

DAA 2621: Dance Improvisation

Fall 2024 | Section: 1621 + 162U | Tues / Thurs @ G006 | 12:50p – 2:20p



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Office Hours: T/R 9-10a or by appointment.

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Syllabi can be found here <http://arts.ufl.edu/syllabi/>

Lab Fees can be located at <http://aa.ufl.edu/policies/material-and-supply-fees/>

Canvas (e-learning): <http://elearning.ufl.edu>

Email Policy: Use ONLY your UFL.EDU email account for e-mail correspondence related to class.

DAA 2104: CONTEMPORARY DANCE PRACTICE 1 COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

Introduces dance improvisation as an art form, a personal practice, and a process for creating choreography through movement exploration, readings, and observations. Credits: 2; Prereq: Dance Major

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces dance improvisation as an art form, a personal practice, and a process for creating choreography through movement exploration, readings, and observations. Each person is charged with developing and extending their movement capacities and I will offer methods, approaches, invitations, and strategies for doing so. We will cultivate our ability to move with intention and nuance and learn to tune our attention to the community, space, sound, and other stimuli. Skill, as an improviser, lies not only in what you do, but when, where and how you do it, drawing upon your experience, imagination, and perceptual awareness. Historical contexts, as well as current frameworks, will inform our practice of dance improvisation. I hope this class will provide you with tools for choreographic research, movement invention, technical growth, and self-analysis. I believe improvisation is integral for all dancers and I hope you will be enriched by your practice of it.

Class will consist of movement research, skill development, and compositional scores designed to increase our capacities to dance as a soloist, in duets and groups. Each person will explore the material in their own way, but will share a willingness to challenge themselves and take risks. Improvisation has the potential to unlock new ways of moving. Pushing through discomfort and awkwardness is a big part of that growth. I expect you to be curious, critical, patient, and creative and to show respect and care for your peers. I expect you to be open-minded and ready to explore what is possible for you. Ultimately, practicing dance improvisation gives us the profound opportunity to connect with our community in creative and generative ways.

The nationally acclaimed improvisation artist Chris Aiken (and one of my mentors) often spoke of "common misperceptions about dance improvisation":

- It is easy
- It is all about freedom
- It is all about spontaneity
- It is undisciplined
- Only certain people can do it
- It is about invention
- It is a primary tool for making work
- It is no fun
- It is all fun

Recommended Equipment: knee pads, water bottle, notebook, digital portal (laptop/phone).

Required Reading/Viewing: TBA; all materials will be made available on Canvas.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Learn about dance improvisation and experience it personally.
- Develop individual and collective skill and comfort with improvising.
- Examine habitual mind and movement tendencies.
- Challenge ourselves to exist outside our “comfort zones” while also accepting and capitalizing on our preferences.
- Develop our attention, curiosity, and responsiveness.
- Apply improvisation to our work as dance technicians, choreographers, performers, and community members.
- Dance with our whole selves, embodying our beliefs, aesthetics, and politics.
- Collaborate with each other.
- Analyze and evaluate improvised performances and practices through written, verbal, and movement communication.
- Address the various locations of improvised dance, especially in Western concert dance traditions and in African diaspora forms.

STUDIO PROCEDURES

Proper Attire: You should come dressed ready for class and able to move freely and comfortably. Long pants are best and knee pads are highly suggested. It is recommended that you do not wear jewelry that will impede your ability to move or put you or others at physical risk.

Water + Food: Be sure to bring a water bottle to class. Make sure you eat a well-balanced meal or snack before and after class. Please do not eat while in class or chew gum.

Device Usage: The studio is a place for focus and engagement, a precious time to be screen-free. Please leave your cell phones, tablets, computers, iPads, Apple Watches, etc. in your bags and on silent unless we are using them for classwork. If you need to be reachable by phone for any reason, let me know in advance of class.

Lateness and leaving early are also detriments to your progress. If you are late or leave early, it is your responsibility to communicate with the professor accordingly before/after class. Chronic tardiness or early departure will require an individual meeting with the instructor to discuss strategies moving forward. See attendance policy below.

RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In order for us all to have a transformative, energetic, and generous experience, we will agree to *participate* in creating a respectful environment. We do so by:

- Showing up for yourself and others.
- Listening fully to each other at all times.
- Taking time to reflect before responding or reacting.
- Demonstrating personal motivation and lifting up those around us. Offer positive feedback to each other.
- Asking questions and contributing to class discussion.
- Collaborating equitably.
- Showing gratitude for community.
- **Communicate.** Please email me with *any and all* concerns, questions, and needs as they arise.
- + **YOUR SUGGESTIONS!** We will create, discuss, and compile community agreements specific to our group. We enter this space with various experiences and perspectives, together seek to create the safest space possible to learn, thrive, and grow.

