Thinking through Puppets and Performing Objects:
Using Theatrical Tools to Communicate the Complex, the Abstract, and the Technical

Class Meetings: Fridays 2:30 – 5:15 pm
Classrooms: CAS 222 and CFA 310 (studio work)

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

This is a unique class where undergrads work with grads and what many would perceive as the “playful” potential of puppets is brought to serious research. 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 product is the creation of two puppet slam pieces, each based on a doctoral students' research. A slam is a collection of short, experimental works. The two pieces are devised in a small group in conversation with the doctoral students themselves. Each graduate student has two pieces created in response to their work; each piece is a product of creativity and innovation and demonstrates the myriad possibilities.

**XC 433’s Stakeholders and Deliverables:**

1. **BU Doctoral and Masters Students**

Each student receives two short pieces that feature their research and represent it in 2 different ways. The work produced in this class allows their research to become more visible and memorable to diverse audiences, promoting it to the larger BU community.

2. **Puppet Showplace Theater in Brookline**

The class produces a unique puppetry event performed through their venue, that highlights the range of puppetry’s possibilities for communicating research and in terms of audience.

3. **The Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs/Office of the Provost**

In the course, students provide a venue for unique professional development opportunities for graduate students. The graduate students have multiple opportunities to explain their research and to collaborate in developing unique ways to think about and communicate it.

**BU HUB Objectives**

XC 433 meets the BU Hub Learning Outcomes for **Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL):**

- 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 (RIL).

- Students will engage in and draw from a variety of research sources, viewing
research as multimodal. They will use both scholarly as well as popular sources, such as Facebook, evaluating when those sources are credible (RIL).

- Students will be able to describe the research of two or more doctoral candidates (including how they narrowed and made specific their focus as part of the process) (RIL).
- By producing creative work in a series of iterative phases, students will demonstrate an understanding of the overall practice-led research process while demonstrating an ability to formulate good research questions or hypotheses, gather and analyze information, and critique, interpret, and communicate findings. The result of the combination of arts-based or practice-led research, along with scholarly investigation will inevitably yield fresh arguments in the form of new approaches to enduring questions created via new artistic expressions (C&I and RIL).
- Students will be able to craft and deliver responsible, considered, and well-structured “arguments” in the form of a puppetry performance that takes a certain position. They use a variety of media and modes of expression and employ the skills of oral and/or signed arguments in a thoughtful manner with diverse audiences in mind and appropriate to the situation and topic (OC).
- In conversations with graduate students and mentors, students will demonstrate an understanding that oral/signed communication is generally interactive, and they should be able to attend and respond thoughtfully to the students and to team members. (OC)
- Students will be able to speak/sign effectively in situations ranging from the formal to the extemporaneous and interact comfortably with faculty, grad students, mentors, and each other. They will also be able to introduce their projects and themselves, providing brief explanations and bios. (OC)
- 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. (TW)
- 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. (TW)
- Through the devising and refining of collaborative puppet works, and documentation in their visual journals, 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 (C&I).

Additional Course Objectives:

- Students will develop skills in a range of puppetry styles, including animation and
Students will be able to describe important aspects of the field of puppetry, including how animation happens, various types of puppetry (with a global lens), and some well-known puppeteers/companies/works. 

- Students will develop improv skills and be able to apply them to puppetry.
- Students will be able to describe some of the principles of improv.

**Student Supplies**

- 8 x 11 or larger bound/spiral unlined sketchbook of at least 80 pages and basic supplies such as pens/markers, colored pencils, glue, scissors, and scotch tape.
- Students will be provided most supplies for creating the puppet pieces but should reserve up to $25 to purchase additional supplies.

**Classroom Etiquette and Use of the Classroom as a Studio Space**

The class relies on crafting items and students are permitted to use an Art Education classroom (CFA 310). To that end, students must treat the space and tools in a respectful and responsible manner to be allowed to continue to use it as a studio space. If this cannot be upheld by the larger class team, students will need to find alternative places to work.

