

**COURSE #: ENG 165 TITLE: ACTING COMEDY: *commedia*, Mask, and Improvisation**

**Course Description:** From the earliest times, actors have used masks and improvisation to embody and develop character and allow the performer's identity to be subsumed in a greater, imaginative figure outside of the self. These tools have unleashed elements in performance that are bolder and more physically expressive and sharply focused than naturalistic modes of acting. Acting Comedy explores the use of these techniques to develop highly expressive characterizations and improvisatory performance styles, concentrating on comedy and the *commedia dell'arte* – the foundation stone of the western comic tradition.

**Credits:** 4

**Semester/Year:** Spring 2019

**Class Day/Time/s:** Thursday 2:00 – 4:40 pm.

**Location:** Todd 107

**First Class:** January 17, 2019

**Last Class:** April 25, 2019

**Does this course use Blackboard Learning Management?** N

**Course Webpage/s** [if applicable]: N/A

**Instructor:** Patricia Lewis Browne

**Contact Email:** plewisb@hotmail.com

**Contact Telephone:** 243-4798

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Office Location:** N/A

**Entrance Prerequisites** [if applicable]: N/A

**Course Aims & Objectives:**

1. To acquaint the students with the history of *Commedia dell'arte* and its influence on modern comedy structures.
2. To explore the skill set needed as an actor to use masks and movement to create expressive characterizations.
3. To become comfortable using improvisation as a conduit to creating scenes and characters.

**General Course Requirements:** This is primarily an acting course, so attendance and participation are of the utmost importance. Much of the class work will be devised during our class meetings in a collaborative process. This is also where group instruction in mask and movement will happen. You will need to spend time outside of class with your peers in rehearsal groups. A significant part of your evaluation will be based on performances done in class – missing class or outside rehearsal time impacts the entire

process of discovery and will affect the quality of everyone's work. There are written components of the class as well: research and presentation of material on Commedia, character and scene work ups and a journal. You are required to see two Todd theatre productions and two outside arts events and write about them.

**Required Texts & Readings** [if applicable]:

*Commedia dell'Arte: an Actor's Handbook* by John Rudlin

*The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte* by Antonio Fava

*Exploring Modern Commedia dell'Arte* by Ali Landvatter

**Assignments and Exams/Quizzes/Tests:**

- Research and write a paper on and present in performance a masked commedia character
- Perform in a commedia scenario based on contemporary events devised collaboratively with class members
- Develop and journal a character without a mask using the principles of character development studied

**Recommended Attire:** Please come to class in comfortable, unrevealing clothing that will allow for a full range of movement. Heavy boots/street shoes are not allowed in Todd 107. Please wear soft soled shoes or be prepared to work in socks.

**Attendance Policy:** Please be advised that more than ONE ABSENCE will significantly impact your grade. Three or more absences will result in a failing grade.

**Grading:** Class Participation and Preparation: 30%  
Research Paper on Commedia: 10%  
Performance of Commedia character: 20%  
Group performance in devised scene: 20%  
Unmasked character and journal: 20%

**Academic Support Services:**

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: [www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/](http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/)

Writing, Speaking and Argument Program: <http://writing.rochester.edu/>

**Academic Honesty:**

Please see: [www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/undergraduates.html](http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/undergraduates.html)

**Disability Resources:**

Please visit: [www.rochester.edu/college/disability](http://www.rochester.edu/college/disability)