



GRA/URA positions at the University of Guelph

Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice a SSHRC MCRI project

Project Director: Professor Ajay Heble

This research project plays a leading role in defining a new field of interdisciplinary inquiry into the social, cultural and political effects of musical improvisation. Our research is of interest to graduate students from a wide range of disciplines, including music, English Studies, theatre and performance studies, law, philosophy, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, French Studies, and communications. It brings together a dynamic international research team with a demonstrated track record in grant management and student training, and it fosters innovative partnerships with community-based organizations. Outcomes will range across a wide spectrum of electronic, broadcast, and print media, with a focus on policy-oriented and community-facing impacts. The project will have a significant effect on how research is done and how its results are implemented and disseminated, both within and beyond the academy. In addition to public discourse and scholarly publication, our work highlights collaboration with arts presenters, educators, and policy makers to ensure the broadest possible impact on Canadian society.

The project's core hypothesis is that musical improvisation is a crucial model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action. Taking as a point of departure performance practices from post 1960s jazz and creative improvised music that cannot readily be scripted, predicted, or compelled into orthodoxy, we argue that the innovative working models of improvisation developed by creative practitioners have helped to promote a dynamic exchange of cultural forms, and to encourage new, socially responsive forms of community building across national, cultural, and artistic boundaries. Improvisation, in short, has much to tell us about the ways in which communities based on such forms are politically and materially pertinent to envisioning and sounding alternative ways of knowing and being in the world. Improvisation demands shared responsibility for participation in community, an ability to negotiate differences, and a willingness to accept the challenges of risk and contingency. Furthermore, in an era when diverse peoples and communities of interest struggle to forge historically new forms of affiliation across cultural divides, the participatory and civic virtues of engagement, dialogue, respect, and community-building inculcated through improvisatory practices take on a particular urgency.

Research Opportunities and Support for Graduate Students

Our project provides distinctive opportunities for undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows to participate in our collaborative and stimulating interdisciplinary environment. We encourage participation in the development of innovative and sophisticated approaches to gathering, analyzing, and disseminating knowledge by actively involving students in every phase of project planning and implementation. Students are encouraged to work across disciplines in ways that will position them as integral participants in defining and shaping a new field of inquiry. All students associated with the project will receive extensive training and support as junior researchers and scholars through involvement with projects such as conference organization, journal editing and administration, website design, policy analysis, and archival and in-field research.

Through our summer institutes, students will collaborate closely with leaders in the field, to participate in the exchange of ideas, to engage in vital and timely problem-driven research issues, and to disseminate their work through public colloquium presentations, with opportunities for publication. In this way, students will not only be given opportunities for professional development through important research and administrative positions; they will also be working actively in a rich, collaborative environment fueled by the motivating interactions of leading practitioners and scholars.

Throughout the tenure of the project, students from a wide range of disciplines (and from different institutions) will be provided with opportunities to interact with one another at regular colloquia, meetings, via our research-intensive website, and at the summer institutes. With generous support from SSHRC's Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) program, our project will fund over 200 graduate research assistantships and 17 postdoctoral fellowships over a seven year period between 2007-2014.

Our project offers numerous programs to support student research and training:

- (1) graduate research stipends to support student projects contributing to our overall research program
- (2) assistantships for administrative positions related to our research tools (electronic journal, website, policy papers, outreach, books, colloquia, summer institutes)
- (3) an international exchange fund, which supports students wanting to work with co-investigators in affiliated institutions, or to undertake periods of fieldwork in other national contexts
- (4) a biennial summer institute bringing together graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to discuss common research issues with leading scholars and practitioners in the field. Our students will also participate in a wide variety of research in-progress seminars and annual colloquia, and have opportunities for publication of essays in both popular and peer-reviewed venues.

Projected GRA/URA Positions at University of Guelph for Summer 2011, Fall 2011, and Winter 2012

- 1) Copyediting for academic journal
- 2) Proofreading/Copywriting for academic journal, research website, and various project documents
- 3) Website Content Generation
- 4) Administrative and Research Assistants
- 5) Policy paper development and analysis
- 6) Public Relations
- 7) Digital Media Editing
- 8) Website Maintenance and updates

Research stipends may be available to graduate students actively working in the area of improvisation, community, and social practice.

Interested candidates should address a CV and cover letter to Dr. Ajay Heble c/o improv@uoguelph.ca by no later than **March 31, 2011**. Interviews will be held in April 2011.