

**HUB XCC 433 B1, Spring 2021**  
**Thinking through Puppets and Performing Objects:**  
**Using Theatrical Tools to Communicate the Complex, the Abstract, and the Technical**

Friday 2:30 – 5:15 pm  
FLR 152

**Instructors**

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**Introduction to the Cross-College Challenge**

The Cross-College Challenge offers a unique project-based learning experience in which interdisciplinary student teams from across BU's undergraduate colleges tackle real-world problems and develop leadership, teamwork and communication skills. Students from any major will collaborate with both on- and-off campus sponsors exposing students to current challenges impacting BU and the City of Boston in areas such as arts management, technology, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and beyond. Some teams may also investigate enduring human questions such as inequality, social justice, and human creativity. This course will focus on puppetry as a unique project-based learning experience.

**Introduction to Thinking Through Puppets**

Puppetry and other forms of object performance are experiencing a renaissance in the US and across the globe. But what can they offer a research university, where not only creating but also communicating new knowledge to a range of audiences is increasingly important? These "animated objects" have traditionally been used to convey narrative content; can they help research to become a compelling story that engages, informs, and even entertains an audience--by activating their intellect and affect? In this course, students from across BU's many colleges will explore how a broad range of puppetry techniques can help them to investigate and then communicate abstract theories, philosophies, and complex processes, injecting them with humor, suspense, and awe. Through visual storytelling, metaphors, materiality, and the handmade, participants will research the function and power of animate objects as tools of arts research. They will engage in analyzing ideas, making and performing, reflecting and giving feedback. The final products will be two puppet slams (a collection of short, experimental works), one based on the students' own research in small groups, and the other in collaboration

with BU doctoral students, who are client partners for this project. Other stakeholders are the office of the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs at BU and the **Puppet Showplace Theater**, which in hosting the second event is lending its brand along with providing its venue.

## **BU HUB Objectives**

XC 433 will meet **BU Hub Learning Outcomes for Oral Communication, Creativity/Innovation, Teamwork/Collaboration and Research and Information Literacy**. In particular:

- Students will learn and demonstrate the ability to search for, select, and use a range of publicly available and discipline-specific information sources ethically and strategically to address research questions.
- By producing their work in a series of iterative phases, students will demonstrate an understanding of the overall research process and its component parts, and be able to formulate good research questions or hypotheses, gather and analyze information, and critique, interpret, and communicate findings. For some teams, the fruits of research will yield new approaches to enduring questions, or new artistic expressions, or fresh arguments.
- Students will be able to craft and deliver responsible, considered and well-structured oral and/or signed arguments using media and modes of expression appropriate to the situation.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding that oral/signed communication is generally interactive, and they should be able to attend and respond thoughtfully to others.
- Students will be able to speak/sign effectively in situations ranging from the formal to the extemporaneous and interact comfortably with diverse audiences.
- Students will receive explicit training in teamwork and sustained experiences of collaborating with others, students will be able to identify the characteristics of a well-functioning team.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to use the tools and strategies of working successfully with a diverse group, such as assigning roles and responsibilities, giving and receiving feedback, and engaging in meaningful group reflection that inspires collective ownership of results.
- Students will demonstrate understanding of creativity as a learnable, iterative process of imagining new possibilities that involves risk-taking, use of multiple strategies, and reconceiving in response to feedback, and will be able to identify individual and institutional factors that promote and inhibit creativity.

## **Student Supplies**

- 8 x 11 or larger bound/spiral unlined sketchbook of at least 80 pages
- Students will be provided a kit of supplies but should reserve up to \$25 to purchase additional supplies

## Course Assignments

This seminar requires your active involvement in a variety of class activities. Not all work will be graded, but that does not mean it is unimportant. Students who prepare diligently for class, participate actively, and take the assignments seriously generally learn more and perform better than those who do not. Specific course requirements are:

- **Annotated Research (10%) (Teamwork)**
  - This assignment gives students the opportunity to practice crucial research and information literacy skills, in collaboration with team members. Teams will formulate a research question, then locate and evaluate a variety of scholarly and non-scholarly sources to inform the team's approach to the Student Slam project.
- **Student Slam (15%) (Individual and Teamwork)**
  - A slam is a series of short-form (3-10 minutes), experimental puppet works, meant to expand the boundaries of the form. This assignment gives students the opportunity to address all HUB areas, as well as to lay a foundation for the final project. Based on their research, classroom exercises, and relevant models, teams will create a short puppet slam piece. The piece will be performed for the class and, after getting feedback, a revised copy will be recorded and submitted.

