#### **COURSE SYLLABUS**

Improv The University of Texas at Dallas

Course: Drama 2372 Instructor: Kathy Lingo, Office 3.514, 972-883-4152 Semester: Fall 2016 Course Start/End Date: Aug. 22 (Mon.) – Dec. 7 (Wed.) Course Place and Time: Section 001: 2:30 – 3:45 M/W Rehearsal Hall Section 002: 4:00 – 5:15 M/W

#### **Course Description and Rational**

Improvisation: This is absolutely where theatre began. When three quarters of the world was illiterate and printed materials were not heard of, entire plays were improvisational works developed through established characters and plots. These "plays" were works developed in improvisation using methods of trial and error, responses to audience and actors, along with repetition. If you have had any acting experience now is the time to try to fine-tune your ability to focus, listen, respond and create. Imagine being able to create an entire scene without memorizing a script!

It is a craft, an art form, which will require practice and experience. There will be course instruction, but the classroom becomes experimental allowing students to try new ideas and forms of expression. We will work with masks and other forms of creative expression, as well. Physical movement will become imperative to visually mold your character in the audience's mind.

As in all my theatre courses, grades are based upon student's participation and timely completion of assignments. Its' fun and in what other class do you get to watch improvisational scenes? However, attendance and participation is mandatory. Exercises and assignment given, in and out of class, are designed for specific objectives in skill building. So what might look like a form of "play" to others is actually an exercise designed to strengthen a professional or physical skill. Classroom rituals and practices are established to help the student create story lines and develop skills that will improve the quality of their life through personal confidence and skill building. Challenge yourself, laugh at yourself and enjoy creating characters that will enrich your life by expanding your mind and your talents.

College level reading and writing skills are a must, but this is only the beginning. A good actor must posses self discipline, selfrespect and respect for others, gracious manners and a respect for protocol and process.

"As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do."

Learning objectives:

Ability to strategically analyze information, verbally and nonverbally. Ability to strengthen listening skills. Ability to assess what information most accurately and reliably responds to the needs of the character, the action and the audience. Ability to interpret information/messages from different perspectives Ability to understand how play stimulates the mind and enhances personal knowledge of one's self Ability to understand the beginning elements necessary to shape a variety of characters within the individual Ability to work with others in groups Ability to take criticism in a positive progressive manner Ability to experience and explore spontaneity

#### **Instructor Information**

- 1. Contact information: 972.883.4152, Office JO 3.514
- 2. Web site: klingo@utdallas.edu

#### **Course Materials**

1. Required and **recommended** texts and materials

Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre, Keith Johnstone, Routledge, N.Y., N.Y, 1990.

Watch: Saturday Night Live (Old and New) specific artists will be discussed

Whose Line is It? Remember they get to rehearse YouTube: These will be discussed Raising Hope (television series) Modern Family (television series) British Comedies (channel 13, Netflix, Hulu) SNL (Saturday Night Live)

Listen: To accent recordings (Youtube and Internet) Vocal cadence and patterns

Students must bring a notebook and writing materials to every class (or computer). Criticism should always be noted

2. Other resources or tools

Students must sign a talent release form.

*If your performance is filmed in class, you must bring the instructor a flash drive to procure a copy of your performance.* 

Clothing: Students must wear comfortable, flexible clothes to class. We will be working with our minds and our bodies, therefore the body must be unconstrained and free to form without worry of inappropriate exposure of body parts. We will be moving from the floor to the rafters.

Shoes must be comfortable, flexible and protective. No flipflops or sandals allowed. You may wear them to class, but cannot perform in them. Hard heeled or other shoes are only allowed through costuming.

If classes are held in the rehearsal hall, no shoes are allowed on the dancer's floor. So, be sure to wear specific soft dance shoes or bring socks if you do not choose to be barefoot. Textbooks and some other bookstore materials can be ordered online through <u>MBS Direct Virtual Bookstore</u> or <u>Off-Campus Books</u> online ordering site. They are also available in stock at <u>UTD Bookstore</u> and Off-Campus Books.

