

CRCRTH 602 Creative Thinking: Syllabus – Spring 2008

Faculty/Instructors:

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CREATIVE THINKING: COURSE OVERVIEW

THE SHAPE OF THE COURSE

The course has three overlapping phases directed toward our final objective which is to increase our effective, novel thinking by applying creativity-relevant strategies to significant, complex problems where we have some expertise or domain knowledge.

Phase One: Understanding the Creative Process

In phase one, we focus on understanding the creative process and how we use it. In order to develop our creativity-relevant skills, it is helpful to work incrementally: to think big, start small. Thus, we begin with simple problems, concrete elements, and guided explorations (e.g. presented problems with common objects). In this phase of the course as later, case studies will offer us models of applying creative problem solving to complex, real world problems in a variety of domains. These cases will be drawn from architecture, music, literature, design, science and technology. There is a strand of case studies on the theme of social entrepreneurship. The latter cases will offer promising approaches to the chronic challenges of poverty, illness, unemployment and illiteracy around the world.

Phase Two: Understanding Creative Persons

In phase two, we will move on to addressing more complex, ill-defined problems with several elements and less guidance (e.g. Look What's There and Design a System activities). Here we will also focus on creative lives and you will have an opportunity to study in depth someone of interest to you.

Phase Three: Using Creative Strategies

In phase three, the course will culminate with highly ambiguous, more "real-world" problems (e.g. your Personal Problem, your Invention in response to things that "Bug" you). We will address the topic of evaluating creativity in persons and products through exercises and a review of creativity tests.

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RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE MODULES

In the course, we will study creativity across domains, in areas where systematic work (creative problem-solving) is most beneficial and areas in which intuition and non-rational approaches yield powerful results. We will provide opportunities and requests for the development of both of these kinds of competencies.

Below you will find a brief description of each of the weekly activities and their purpose in building your knowledge and skills in the area of creative thinking, the WHY of what you're doing. In the course modules you will find detailed descriptions of each of these activities which will explain the HOW to of each. Each module has activities that can be done "anytime" and those that benefit from sequencing.

Do Anytime Activities:

- Media Viewing: The media clips are case studies that exemplify the concepts and strategies under discussion. The subjects embody open-mindedness, optimism, courage, perseverance and risk in the face of complex social problems. They offer inspiration.
- Searching the Internet: You will be asked to research a variety of persons and concepts to add to your repository of ideas for activities and to enrich your experience (Occasionally you'll be asked to do an Internet Search as a pre or post reading activity).
- Play: Many activities will invite you to playfully explore materials and ideas in order to develop a fresh perspective and to generate novel ideas.
- Relaxation: Relaxing for five, ideally ten minutes of deep breathing helps to clear the mind and to reveal one's inner voice. Emptying the mind makes room for new ideas. It is recommended that you do so before the activities. You may wish to use "Five Good Minutes" or the Garden of Serenity CD for support.
- Cartoon Caption Writing: Have some fun participating in, or viewing, the New Yorker Cartoon Caption Writing Contest. Humor nurtures imagination.
- Art/Music: Keen sensory awareness supports productivity. I urge you to hone yours by open-mindedly viewing art and listening to music that is different from that which you usually enjoy. (If you want guidance, Michael Gelb in *Senzione*, a chapter on this topic, in *How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci*, recommends some specific musical works.)

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Activities with Required Sequence:

- Pre-Reading Activities: The purpose of these activities is to help you recall and organize your prior knowledge on the topic. It is essential therefore that you do them before the required reading and media viewing.
- Post reading activities: The purpose of these activities is to allow you to practice and extend the knowledge you have gained through reading and media viewing.

In many of these activities, you will be asked to persevere past your normal stopping point. There are two reasons for this: first, there is significant evidence that doing so not only produces more ideas, but more original ideas. Second, in these variations on the original task, you will be trying new strategies (e.g. finding forced relationships, role-playing) with guidance that you can apply later at will. So relax, be open, let yourself be silly and persevere.

Weekly Writing Assignments:

- Journal: The purpose of the Journal is to invite you to make the readings your own (enhance memory) by reviewing and selecting the concepts you believe are most significant; to question them, to seek clarification or to argue against them. This is a place to question assumptions, discover connections, dialog with the authors. (One page weekly.)
- Diary: The diary or personal notebook is the place for you to record and track your development as a creative problem-solver. It is a place for you to “think about your thinking,” to record your evaluative reflections on each week’s problems and activities (metacognition). Here you will be able to integrate theory and practice, to discover what helps and what hinders your productive thinking. (One paragraph to a half page weekly.)
- Application: The purpose of seeking prompt and direct application of concepts and strategies is to facilitate their use and transfer to your life. (One paragraph weekly.)

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EXPECTATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

All required readings and required weekly activities must be done on time and sent to your instructor at ASSIGNMENTS. Where visual products are to be shared you will need to use a Blog. The section on Technical Requirements will explain how. Use the CALENDAR to stay clear on major assignment due dates.

Optional readings, media and activities are offered to enrich your experience. Choose those that meet your needs. But do peek into some that are beyond your current interests because you might discover a new one.

Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Every effort will be made to create a class community, a safe environment in which to play and risk. You will, in the first week, be assigned a Buddy and placed in a four-person Core Group for some activities. You are encouraged to use e-mail and the DISCUSSION to converse with class members about readings and activities. You will be expected to participate in the one-hour weekly Chat Room Virtual Class, and some assignments will be posted on the Whiteboard for everyone's edification and enjoyment. Your instructors will respond to your e-mails within 48 hours rather than have a posted office hour.