**Course Assignments and Objectives:**

This seminar requires your active involvement in a variety of class activities. Not all work will be graded individually, 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. Also, many of the practices, habits, and dispositions that make up the HUB capacities addressed in the class, are not developed through discrete assignments, rather they are developed through regular and sustained engagement with the course activities. They are: **Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C)** and **Research and Information Literacy (RIL)**

**Specific course requirements are:**

- **Doctoral Students’ Slam (35%) (Team)**
  
  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. 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. This final grade also reflects their teamwork and
documentation of the development of the piece. Final presentation on April 29 (OC, C&I, T/C, R&IL)

- **Annotated Research (5%) (Team) Student Slam**
  This assignment gives students the opportunity to practice crucial research and information literacy skills. The class will choose a topic and each team will formulate research question/s that relate. They will then locate and evaluate 3 scholarly and 3 non-scholarly sources to inform their team’s approach to the Student Slam project. Due February 11 (R&IL)

- **Student Slam (15%) (Individual and Team)**
  A slam is a series of short-form (3-10 minutes), experimental puppet works, meant to explore and 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 version will be presented. Final presentation on March 4 (OC, C&I, T/C, R&IL)

- **Teamwork Contracts (5%) (Team)**
  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 teamwork. 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. Due on February 18 and March 25 (OC and T/C)

- **ePortfolio and Reflections (10%) (Individual)**
  Students will reflect on their learning experiences and progress during the course, after the Student Slam and the Doctoral Slam (Final Documentation/Reflection of Doctoral Slam Pieces). Students should gather images as they go to document their process and the new skills and knowledge acquired through their creative activities (e.g., in-process photos, inspiration, and short video). Ongoing, due on March 18 and May 6 (C&I)

- **Attendance, preparation, and participation (20%) (Individual)**
  Students must also attend the showcase in May. This may also include commenting on classmates' work and checking the FB page of global puppetry as a form of research. This portion of the course requirements will address all HUB areas. Ongoing (OC, C&I, T/C, R&IL)

- **Visual Journal (10%) (Individual)**
Each week students create 3-5 pages of visual/sketchnotes in your Visual Journal. Students will respond to assigned texts and viewings, in-class activities, and their plans for larger projects. You may be given specific prompts such as key concepts and puppet terminology. This is a place to experiment with creative strategies and to cultivate meta-awareness of 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. While we are looking for engagement in course content and substance, there is no one way to create a journal and this needn’t be a work of art. Ongoing (C&I and R&IL)

**Required Hours Outside Class**

- **XCC Virtual Launch:** Wednesday, January 19th 5:00-7:00pm  
  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, 3/18  
  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 4/29, 7-10 PM  
  We will do a final prep during class time, then have a pause for dinner and reconvene promptly for the slam. This addresses all HUB areas.

- **HUB Virtual Showcase Event:** 5/6, evening (time TBA)  
  All XCC sections will highlight their projects during this end-of-semester showcase. This addresses all HUB areas.

**Policies**

- **Attendance:** Much of the learning and creation takes place during class, so every absence is impossible to really make up. Missing more than one class (or specific classes) may result in a lower score. Missing the slam performances, for example, will lower the final grade significantly.

- **Lateness:** Class will begin promptly. Regularly arriving late to class is an attendance issue.

- **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:** Students should be present in terms of attention and engagement. Only have your laptop open when necessary for class work. Close extraneous programs and keep phones silenced and out of sight.

- **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:**
  - Students are expected to work towards the success of the group, which may mean give and take.
  - 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.
  - 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 or have conflicts that you cannot resolve, please consult the professors immediately.
  - Students will be asked to use Google Teams to communicate (and to include us).
  - Students should attempt to resolve issues as a team but in the case of, for example, lack of responsiveness to communication by a member, students should contact instructors immediately and give a factual account of the issue.