### **Course Policy**

- 1. Make-up exams: Exams will be in the form of performed assignments and will only be allowed if official emergency documentation can be proved. However, formal performances with audiences cannot be made up.
- 2. Extra Credit: Students will be given due dates and assignments in advance. Extra Credit work will not be given.
- 3. Late Work: refer to make-up exams to whom the curtain is held for
- 4. Participation: We will be doing in class activities and participation is a must, as well as part of the student's grade.

Technical Requirements

Must be able to use email and word process.

**Student Assessments** 

**Grading Information** 

List point values and weights for all assessment tasks

Participation 40% - Including class assignments and instruction

Character and Improv Skill Growth: 40%

Your attendance can seriously affect your final grade. Please read below under attendance policy.

Journal Assignment:

20%

All students are to create and maintain a journal. Each week different topics will be discussed and employed in class. Each entry should cover two weeks of class work and assignments. I will require a minimum of two journal entries covering two consecutive weeks each. So, choose your weeks carefully. Choose the weeks that you feel truly represents your work, struggles and accomplishments in this class. These will be due Nov 14 (Monday).

Here are some questions to ask yourself before you write your entry:

-any handouts or notes (If you missed class this needs to be noted.)

-what was worked on in class those weeks (subject and/or goal)

-what you did in the activity or what character did you play? -what did you do to create this character? (Where did the

character come from?)

did you study others?

did you watch documentaries, films, etc?

did you speak with others or use observation skills?

did you do physical research (i.e.. Studies on disorders,

etc....)

-what made it difficult and/or easy for you?

-what is the importance of knowing this information or doing the exercise?

-what other research did you do for these assignments and/or activities?

-what do you think you accomplished these weeks (your strength)?

-what do you need to work on (your weakness)?

These journals are to be typed, well-organized and should be approximately two to three pages per entry. Analyze your work and choose your words carefully. Superficially filling the pages with shallow or repeated jargon will not satisfy the requirements for this assignment. I want depth in your personal analysis. It must be college level writing and I must be able to understand your points of analysis as well as your prescription for improvement. Here is an example:

Week 1 and 2: Aug. 22- Nov. 5

Instructions: The first two weeks of class we were told to read our syllabus on line, bring our computers to the next class and played various Improv games.

Subjects and Activities: We played the following games: Freeze, Man vs. Machine, Man vs. Animal, 3 times bigger and Picking Up Your Feet. In addition, we covered body positioning for stage. (We may play many games and work on multiple skills. You must cover at least three activities, assignments or exercises.)

Characters- When we played the game Freeze I tried to play a homeless woman and a small child in two separate scenes. When we played the game "Man vs Machine" we came up with a cool idea to create a blender.

Difficulty – When playing "Freeze" for the first time it was hard and a little scary. It was difficult to find the right time to call "Freeze" and jump into the Improv scene. It just seems to move so quickly I get a little overwhelmed and by the time I get the nerve to yell "Freeze" the scene has moved on and so has my opportunity to jump into the scene.

In "Man vs Machine" it took us awhile to come up with the idea, but when we did, things came together quickly. It was strange to have to be in physical contact with others at all times and work on movement continuously touching each other to make it function. (You could also discuss the difficulty in Brain Storming or coming to an agreement as a group if this becomes difficult.)

Body Positioning- It's also difficult to remember which arm and leg to put forward or back in a scene so the audience can see our movements clearly. We must remember to keep our bodies open and not stand at half when talking to one another allowing the body to remain open. The instructor says we will do it so much in class it will become automatic. I hope she's right.

Importance of assignments: I can see in these two exercises how an Improv performer must stay focused at all times. You can't afford to let your mind wonder and as soon as you see an opportunity you must jump in. If you hesitate you loose the moment. I can see how it helps your concentration, listening skills and reaction time. You don't have time to contemplate fear or insecurities. You do not have time to let your mind wonder. You must be, as the instructor puts it, "in the moment at all times" when you play these games.

In "Man vs. Machine" it teaches you to physically work together and how you must depend upon others to do their part to make the machine function properly. This is symbolic of what a group must do to make an Improv scene work. Students must work together physically and mentally to accomplish the goal of the activity and scene.

