

Critical Studies in Improvisation: PhD

The interdisciplinary graduate program in Critical Studies in Improvisation (IMPR) offers a PhD degree incorporating foundations in critical inquiry, multidisciplinary improvisatory practices, performative agency, and community engagement, built on years of award-winning, arts-based research and training by the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI). Join our community of improvisers!

uoguelph.ca/arts/improv

PROGRAM

In the cohort-based Critical Studies in Improvisation PhD (4 years) program, students will complete three core courses together in Core Concepts, Research Methods, and Arts-Based Community-Making. In conjunction with faculty mentors, students will develop their individual program of study, customized to their research and practice interests. Through courses, project work and optional paid internships, students will have many opportunities to engage with fellow students, scholars, artists, improvisers-in-residence, and community organizations. Candidates will gain broadly applicable practical skills in research and project development, management and implementation, leadership, and collaboration.

RESEARCH

PhD students will develop their own projects.

PhD students will focus on IMPR as their Primary Area (part of the Qualifying Exam), which will involve an intensive literature review, preliminary thesis research, and presentation at the Graduate Colloquium. PhD students will establish an area of disciplinary expertise through the combination of their course electives, the pedagogy lab, and the Secondary Area (SA). Outcomes will include the design of specific courses in the Secondary Area which will be shaped by critique and response from faculty advisors.

Application Deadline:

January 31, 2026

Entry: Fall 2026



Musical Improvisation at Land's End summer camp participants lying on a beach in the Gaspésie. Photo: Kimber Sider

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

PhD: Applicants must have achieved a minimum GPA of 75% in their completed Master's degree program.

All applications must include:

- CV
- Transcripts
- Writing Sample
- Two letters of reference
- Research Proposal with rationale
- Portfolio of creative, professional, community-engaged, and/or research practice, in relationship to IMPR and to their proposed area of research. Portfolios can include music, artwork, digital files, writings, and must be linked to the candidate's rationale for admission.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN:

- Improvisation
- Community engagement
- Interdisciplinary approaches
- Arts-based practices for social change
- Practice-based research / Research-creation

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:

- Research and writing
- Public administration
- Communications
- Government, non-government organizations and not-for-profits
- Community leadership
- Arts programming and administration

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL STUDIES IN IMPROVISATION

Director:

Dr. Eric Fillion
efillion@uoguelph.ca

CONTACT INFORMATION

Graduate Program Coordinator:

James Harley
imprgpc@uoguelph.ca
 519-824-4120 ext 56637

Academic Program Assistant:

Callie Gibson
imprgpa@uoguelph.ca
 519-824-4120 ext 54388

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL STUDIES IN IMPROVISATION (IICSI)

IICSI is a partnered research institute hosted at the University of Guelph. The partners include six academic institutions, a foundation (Musagetes), and over 30 community-based organizations. The Institute's mandate is to create positive social change through the confluence of improvisational arts, innovative scholarship, and collaborative action. Our team engages, connects, and mobilizes scholars, students, creative practitioners, and community partners in order to create a vibrant intellectual hub, and a focal point for leading-edge research and critical inquiry in the field of improvisation studies.

For more about the institute and a full list of partners, visit our website:

improvisationinstitute.ca/about-iicsi/team/

Through IICSI, students in the program will have access to a broad range of award-winning faculty, artists, scholars, and community organizations, as well as internships and ImprovLab, a cutting edge performance and research facility currently in development. In addition to IICSI's five other university sites and network of affiliated scholars and community organizations, students will have opportunities to engage with a variety of experts such as IICSI Postdoctoral Fellows and Community Engagement Officer, Improvisers-in-Residence, Visiting Artists, and faculty and researchers from the University's Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI).

CORE GUELPH FACULTY

Frederique Arroyas – Associate Professor, SOLAL (French) (IICSI Site Coordinator)

Daniel Fischlin – Professor, SETS (English) & Graduate Program Coordinator

James Harley – Associate Professor, SOFAM (Music)

Ajay Heble – Professor, SETS (English) & Director, IICSI

AFFILIATED GUELPH FACULTY

Madhur Anand – Professor, Environmental Sciences

William Bettger – Associate Professor, Human Health and Nutritional Sciences

Diane Borsato – Associate Professor, Studio Art

Elaine Chang – Associate Professor, English & Theatre Studies

Rumina Dhalla – Associate Professor, Management

Mervyn Horgan – Associate Professor, Sociology

Karen Houle – Professor, Philosophy

Elizabeth Jackson – Acting Director, Community Engaged Scholarship Institute

Leah Levac – Assistant Professor, Political Science

Mark Lipton – Associate Professor, Literary Studies / Theatre Studies

Marta McCarthy – Associate Professor, Music

Judi McCuaig – Associate Professor, Computer Science

Kimberley McLeod – Assistant Professor, Theatre Studies

Carla Rice – Professor, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

Howard Spring – Associate Professor, Music

Alyssa Woods – Assistant Professor, Music

IICSI SITE UNIVERSITIES & COORDINATORS:

McGill University – Eric Lewis (Associate Professor, Philosophy)

Memorial University of Newfoundland – Andrew Staniland (Professor, Music)

University of British Columbia – Kevin McNeilly (Associate Professor, English)

University of California, Santa Barbara, Centre for Black Studies – George Lipsitz (Professor, Black Studies)

University of Regina – Rebecca Caines (Associate Professor, Media, Art & Performance)



PhD student Carey West with Improviser-in-Residence Douglas R. Ewart and Sound It Out radio producer Rachel Elliott in a turntablism workshop at the Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium.

Photos: Richelle Forsey



INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
CRITICAL STUDIES IN
IMPROVISATION