**Additional Resources**

- For research help, feel free to schedule an individual or team appointment with Marci Cohen, Assistant Head, Music Library, Mugar Memorial Library [mcohen2@bu.edu](mailto:mcohen2@bu.edu) / 617-353-3707

- For help with teaming dynamics, feel free to schedule an individual or team appointment with the XCC Teaming Teaching Fellows: TBA.
DAILY SCHEDULE

Week 1  1/21  Introduction to Course & Intro to Puppetry: Part 1

Activities:

• Introductions
• Improv Activity: “The Many Whos I Am.”
• Discuss syllabus & expectations (including journal pages/setting up Digication portfolio/materials requirements)
• Freewrite: What is a puppet or what makes something a puppet?
• puppets and breath: sticks
• Visual Journal Reflection (Eva-Lotte Lamm and “Puppet Wisdom” words)

Due: Nothing

To do: Set up ePortfolio for 1/28, Checkout additional assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). You will create Visual Journal pages quasi-weekly.

HUB UNITS: Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 2  1/28  Intro to Puppetry: Part 2

Activities:

• Improv warm-up
• paper as a material and brown paper experiential activity in teams
• Objects/Materiality/Metaphor
• Create 1-minute stories: Introductions
• Miranda July: The Button Factory and Julio Torres: My Favorite Shapes (storytelling, suspension of disbelief/willful belief) and holding space
• Discuss The Puppet Tree
• Discuss clips

Due: Set up ePortfolio for 1/28, Checkout additional assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). You will create Visual Journal pages quasi-weekly.

To do: Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages. Think of a couple of interesting topics, concepts, or themes and come ready to share.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 3 2/4 Intro to Puppetry: Part 3

Activities:

• Revive the paper puppets, add mood and reaction (and music)
• Molly Bang: How Pictures Work
• Elements of Puppetry (How do they relate to the Elements of Art and Principles of Design and the Elements of Dance?)
• Hand puppet practice
• Improv with hand puppets. Add rhythm, mood, and reactions?
• Pick a theme for the group slam

Due: Share at least one issue that you feel would be something interesting to research and explore throughout puppetry. Assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages. Think of a couple of interesting topics, concepts, or themes and come ready to share.

To do: Create 2 pages of primarily visual brainstorming for group slam project. Checkout
assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages. Think of a couple of interesting topics, concepts, or themes and come ready to share. Finish a hand puppet.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 4  2/11  Intro to Teamwork with Teamwork Teaching Fellows and Dividing Versus Devising and Hand Puppet Exploration

Activities:

- Team Fellows
- Devising versus dividing
- Hand puppet exploration with improv

Due: Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages. Annotated Research Template Started. Bring completed hand puppet

To Do: Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages. Annotated Research Template Started. Bring completed hand puppet. Teams will need to arrange to meet during the week to complete the contract; 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).

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), and Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C)

Week 5  2/18  Various Puppet Types and Team Studio Work Time
Activities:

- Demo different techniques (tabletop, toy theater, shadow; the process of conveying abstract concepts through image/metaphor
- Studio time to work on Student Puppet Slam

Due: Team contract for Student Slam group. Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages, Annotated Research Template complete and Team Contract.

To Do: Rehearse and Build items for the slam piece and check assignments/Course Materials and Activities on BB. Journal

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 6 2/25 First Iteration and feedback session. CRP (Critical Response Process) and Student Puppet Slam

Activities:

- CRP: Critical Response Process (watch short video and review handout)
- Present pieces and practice CRP to give feedback

Due: Be prepared to perform first iteration of Puppet Slam piece LIVE for the class


Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and
Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 7  3/4  Undergraduate Puppet Slam

Activities:

● Perform the slam

Due: Final Student Puppet Slam Piece

To do: Reflection and documentation on Student on ePortfolio in two weeks.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I) and Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C)

Week 8  3/11  Spring Break

Week 9  3/18  Grad Students Attend Class to Present on Their Research, ranking of choices, and Doctoral Team Contract.