Research-I don't know what other research to do right now. The only thing I think I can do at this point is continue to play these types of games in class and to join some of the "Club Improv" meetings outside of class. Practice is probably the best thing I can do right now. I am going to try to work on my listening skills, inside and outside of class time.

Accomplishments/Growth- I was able to go into the exercise called "Freeze" twice the first time. It may not have been the best scene, but I feel pretty brave for doing it. It is difficult for me to touch others and I did it! This may not be a huge accomplishment for others, but it is for me. I am use to working alone. These exercises force me to work with others, mentally and physically. These exercises show me how dependent human beings are on one another to succeed in Improv (and in life) and have allowed me to build trust in others.

I have learned I do not listen to others, as well as I thought I did. I have always been a good student and can hear very well, but I have learned that real listening is not just hearing the words. It is much more. It is honestly listening with an open mind to what the other person is saying and carefully watching the non-verbal messages being sent at the same time. Communication is constant. This means you cannot assume anything. You must listen with your ears and your eyes.

With every message we receive there are two messages. The first message we learned is content, which is what the person actually said, the meaning of the words used. The second is the relational message, which can influence or even change the meaning of the content. It's not always what you say, but how you say it that counts. To quote my professor: "Words do not have meaning, people do."

Weakness/Critiques: I am a shy person and to be honest, a little insecure. I am trying to become more confident. I will need to speak up more and continue to perform in class exercises. I will try to think more positively about assignments and my actions. As the instructor says: We all have an inner critic that makes us too self-aware or can hold us hostage from our ability to create or respond by making us fearful of rejection or insecure about our actions. As the Instructor says: In this class you must put that inner critic in time-out. I'm going to follow what the instructor says and use "self talk" to send myself positive messages rather than negative ones.

The professor told me that I must work on projecting my voice. This is going to take some work and conscience practice on my part. She has recommended I do more vocal warm ups and practice projecting daily. I need to learn to listen to myself. We discussed in class how we don't really listen to ourselves on a daily basis and how we need to hear our voice come back to us.

At the end of the weeks' journal entry you must scan and attach all written assignments for those weeks.

Character and Improv Skills can be determined by some of the following factors:

Embodiment of character –full character commitments (mind, body, action)

This also includes a variety of characters not just one!

Executes basic rules of Improv

1. Do not say NO

2. Listen to what others say and do not speak over them.

3. Project and develop vocal skills

4. Do not block others when performing/be aware of physicalities

5. Use physical levels and positions for staging discussed in class

6. Use and develop different characters

7. Do not hog the improv or let others do all the work

- 8. Respond to action on stage when not speaking
- 9. Be original and try new things
- 10. Understanding of timing
- 11. Sensitivity and respect to others

12. An understanding of when to lead and when to develop background

13. Staying focused in character at all times

14. Listen carefully with eyes and ears

15. Adds different perspectives to subject matter and characters

List grade criteria for course

Scaled Score	Letter Equivalent
90 -100	Α
80-89	В
70-79	С
60-69	D

Your instructor also keeps an old-fashioned grade book. Due to past technological misfortunes, some operator errors and some systems errors with WebCT and other systems used, your instructor chooses to use elements of both, maintaining the whole organization of the class in written format. You may always set an appointment with me to discuss your grades, if assignments are not posted on the web. There might be assignments and submissions posted on the web. The instructor will let you know in class if there are postings.

#### **Participation**

How can one take an improvisation course and not participate, mentally and physically, at all times? Theatre is a collaborative art. Participation in this course is a physical and mental activity. Students must be able to handle criticism with a positive attitude and work to incorporate those critiques/suggestions into future performances.

Absences are taken seriously and only two "free get out of jail" cards are given per semester if your class meets twice a week, ten points will be taken off your participation and potentially performance grade for each absence that follows. If your class meets once a week, students receive one "free get out of jail" card and 20 points will be taken off their participation and potentially their performance grade with each absence that follows. Only absences where emergency/medical documentation is provided or University sponsored field trips/events will be excused. Theatre requires discipline. Use your absences wisely!

