Class helps students ‘Improv’ acting skills

BY DANNY SULLIVAN
REPORTER

Most students dread being put on the spot by a professor during class. But for members of the Theater Department’s improvisational theater class, the challenge of being put on the spot is what makes the course so fun.

“All we do is have fun,” said Arts & Sciences sophomore Melanie Wigton. “It’s a really laid-back class.”

Improvisational theater was not offered by the theater department for over a year, but the class has received much more interest this semester, according to Dr. William Hutson, associate professor of the Fine and Performing Arts Department.

Hutson said the class, with 18 members and several other interested students, has almost gotten “too big.”

“I was very surprised, but that’s a good problem to have,” Hutson said. “We’d like to offer the class more frequently or add another section, given the increased interest.”

Hutson said the class is made up of an equal number of theater and non-theater majors. Most of the students have already taken a course in beginning acting, however.

“It’s all about the skill of being able to make something up on the spot,” said Luke Tysdal, Arts & Sciences sophomore.

Hutson uses a variety of games and exercises to teach the class.

“We play improv games,” explained Wigton. “For instance, we will go around the room, and we will have to introduce the person next to us. As we make up a story about the person, that person has to act it out. It can be really funny.”

“I’ll throw out a character or a plot, and then the class has to act it out and build around it,” Hutson said.

Another exercise involves Hutson giving each class member a one-liner, with which the class members must create a cohesive skit. Later in the semester, Hutson said he plans to have the class perform a soap opera by providing the class with a vague script and scene description. The class will have to perform the scenes while creating their own dialogue on the spot.

That’s when teamwork comes into play.

“The class has to work as a whole,” said Wigton. “There has to be a lot of unity. Everyone gets to know each other well, and everyone gets to know Bill really well!”

Hutson said that the members of the “improv” class are well-suited for the class.

“It’s kind of a wild group,” said Hutson with a grin. “It’s great to be zany. But it takes discipline, too. Sometimes I’ll tell them to perform a scene, and it comes out really funny. Then I’ll tell them to re-do the same scene from a serious perspective. It can be a challenge.”

The “improv” class will have a chance to show-off their skills during a public performance in late April, said Hutson. The ticket prices, date, and time will be announced later.

Contact this reporter at: dannys@creighton.edu

Robby Valenta (left) and Erin Dunn pretend to be Eva and Juan Peron from the musical Evita while playing the improvisational game “Freeze Tag” during class. The games played during Improvational Theatre aim to improve the students’ quick thinking skills and enhance their sense of comedic timing.

Photo by Denise Lawse