CULTURE OF CARE:

I propose we adopt a **culture of care** in all our endeavors. Care affects how we interact with ourselves, one another, and the space we share. Care invites more patience and generosity. Care can ensure our personal and collective safety, well-being, and development. I invite us to practice radical empathy and hospitality to cultivate an atmosphere where we can all feel welcome to enter and participate.



“Not causing harm requires staying awake. Part of being awake is slowing down enough to notice what we say and do.”

-Pema Chödrön

ATTENDANCE POLICY



It is your responsibility to be an active participant in this course. Be generous, inquisitive, and motivated. Speak up and be an eager contributor to conversations and peer to peer discussions.

While “active engagement” can hard to quantify, demonstrated engagement with the readings and regular constructive contributions to class discussions will improve your grade; absence, disruptive behavior, or lack of participation will count against your grade; **three late arrivals will count as one absence.**

Remember that a) you cannot participate if you are not in class and b) attendance alone does not constitute active participation; if you have difficulty speaking up in class, talk to me privately about this early in the semester.

If you must **observe** class due to injury or illness, you will be required to write an observation analysis that must be submitted at the end of class.

Students can take 2 absences with no penalty; no documentation is required for the first 2 absences as they are automatically excused. **If the third absence is unexcused, it will result in 5% deduction from the final grade.** Excused or unexcused, on the third absence, a meeting is required with the instructor and/or area faculty to assess the student’s continued participation in the course. If the third absence and all subsequent absences are unexcused, each will result in an additional 5% deduction from the final grade. Opportunities to make up missed material for unexcused absences is up to the instructor’s discretion and will be made available through other classes and/or assignments.

Any absence from class for the following reasons must be supported by official acceptable documentation to avoid a grade penalty:

- Illness—doctor’s note must be on official letterhead with address and phone number, noting the date and time of visit and diagnosis verifying that an absence from class is warranted, doctor name and signature
- Serious family emergencies
- Special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences)
- Military obligation
- Severe weather conditions
- Participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate
- Court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena)

To help organize accommodations, students should inform the instructor by the end of the second week of classes of religious observances of their faith that will conflict with class attendance this semester.

In addition to attending all classes, attendance is required at the following performances. You will provide proof of attendance within one week after viewing the production and participate in class discussions.

- ***Circa’s Humans 2.0:*** Oct 13
- ***Doug Varone and Dancers @ YDW:*** Nov 1
- ***Agbedidi,*** Nov 21-24

COURSE EXPECTATIONS + GRADING

(1) GROWTH + DEVELOPMENT (60% or 600 points)

You will receive two Growth + Development scores, each worth 300 points (600 total), at midterm and end of semester. The following areas are used by faculty to assess student progress throughout the semester:

- **Artistry:**
 - Student demonstrate comfort with improvising and willingness to take risk.
 - Student exhibits an investment in exploring new ways of moving and is actively developing their distinct voice as an improviser.
 - Expansion of understanding about dance improvisation and ability to access a range of movement qualities.

- **Awareness:**
 - Student is able to respond to stimuli in thoughtful ways and develops their sensitivity to the environment.
 - Student is able to recognize and articulate the value of improvisation in other dance/life settings.
- **Communication:**
 - Student exhibits an ability to speak from the self and their own experience, while being respectful of others and demonstrates the ability to articulate questions with clarity.
- **Community Engagement:**
 - Student takes care of the space as outlined in handbook/syllabus; demonstrate commitment to a collaborative learning environment by expanding one's willingness to work with all classmates versus a select few as the course progresses.
 - Student commits to individual and shared responsibility for class/group work.

(2) PROJECTS + RESPONSES (40% or 400 points)

All projects and written work will be submitted via Canvas. I will communicate more specific requirements for each project in-class prior to the deadline. See Course Schedule below for more details.

- **Weekly assignments** (due Sundays at 11:59p/160 total): You will be asked to engage in various assignments, viewings, discussion boards, etc unpacking various improvisation exercises, videos, and readings we encounter together.
- **Midterm Project** (120 points): In collaboration with a small group of peers, you will design an improvisation score and lead the entire class through your score. Your score should be based on the units covered in class but adapted to explore a more specific question or create a specific experience.
 - In-class presentation (60 points) graded on your group's collaborative facilitation of score, lasting 10-15 minutes, and ability to articulate the group's structure, creative process, and intention.
 - 1 page reflection paper (60 points) that identifies the score's guiding question / intended outcome, model scores used to develop it, and includes your own reflection on what happened as you led the improvisation.
- **Final** (120 points): With one partner, you will create a 4 to 5 minute improvised performance in the movement vocabulary/ies of your choice. Your performance should be well rehearsed and thoroughly planned but not fully choreographed with set material allowing you to fully embody the power of improvisation in performance.
 - In-class presentation (60 points) for your collaborative duet performance.
 - 3-page Final paper (60 points) discussing the creation and sharing of your final project. The paper will also include a reflection on your overall growth and development from the semester.



EXTENSIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS:

Please do your best to submit work on time. I understand that there will be extenuating circumstances and ask that you contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the due date to arrange for an extension. I respect you and your time and know that sometimes flexibility is needed to do your best work. Please respect me by honoring these timeframes which will allow me adequate time to review your work and give thorough individual feedback.

PERCENTAGES

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Growth and Development | 60% |
| Projects + Responses | 40% |
| TOTAL | 100% |

LETTER GRADES

| | |
|----|----------|
| A | 95-100 |
| A- | 90-94 |
| B+ | 87-89 |
| B | 83-86 |
| B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 77-79 |
| C | 73-76 |
| C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 63-66 |
| F | Below 63 |

[Link to the university grades and grading policies](#)

COURSE UNITS + SCHEDULE

UNITS:

- (1) **SELF** – looking at our daily life and mining our habits, preferences, and aesthetics to understand ourselves and work toward development of comfort and range with improvisation.
- (2) **COMMUNITY** – dancing in community with others in duets, small groups, and as a whole ensemble. This unit is in relationship to the previous one, asking us to consider how does the *self* relate to the *community*.
- (3) **SPACE and what's inside it** – identifying the kinds of spaces we improvise in and how that changes the purpose of the improvisation, as well as noticing other stimuli, such as objects and music, that influence our improvisations. This unit is in relationship to the previous two, asking us to consider how *self* and *community* relate to the *space* and *what's inside it*.
- (4) **CONTEXT** – locating improvisation in specific social, cultural, and historical contexts, we explore the purposes and possibilities for improvisation and ask ourselves why and how we practice it. This unit is in relationship to the previous three, asking us to consider how *self*, *community*, and *space* relate to *context*.

| WEEK | TUESDAY | THURSDAY | ASSIGNMENT (Due Sundays at 11:59) |
|------|--|---|--|
| 1 | | Aug 22 Introduction to the course | Letter to Alex + Incremental Improvisation #1 |
| 2 | Aug 27 Self: Improvisation in everyday life | Aug 29 Self: habits | Authentic Movement discussion board + Incremental Improvisation #2 |
| 3 | Sept 3 Self: preferences/aesthetics | Sept 5 Self: movement research + solo voice | Incremental Improvisation #3 |
| 4 | Sept 10 Self: practice | Sept 12 GUEST Brannndi Lewis | Response Bebe Miller |
| 5 | Sept 17 Community: duets | Sept 19 Community: ensemble dancing | Response: Contact Improvisation |
| 6 | Sept 24 Community: intro to contact improvisation | Sept 26 Community: practice | Incremental Improvisation #4 10 minute + Midterm reflection |
| 7 | Oct 1 REVIEW + SYNTHESIZE | Oct 3 Work on mid-term | Response: Onye Ozuzu TEDtalk |
| 8 | Oct 8 Individual meetings / Work on mid-term | Oct 10 Individual meetings / Work on mid-term | Work of Midterm presentations + paper |
| 9 | Oct 15 Share mid-term projects in-class | Oct 17 Share mid-term projects in-class | Response: Circa's Humans 2.0 + Midterm paper |
| 10 | Oct 22 Space: site | Oct 24 Space: music/sound | Response Jeanine Durning |
| 11 | Oct 29 GUEST: Varone | Oct 31 Space: Objects + stimuli | Response Doug Varone and Dancers |
| 12 | Nov 5 Discuss Varone | Nov 7 Context: performance + choreography | Response Judson Dance Theater |
| 13 | Nov 12 Context: social dancing | Nov 14 Context: improvisation + African diaspora | Response mayfield brooks |
| 14 | Nov 19 Culminating practice / Final projects | Nov 21 Culminating practice / Final projects | Response Agbedidi |
| | THANKSGIVING | BREAK | |
| 15 | Dec 3 discuss Agbedidi Culminating practice / Final projects | Dec 4 6:30p Final UnShowing REQUIRED | Final Presentation + Paper |

UF POLICIES

COURSE EVALUATIONS:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner.](#) Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code.](#) Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

IN-CLASS RECORDING:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

- *E-learning technical support:* Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center:](#) Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support:](#) Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- [Teaching Center:](#) Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- [Writing Studio:](#) 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- *Student Complaints On-Campus:* [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)
- *On-Line Students Complaints:* [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

HEALTH + WELLNESS RESOURCES

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

CONTENT WARNING:

In this course, we will cover content and materials that some may find difficult. It is important that in an artistic practice course we do not shy away from engaging with materials that may be controversial or challenging. I will do my best to give you advance notice when specific materials or content covered may contain images, language, or perspectives that some may find difficult, and I encourage you to reach out to me if you are struggling with the course materials. In class, if you need to step away for a period of time as we are covering particular content, you may do so without penalty, but I ask that you remember that you are responsible for any information covered in your absence.

****THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE****

Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.