Please do not come to class ill. Remember, it's a collaborative event and we don't want to create a tragedy or comedy of errors with others health. Please bring me a copy of your medical documentation to avoid penalty.

Participation includes contributions and reactions to classroom and studio work, verbal expression of ideas to others, enthusiasm for topic in those expressions and overall involvement/behavior in class activities. Students must speak up, but do so appropriately. It is also the ability to accept criticism in a positive light and work to improve on those observations.

**Class Policies:** 

Aristotle Paraphrase from the "Poetics": Drama is man at his best. Comedy is man at his worst. We will deal with adult language and situations in this class. Many times in comedy and drama we are not always politically correct and harsh words can be used. Stereotypes may occur in character development and sexual tension or situations can be a funny treatment for a topic. However, if you are offended or feel compromised please speak with me. Students must work in groups and create each scene. Groups maybe changed and/or other solutions maybe explored. Silence is acceptance. It is your right to speak up.

#### Assignments

This is a performance-based course. Performances will be graded in written and oral forms at the discretion of the instructor. Performances will be discussed openly in class for learning purposes. Students are to take detailed notes of criticisms and comments made by the instructor and others during critique sessions.

Exercises, rituals and improvisations require physical involvement. There will be individual assignments, but most will involve groups of people. Theatrical and improvisational work is collaborative. Actors must learn to work, listen and literally feed off other people. Therefore, theatre games and physical types of exercises will be employed throughout the semester. Students will be expected to research and lead in such exercises.

We will be playing lots of theatre games in this class, as long as time allows. These games require group work and are a part of your participation grade. These games may also be incorporated into specific group projects of performance. I.e. Critique groups maybe formed to work on character development in a peer review type of setting.

Assignment submission instructions: Again, this is a performancebased class and you will be critiqued orally in class. You will be responsible for keeping up with those comments and grades. In other words, keep every critique and grade sheet you are given until you receive your final grade. I recommend this for any class you take.

Your journal must be submitted to me in hard copy. If you have printer problems please solve them before the assignment is due. Do not come to class the day they are due with this excuse. "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." I know "things" happen in life, but please do not try to do your assignment the night before they are due. "Things" may happen so give yourself time to take care of them.

#### **Online Tests/Quizzes**

Exams and quizzes are in the form of performances.

#### **Final Examination**

Your final in this course will be a formal assignment with specific requirements to be fulfilled. Your final maybe your performance during "An Evening of Improv", which will occur in the Main Theatre at the end of the semester. All students in this class must attend the show, whether they are performing or not. The dates and times will be announced in class. The professor for this show will determine student performance and participation. It will be a piece of work that should demonstrate all the skills you have acquired throughout the semester and must be approved by your professor and/or committee. It maybe a continuation of a previous work explored in class or a specific project developed between the student and the instructor. Detailed requirements will be given in class based upon individual and class needs.

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#### **Course Evaluation**

As required by UTD academic regulations, every student must complete an evaluation for each enrolled course at the end of the semester. An online instructional assessment form will be made available for your confidential

use. Please look for the course evaluation link on the course Homepage towards the end of the course.

### **Sharing Confidential Information**

Students considering sharing personal information in email, in person, or within assignments or exams should be aware that faculty members and teaching/research assistants are required by UT Dallas policy to report information about sexual misconduct to the UT Dallas Title IX Coordinator. Per university policy, faculty have been informed that they must identify the student to the UT Dallas Title IX Coordinator. Students who wish to have confidential discussions of incidents related to sexual harassment or sexual misconduct should contact the Student Counseling Center (972-883-2527 or after hours 972-UTD-TALK or 972-883-8255), the Women's Center (972-883-8255), a health care provider in the Student Health Center (972-883-2747), the clergyperson (or other legally recognized religious advisor) of their choice, or an off-campus resource (i.e., rape crisis center, doctor, psychologist). Students who are sexually assaulted, harassed, or victims of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, or stalking, are encouraged to directly report these incidents to the UT Dallas Police Department at 972-883-2222 or to the Title IX Coordinator at 972-883-2218. Additional information and resources may be found at http://www.utdallas.edu/oiec/title-ix/resources.