Activities:

● 60 minutes grad students
● 15-minute improv activity midway through? With hand puppets?
● 60 minutes grad students
● 30 minutes: Receive groups, meet, and rank choices of which graduate student research they want to work with.

Structure = 15 minutes for each grad student. Students listen and take notes during grad student presentations Each grad student presents for approximately 7 minutes with 5 minutes of questions and 3 minutes of reflective sketchnoting in the visual journal.
Due: Final Student Puppet Slam Documentation and Reflection on Student.

To do: Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages.

Oral Communication (OC), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

3/21 World Puppetry Day

Week 10 3/25 Meet at Puppet Showplace at 3:00 (end by 4:45)

Activities:

- tour of the venue
- receive group assignments
- group time to brainstorm and meet with teams

Due: Team Contract for Doctoral Slam. Set-up google groups, make contact and schedule a first meeting, and start to think of ideas based on the presentations. Assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages.

To Do: Meet with your group outside of class to share ideas and brainstorm and set up 2 meetings with the 2 doctoral students if you haven’t and try to meet once by next week. Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), and Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C)

Week 11 4/1 Studio Time and check-ins with groups
Activities:

- Devise and build
- Team meetings with Suzy and Felice

Due: Have met with your group outside of class to share ideas and brainstorm and set up 2 meetings with the 2 doctoral students. Maybe have met once with the doctoral students. Checkout assignments/course materials in the Blackboard folder for the week such as watching and responding to clips and doing readings (see “task list” in the folder each week for clarification). Visual Journal pages.

To do: Meet with your grad student and continue to develop the pieces Ideas, meet with teams to continue to devise and build. Rehearse. Create a crankie (individual) due in 2 weeks.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 12 4/8 Feedback Sessions with Puppeteer Guests

Activities:

- 15 minutes to rehearse
- Present/make a pitch for guests and write notes for your classmates
- Crankie

Due: Have met twice and scheduled a third meeting with the grad students. For guest mentors, be prepared to describe and/or do a sample demo/presentation of each of your pieces. Show puppets or props in progress. Other assignments/course materials and activities on BB.

To do: Integrate Ideas, meet with teams to continue to devise and build. Rehearse. Create a crankie (individual) due in 2 weeks.
Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

Week 13  4/15  Independent Work Time- No Class Meeting

**Due:** Arrange with your team to meet to work on the piece for at least 10 hours over the two weeks. Build and rehearse. Document process for Final Slam. Check blackboard for any items that should be uploaded.

**To do:** Arrange with your team to meet to work on the piece. Build and rehearse. Document process for Final Slam. Check blackboard for any items that should be uploaded. Continue to consult the graduate students.

Week 14  4/22  Feedback session with Graduate Students and Puppet Showplace Visiting Artist

**Activities:**

- Present final pieces for the artists from Puppet Showplace Theater

**Due:** Final pieces are close to finished and ready to show (with minimal set-up). Document process for Final Slam. Crankie due (upload a video to ePortfolio or show in class). Submit bios and intros to the pieces.

**To do:** Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse... and also incorporate feedback into final piece. Stay in contact with the graduate students.

Week 15  4/29  Meet at Puppet Showplace Theater: Graduate Puppet Slam
Activities:

- Dress rehearsal
- Break
- All-call
- Performances
- Talkback
- Clean-up

**Due:** Be fully prepared to perform (well-rehearsed and all props and puppets made).

**To do:** See Description for Final Documentation/Reflection of Doctoral Slam Pieces on BB due %.

Oral Communication (OC), Creativity/Innovation (C&I), Teamwork/Collaboration (T/C) and Research and Information Literacy (RIL)

**5/6 XCC Project Showcase (evening)**

**Due:** Preparations for the showcase and the final Documentation/Reflection of Doctoral Slam Pieces/Process due by 12:00 pm (noon)