### **Doctoral Students' Slam (30%) (Teamwork)**

- The culminating project for this course gives students the opportunity to address all HUB areas. In collaboration with their client partners, BU graduate students, teams will perform a 10-minute puppet slam piece **hosted by the Puppet Showplace Theater** and participate in a "defense" that helps us evaluate the process rather than simply the product. Teams should be prepared to demonstrate an understanding of how puppets and objects work, as well as an awareness of how they incorporated risk-taking, creativity, craft, client expectations, and audience awareness into their process.
- **Teamwork Contracts (5%) (Teamwork)**
  - Students will work in different teams, for the Student Slam and for the Doctoral Slam. To facilitate these collaborations, students will receive explicit training in Team Learning Assistant (TLA) software. For each project, students will learn how to use the tools and strategies of working successfully with a diverse group, such as assigning roles and responsibilities, giving and receiving feedback, and engaging in meaningful group reflection that inspires collective ownership of results.
- **Reflections (6%) (Individual)**

- Students will reflect on their learning experiences and progress during the course, after the Student Slam and the Doctoral Slam. Students are welcome to document their thoughts about the new skills and knowledge acquired through these projects in a brief written essay or more creative format (e.g., photo-essay, short video).
- **Attendance, Preparation, Participation, Homework (24%) (Individual and Teamwork)**
  - Each regular class meeting is worth 2% of your final grade, broken down as follows: 0.5% for attendance, 0.5% for preparation/engagement, 1% for timely completion of homework.
  - Your regular attendance and participation, careful preparation, and respectful citizenship are essential both to your own learning and to your classmates' learning, particularly when working in teams. Participation can be both active and passive: respectfully listening to your classmates' ideas during discussion is just as important as sharing your own thoughts. Likewise, taking notes, contributing to small-group activities, completing homework and in-class exercises, responding thoughtfully to other students' creative work, and arriving to class on time are all forms of participation. This portion of the course requirements will address all HUB areas.
- **Journal checks (10%) (Individual)**
  - Students will practice responding to assigned texts and experiment with creative strategies in a journal. In this way, students will cultivate creativity as a learnable, transferable skill. You will be expected to photograph or scan pages and upload portions of this journal to your Digication Portfolio for regular checks. While we are looking for engagement in course content, there is no one way to create a journal.

### Required outside class hours

- **XCC Virtual Launch:** Friday, 1/28, 4:00-5:30PM
  - Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/xcc-virtual-launch-spring-2021-tickets-129913650225>
  - Meet students and faculty across the XCC program, as well as be introduced to the campus resources to help you with your projects.
- **Student Puppet Slam:** Friday, 3/5, time TBD
  - This activity addresses all four HUB areas.
- **Meetings with grad students**
  - Several times during the semester, teams will meet with their assigned graduate students at mutually convenient times to work on the Doctoral

Slam. This addresses all HUB areas.

- **Doctoral Slam:** Friday 4/23 or Saturday 4/24, time TBD
  - We will do a final prep during class time, then reconvene promptly at time TBD. This addresses all HUB areas.
- **HUB Virtual Showcase Event:** Date/time TBD
  - All XCC sections will highlight their projects during this end-of-semester showcase. This addresses all HUB areas.
- **Final Defense:** Thursday, 5/7, 12-2 pm
  - Teams will meet with instructors to defend their doctoral slams and debrief about the course. This addresses all HUB areas.

## Policies

- **Attendance:** So much of what we do for this class takes place during class, so every absence is a loss of work that you cannot make up. Each student is allowed one absence without penalty; however, it is the student's responsibility to check in with the instructors and/or team members, in advance if possible, and create a plan for any missed work. See section above regarding loss of points for attendance and missed activities.
- **Lateness:** Class will begin promptly. Regularly arriving late to class will be cause for a private conversation with the instructors, followed by grade penalties if appropriate.
- **Email policy:** Instructors will make announcements by email, so we ask that you check your email regularly. You are responsible for the information we send you. Likewise, we will check our email at least once daily for questions from you. Please allow 24 hours for a response during the week, 48 hours over the weekend.
- **Electronic Devices:** [Recent research](#) shows that "the mere presence of [a smartphone] reduces available cognitive capacity." Think about our class as an organism--if one part of the organism is distracted, this distraction can impact the health of the entire organism. Laptops/tablets are permitted in class only for course-related activities (e.g, accessing assigned reading, communicating with clients). Please close extraneous programs and keep phones silenced and out of sight. You will receive advance notice when laptops are necessary.
- **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the presentation of another's work as your own, even by mistake- is a violation of BU regulations. Plagiarism may result in failing this course and possible further penalties. Be sure to read and comply with BU's [Academic Conduct Code](#) for undergraduate students. If you are in doubt, consult the instructors.

- **Rules governing teamwork:** 1. No team member shall intentionally restrict or inhibit another team member's access to team meetings, team work-in-progress, or other team activities without the express authorization of the instructor. 2. All team members shall be held responsible for the content of all teamwork submitted for evaluation as if each team member had individually submitted the entire work product of their team as their own work. If you have any questions or doubts, consult the professors.