Major Assignments

Reflective Reviews of Diary and Applications I & II

Reflective Review of Diary and Applications #1 – Modules 1 – 6 (1 pg)

Review your Diary and Applications for Modules 1 – 6. What patterns of performance, growth, questions emerge? What strategies/techniques were the most helpful in expanding your approaches to the problems? Which concepts, strategies/techniques were the most easily and usefully applied outside of the course? Were any perceptual, cognitive or personal blocks overcome? What does the review imply for future work? (Due Module 7)

Reflective Review of Diary and Applications #2 – Modules 7 – 12 (1 pg)

Review your Diary and Applications for Modules 1 – 12, with a focus on 7 – 12. What patterns of performance and growth emerge? Assess the degree to which your Wishes and Predictions have been realized. What accounts for the result? What aspects of the course – attitudes, insights, strategies / techniques – will you try to keep with you? How will you maximize that likelihood?

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Biography Presentation: Empathic Role-Taking

Objectives:

- 1) To **Be** the person briefly; to experience the thoughts and feelings of your person, to communicate from that individual's perspective.
- 2) As your subject, to do the following Moment in Time Activity through which you will distill and describe the salient features of your life critical to your creative development (e.g. crises, mentors, etc.) or your creative productivity.
- 3) To share your life with others by posting the activity on the Whiteboard.
- 4) To read 1 of the posted items and to respond as your subject in the Threaded Discussion section to three persona profiles.
- 5) To write a brief (1 pg) reflection on what you learned by being and writing in role and by viewing the work of others.

One Moment in Time Activity:

You may choose from either option listed below.

Option 1:

Take a moment and imagine “your” desk (dresser, shelf, box, satchel) – **the place where your personally meaningful items are kept.** The desk should include **at least 5 objects of significance** to you. Describe these to us in whatever way feels appropriate (verbal, visual). One object must be a journal or notebook opened up to the most recent entry or a letter of importance that you have written. What does it say?

Optional Additions: Include additional information. Describe the room. Are there other people in the space? What are you listening to? What is the time of day and why? Where have you come from? Where are you going? Why are you in the room? How old are you at the time?

Note: If your subject would not have a desk or a room of significance, choose a different setting/place for capturing in detail a life-revealing Moment in Time. (Discuss with your instructor if necessary)

Option 2:

Reveal the subject's creativity by being the subject or someone in the life of the subject (e.g. wife, friend, professional rival) or something in the life of the subject (e.g. the subject's creation). Convey these understandings through a written **monologue or dialogue.** For example, let a writer's pen describe the writer's life; let a painting describe the artist; let a spouse describe the subject's creative process. Be sure to make the monologue or dialogue richly detailed and informative.

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Final Project: Museum Exhibit on Creativity

- Our class has been commissioned to design a **virtual museum exhibit on creativity** for UMB to which you must contribute.
- In creating this exhibit, you will be sharing with the visitor your understanding of the nature of creativity. The exhibit should present salient concepts from the course. You may work on this project in your preferred mode: a) alone (presenting 3 concepts), b) with a Buddy (presenting 5 – 6 concepts), or c) with your Core Group (presenting 8 – 9 concepts in greater depth). Note: The scope differences reflect an awareness of the extra time needed for the decision-making that leads to quality, cooperative work. It is expected that the exhibit will contain images and text.
- You must decide what will go into the exhibit and how the information/artifacts will be organized and presented.
- The project should reveal comprehensive understanding of the material and issues covered during the term offered from a fresh, personal perspective. **Each student will submit a short (2–3 page) essay reflecting on what he/she learned through the experience of constructing the exhibit.** During the last 4 weeks of the term, you will be invited to discuss, brainstorm and develop this project with your buddy, even if you plan to do the final work alone.

Questions to Think About:

- Will you focus on the creative process, creative persons, creative products, or a theme or case study that cuts across all 3 of these (e.g. the process and products of one creative person)? Will that person be you?
- Will you focus on rare culture-altering creativity or the creativity we generate and encounter daily?
- Will you focus your exhibit on a sub-theme, such as things that enhance or inhibit creativity?
- How will you organize and narrate the information to make it engaging to the visitor?
- How will you use visuals, artifacts, and text together to present your information to the viewers?

Potential Sources:

- Web museums – ibiblio.org
- Most major art / science / history museums offer brief experiences to web visitors that are based on static images and text that can serve as models for your basic approach. Note: You are NOT EXPECTED to include video or sound in your exhibit but feel free to use whatever talents and equipment you have available.
- You may incorporate any of your responses to assignments throughout the semester, including: new products and/or artifacts you've developed, visual, sculptural works, up to 35% of the presented material can be selected from the course offerings.

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Anticipated Audience:

- Having a specific audience in mind is extremely important since it will help you to select the concepts you wish to share in your Virtual Museum Exhibit and the point of view and form in which you want to integrate them.
- To make this assignment most personally meaningful, I recommend you choose an audience pertinent to your life. If you are a teacher, perhaps you want to envision making your Virtual Museum Exhibit directed to your students or your colleagues. If you are a manager, you may wish to create a presentation for your team or clients. If you wish to present the information to family and friends, visualize their interests and needs. Or you may wish to choose the public at large, by imagining yourself the curator of an exhibit directed to a broad cross-section of the population.
- I strongly urge you to identify your audience as one of the first things you do in beginning this project, since it will help you to see the project as manageable and reasonably ambiguous. So, imagine your audience in as much detail as possible. Then, be bold, and have fun!

Final Essay (total 4–5 pp):

Each student will submit a Final Essay containing 2 parts:

Part I (1–3 pp) Should be an explanation of the intention of your exhibit or part thereof; it should explain WHY you chose the concepts and organized as you did. How does your exhibit reflect your understanding of the nature of creativity, creative persons and processes?

Part II (1–2 pp) Should be a reflective statement on what you have learned through the experience of creating the exhibit.