#### **Student Conduct and Discipline**

The University of Texas System (Regents' Rule 50101) and The University of Texas at Dallas have rules and regulations for the orderly and efficient conduct of their business. It is the responsibility of each student and each student organization to be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations which govern student conduct and activities. General information on student conduct and discipline is contained in the UT Dallas online catalogs (http://catalog.utdallas.edu).

The University of Texas at Dallas administers student discipline within the procedures of recognized and established due process. Procedures are defined and described in the Student Discipline and Conduct, UTDSP5003

(<u>http://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003</u>). Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations (SSB 4.400, 972-883-6391) and online at <u>http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents</u>.

A student at the University neither loses their rights nor escapes the responsibilities of citizenship. He or she is expected to obey federal, state, and local laws as well as the Regents' Rules, university regulations, and administrative rules. Students are subject to discipline for violating its standards of conduct whether such conduct takes place on or off campus, or whether civil or criminal penalties are also imposed for such conduct.

# **Academic Integrity**

*Academic Dishonesty:* The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that a student demonstrates a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work.

Academic dishonesty can occur in relation to any type of work submitted for academic credit or as a requirement for a class. It can include individual work or a group project. Academic dishonesty includes, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and collaboration/collusion. In order to avoid academic dishonesty, it is important for students to fully understand the expectations of their professors. This is best accomplished through asking clarifying questions if an individual does not completely understand the requirements of an assignment.

Additional information related to academic dishonesty and tips on how to avoid dishonesty may be found here: <u>http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/maintain</u>

## Email Use

The University of Texas at Dallas recognizes the value and efficiency of communication between faculty/staff and students through electronic mail. At the same time, email raises some issues concerning security and the identity of each individual in an email exchange. All official student email correspondence will be sent only to a student's UT Dallas email address and UT Dallas will only consider email requests originating from an official UT Dallas student email account. This allows the University to maintain a high degree of confidence in the identity of each individual's corresponding via email and the security of the transmitted information. The University of Texas at Dallas furnishes each student with a free email account that is to be used in all communication with university personnel. The Department of Information Resources provides a method for students to have their UT Dallas mail forwarded to other email accounts. To activate a student UT Dallas computer account and forward email to another account, go to http://netid.utdallas.edu.

#### **Student Grievance Procedures**

Procedures for student grievances are found in university policy UTDSP5005 (<u>http://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5005</u>). In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding disputes over grades, application of degree plan,

graduation/degree program requirements, and thesis/and dissertation committee, advisor actions and/or decisions, evaluations, and/or other fulfillments of academic responsibility, it is the obligation of the student first to make a serious effort to resolve the matter with the instructor, supervisor, administrator, or committee with whom the grievance originated.

### **Incomplete Grade Policy**

As per university policy, incomplete grades may be given, at the discretion of the instructor of record for a course, when a student has completed at least 70% of the required course material but cannot complete all requirements by the end of the semester. An incomplete course grade (grade of 'I') must be resolved completed within the time period specified by the instructor, not to exceed eight (8) weeks from the first day of the subsequent long semester. Upon completion of the required work, the symbol 'I' may be converted into a letter grade (A through F). If the grade of Incomplete is not removed by the end of the specified period, it will automatically be changed to F.

## **AccessAbility Services**

It is the policy and practice of The University of Texas at Dallas to make reasonable disability-related accommodations and/or services for students with documented disabilities. However, written notification from the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is required (see http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess). If you are eligible to receive disability-related accommodations and/or services and to ensure accommodations will be in place when the academic semester begins, students are encouraged to submit documentation four to six weeks in advance. Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact the Office of Student AccessAbility for a confidential discussion.

The Office of Student AccessAbility provides:

- 1 Academic accommodations for eligible students with a documented permanent physical, mental or sensory disability
- 2 Facilitation of non-academic and environmental accommodations and services
- 3 Resources and referral information, and advocacy support as necessary and appropriate.

