%)

Class meetings are a central part of this course experience, and will include both presentations/discussions and music making, so you must bring your instrument to all classes. If you are sick, do not come to class; instead, please inform me immediately, and visit the health center or a doctor.

Participation in class means taking part in performance activities and also contributing to discussions in some way, as well as listening carefully to others. I will assign a participation grade mid-quarter and another at the end of the quarter, and if your participation in class is inadequate, I will discuss it with you individually ahead of time. Arriving late to class or missing classes will lower your participation grade.

## Workload expectation and advice

This is an upper-division, 4-unit course with different types of assignments each week, so it requires good organizational and time management skills. I expect you to spend roughly 6 hours per week on the work outside of class. I recommend dividing that evenly among the Study Assignments, the Creative Practice assignments, and the ongoing work on the Project. If you are unable to keep up with the work, please contact me immediately and I will do my best to help. If you need any course accommodations due to a disability, you must set up a contract through the [Disability Services Center \(http://disability.uci.edu/\)](http://disability.uci.edu/) by the beginning of the quarter.

## Important dates

All details and due dates are listed in Canvas [Assignments](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/assignments) (<https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/assignments>) (and you can view them on the Schedule tool), but please also note the dates below. Recommended concerts will also be announced during the quarter, including some by ICIT grad students.

- Monday, Jan. 17: MLK holiday, no class. Instead, each student will sign up for an individual meeting with the instructor this week.
- Monday, Feb. 21: UCI holiday, no class. Instead, each student (or Project group) will sign up for an individual meeting with the instructor this week.
- Friday, March 18 from 9am-11:30am, in MM 218. We will meet to share final projects at this time.

## Collaboration, integrity and inclusivity

Many activities in this course are collaborative, but you must be always careful to *avoid representing another person's work as your own*. Any attempt to do so will be considered an academic integrity violation, and will be [reported \(https://aisc.uci.edu/students/academic-integrity/procedures.php\)](https://aisc.uci.edu/students/academic-integrity/procedures.php).

My intention is always to facilitate welcoming, inclusive and respectful environments for collective learning among diverse students, in the spirit of the [UC's system-wide policies on diversity. \(https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/\)](https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/) Those policies define diversity as "the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance" and "include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more." I expect all of us to aspire to create a supportive environment, to communicate with one another in respectful, constructive ways, and to understand the presence of these diverse life experiences in our classroom as a strength and learning opportunity for everyone. By remaining in the course after reading this syllabus, you are affirming that you share these intentions. In addition, note the following UCI resources:

- [Diversity Resources at UCI \(https://uci.edu/diversity/index.php\)](https://uci.edu/diversity/index.php)
- [Disability Services Center \(http://disability.uci.edu/\)](http://disability.uci.edu/)
- [UCI LGBT Resource Center \(http://lgbtrc.uci.edu/\)](http://lgbtrc.uci.edu/)
- [Undocumented Student Support \(http://dreamers.uci.edu/\)](http://dreamers.uci.edu/)
- [School of the Arts Student Affairs \(https://www.arts.uci.edu/student-affairs-office\)](https://www.arts.uci.edu/student-affairs-office)
- [UCI Counseling Center \(http://www.counseling.uci.edu/\)](http://www.counseling.uci.edu/)
- [Student Outreach and Retention Center \(SOAR\) \(https://soar.uci.edu/\)](https://soar.uci.edu/)

## Basic needs security

Any student who faces challenges securing sufficient food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the [School of the Arts Student Affairs \(https://www.arts.uci.edu/student-affairs-office\)](https://www.arts.uci.edu/student-affairs-office) office for support, and also to become familiar with the [UCI Basic Needs Hub \(https://basicneeds.uci.edu/\)](https://basicneeds.uci.edu/), which offers UCI students emergency food and toiletries, short-term transportation, and many other kinds of support. In addition, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so, which will enable me to offer support in whatever way I can, including helping you to find support resources on campus.

## COVID-19 policies

Please review this page in all its gruesome detail: [Detailed, campus-wide COVID policies. \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/pages/detailed-campus-wide-covid-policies\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/42378/pages/detailed-campus-wide-covid-policies)

# Thank you

Thank you for reading the entire syllabus. I look forward to working with you this quarter!