### **Learn from Anywhere format & etiquette**

- All class sessions will happen in EST, so remote students must be able to attend during our regularly scheduled sessions.
- When you attend class in-person, you must wear a mask that fully covers your nose and mouth and maintain distance from others.
- When you attend class in-person, you will need a fully charged laptop/tablet (rather than a phone) and a set of headphones/earbuds for teamwork with remote students.
- When you attend class remotely, please keep your video on to show us that you are fully present and to receive credit for attendance. If a situation at your location momentarily necessitates that you turn off your camera, that is okay. Or if you are currently in a special situation and would like to petition to have your camera off, please reach out to discuss a possible accommodation.
- As a rule, class sessions will not be recorded, though some sessions or portions of sessions may be recorded.

### **Additional Resources**

## DAILY SCHEDULE

**1/28 XCC Virtual Launch, 4:00-5:30PM:**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/xcc-virtual-launch-spring-2021-tickets-129913650225>

**1/29** Introduction to the course & puppetry; discuss syllabus & expectations (including journal pages/setting up Digication portfolio); In-class activities related to Creativity/Innovation & Research and Information Literacy areas: 1) *Freewrite*: What are puppets? What is the source of my knowledge on puppets? 2) Experiential activity 3) Visual Journal Reflection

**2/5** Discuss clips; receive instruction in the principle of teaming **and discuss teaming**; Assign Structured Brainstorming

**Homework due:** 1.5 hours of watching clips; excerpts from *Puppetry: A World History*; Finish setting-up ePortfolio. Review syllabus and Blackboard site. Check Facebook site (weekly).

**Journal pages:** 3-5 pages of visual/sketchnotes in response to the viewings.

**2/12** Present topics from Structured Brainstorming; Create teams; Assign Annotated Research; Demo different techniques; Discuss viewings; Practice creativity/innovation by creating a piece & sharing

**Homework due: Structured Brainstorming for Student Slam; Team contract for Student Slam** (NOTE: Teams will need to arrange to meet during the week to complete the contract and annotated research assignments; before meeting

plan

to watch the [Teaming Prezi](#) and read pp. 13-20 of the TLA Handbook and fill out the Individual Contract Worksheet (part 1 & 2))

**Journal pages:** Respond to prompt on Blackboard

**2/19** Team conferences about Annotated Research; Studio time to work on Student Puppet Slam; Practice research & information literacy, oral communication, teamwork/ collaboration, creativity/innovation

**Homework due: Annotated Research**

**Journal pages:** Respond to prompt on Blackboard; post pages in Digication portfolio

**2/26** Discuss and apply the process of conveying abstract concepts through

image/metaphor as forms of Creativity/Innovation; Constellation(s) or Poem-object exercise; Students receive graduate pairings; Studio time to work on Student Puppet Slam

**Homework due:** Selected poetry; Molly Bang, *How Pictures Work*; watch Julio Torres's "[My Favorite Shapes](#)" (or if you have HBO, here is a link to the [HBO special](#); trailer [here](#)); Be prepared to discuss how shapes, colors, and other art elements make meaning.

**Journal pages:** Respond to readings/viewings on Blackboard; post pages in Digication portfolio

**3/5 Student Puppet Slam and feedback session;** Practice oral communication via structured feedback using CRP model; Start planning for Graduate Puppet Slam  
**Homework due:** Teams must set up a time to meet/call graduate students during coming week

**3/12** Teams meet with graduate collaborators to begin planning Doctoral Slam  
**Homework due: Team Contract for Doctoral Slam, Reflection on Student Slam/Teamwork**

**3/19** Teams check in with instructors; Individual work/planning time

**3/26** Show individual mini-pieces about COVID-19 and discussion/demo of techniques to make screen-based work with phone, etc. Watch *Puppet* together and discuss.

**Homework due:** Prepare a 2 to 3 minute piece, using any materials you want, and thinking of the screen as a theater.

**Journal pages:** Respond to readings/viewings on Blackboard; post pages in Digication portfolio

**4/2** Studio/check-in time (timeslot with Jessica and Felice will be assigned between 2:30-4:00); Teamwork check-in with **teaming interns** from 4:15-5:15 Practice Oral Communication, Teamwork/Collaboration, Creativity/Innovation

**Journal pages:** Respond to readings/viewings on Blackboard; post pages in Digication portfolio



**4/9** Feedback sessions with guests  
Practice Oral Communication, Teamwork/Collaboration, Creativity/Innovation

**Homework due:** A sample demo/presentation of each work in progress

**Journal pages:** Respond to 1-2 pieces from the [Screen Puppets Facebook page](#); post pages in Digication portfolio

**4/16** Feedback session with graduate students and Slam emcee?  
Practice Oral Communication, Teamwork/Collaboration, Creativity/Innovation

**Homework due:** Draft of Doctoral Slam piece(s)

**Journal pages:** Respond to readings/viewings on Blackboard; post pages in Digication portfolio

**4/23** Final prep and run through of virtual slam; reconvene at 6:00 pm for tech run

**Graduate Puppet Slam: 7-9 pm**

**5/5 Homework due: Reflection #2 on course & Doctoral Slam (Blackboard)**

**5/8 Closing reflection/defense, 3-5 pm**