OSA is located in the Student Services Building, suite 3.200. They can be reached by phone at 972-883-2098, or by email at <u>studentaccess@utdallas.edu</u>.

## **Religious Holy Days**

The University of Texas at Dallas will excuse a student from class or other

required activities, including examinations and travel time for the observance of a religious holy day for a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20, of the *Texas Tax Code*.

Students are encouraged to notify the instructor or activity sponsor as soon as possible regarding the absence, preferably in advance of the assignment. Excused students will be allowed to take missed exams or complete assignments within a reasonable time after the absence: a period equal to the length of the absence, up to a maximum of one week. A student who notifies the instructor and completes any missed exam or assignment may not be penalized for the absence. A student who fails to complete the exam or assignment within the prescribed period may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment.

If a student or an instructor disagrees about the nature of the absence [i.e., for the purpose of observing a religious holy day] or if there is similar disagreement about whether the student has been given a reasonable time to complete any missed assignments or examinations, either the student or the instructor may request a ruling from the President of UT Dallas or from the President's designee. The chief executive officer or designee must take into account the legislative intent of *Texas Education Code* 51.911(b), and the student and instructor will abide by the decision of the chief executive officer or designee.

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#### **Course Outline/Schedule**

This course outline and schedule is purely tentative. It is a form of organization that is intended to help the instructor reach the objectives of the course, but when dealing with human elements and development, there are always variables. The instructor has the right to change the dates, times and assignments, as she deems necessary. Instructions will be clearly discussed in class and students are required to take notes of all class discussions.

WEEK	STARTI NG DATE	TOPIC/LECTURE	ASSESSMEN T / ACTIVITY
1 (First class day)	Aug 22	Welcome Syllabus Review Importance of Play Taking and giving criticism	Beginning games Basic Construction for

		-Staging -physical levels -blocking -opening up -counter movements	Improv
2	Aug 29	Basic Rules of Improv Being in the moment- Observation skills- Commitment- Developing story lines	In class exercises -body isolations -center points -age range Full physical and mental commitments made in scenes.
3	Sept 5	Labor Day Holiday	
4	Sept 7 Sept 12	Man vs Machine Man vs Animal Energy	Students will perform these in class.
		Positions of power	-Mirrors -Isolation of energy (the eyes) -Exact and repetitive movements -3X the size

5	Sept 19	Increase size of groups -Slow motion and physical support	Individual Improvs Due in class Begin Small Group
6	Sept 26	Silence and Timing -make it ackward -too soon -too late -loud break for tension	-nonverbal scenes
7	Oct 3	Volume and Voices -sound affects -quality - cadence/patterns -pitch and tone	Students will have to create 3 different characters with 3 different voices
8	Oct 10	Basic Representation of some stage combat	Scenes in class
9	Oct 17	Putting it all together	Scenes due in class
10	Oct 24		
	Oct 31	One Word Theme practice	Skill sharpening and impromptu

			games. Student performance.
11	Nov 7	Development of new scenes	Students must come to class with a list of topics and potential scenes
12	Nov 14	Working with the scenes	
13	Nov 21	Thanksgiving Break	
14	Nov 28	Rehearse for final	
15	Dec 5	Final Performances	Performance and Participation

These timelines and descriptions are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

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Syllabus Addendum

**Prof's notes on dishonesty:** 

Performances can be plagiarized by the cutting selected, movements copied and mimicking. Your performances must be your own. Imitating someone else's performance is cheating. Don't use someone else's work. Make your own decisions, cut your own work and incorporate your own talents.

#### Withdrawal from Class

The administration of this institution has set deadlines for withdrawal of any college-level courses. These dates and times are published in that semester's course catalog. Administration procedures must be followed. It is the student's responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, I cannot drop or withdraw any student. You must do the proper paperwork to ensure that you will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if you choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.

Other policies:

Questions about hand gun carry policies, procedure and policies please refer to the UT Dallas Syllabus, Policies and Procedures webpage.

http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies

Please go to http://provost.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies/