University of Massachusetts at Boston
College of Advancing and Professional Studies
Critical & Creative Thinking Program

Syllabus
CRCRTH 618: Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Organizational Change

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Course Format

Fully online (via Blackboard Learn 9.1, instructor-led, materials organized and released according to weekly modules, assignments due each week, occasional synchronous sessions (live conversations), with schedule outlined below.

Catalog Description

Through interactive, experiential sessions and structured assignments, students learn critical and creative approaches to working in organizations. Skills addressed include: communication and team-building; facilitation of participation and collaboration in groups; promotion of learning from a diversity of perspectives; problem-finding and solving; and reflective practice. Students apply these skills to situations that arise in business, schools, social change groups, and other organizations with a view to taking initiative and generating constructive change.

Course Overview:

This course is about exploring the relationships between creative thinking, collaboration, and organizational change and finding insight into the connection between theories about these relationships and the realities of how organizations, teams, and communities work in practice. This course, within the Critical and Creative Thinking program, supports an interdisciplinary perspective, where we can draw upon diverse interests, backgrounds, and types of organizational settings (schools, businesses, government and nonprofit agencies, social organizations, families, etc.). Further, we give attention not only to improving organizations but also seek to understand how individuals may develop as reflective practitioners in connecting their own work practices to implications for one's group or organization

Some of the themes explored will include individual purpose with respect organizational goals, the role of chaos in organizational work, systems thinking, creative thinking as a dynamic of collaboration, the potential for, and influence of, informal leadership on organizational change, and the distinctions between working groups and real, high-performing teams and the many variations in between.

Additionally, this course involves the use of peer groups in addressing certain written assignments. Through dialogue and interaction between those in a small group, there is an opportunity to directly observe the collaborative process within the course and to support individuals in their academic writing. By identifying writing goals, individuals are able to address personal needs around developing their writing as a fundamental competency in a graduate course as well as explore the course topics.

Pointers about the preparation assumed for this course

No specific preparation is required for this course, although students will hopefully have developed some perspective on working in teams and have some interest in collaboration where thinking and learning take place with others. Although this is an online course, we don't specifically emphasize virtual teams over face-to-face teams. At the same time, students may find that the course provides a forum for exploring issues that come up when collaborating across distances, and the technological tools that support such interactions, especially as the entire concept of "collaboration" continues to shift to include groups that extend outside of a single geographical location. Students may enter the course with some ongoing professional issue or organizational challenge in mind that may be addressed through the application of collaborative practices, but such an issue need not be well-defined by the time the course starts.

Reference Links

- Blackboard login: https://umb.umassonline.net/ (available to students upon the course start date)
- Help for Blackboard Learn:
  http://www.umb.edu/it/getting_services/support_for_online_courses_blackboard/blackboard_learn_9_student_support
  (includes links to additional tutorials and reference guides as well as tech. support contact information)

Course Goals

Through this course, you will:
- develop thinking and acting strategies for both influencing and responding to change in organizations.
- explore issues of organizational learning and how it may be supported by utilizing the contributions of diverse perspectives.
- formulate plans to pilot new tools and processes in addressing your specific organizational challenges.
- clarify the differences between working groups and real, high-performing teams and establish principles that can guide you in understanding your role within teams and the compatibility of personal and team goals.
- identify how seemingly small actions in organizations can have unexpected, unintended, and/or far-reaching consequences, and how we might account for this in organizational decision-making.
- establish principles and habits that will help you to develop creatively as a leader and group facilitator in organizational settings, particularly outside of formal leadership authority.
- identify a personal goal with respect to developing your academic writing, and then share your written work with a small peer group such that interactions provide feedback and support in addressing your goal.

Required Texts and Materials

- Katzenbach, J. & Smith, D (2006). The Wisdom of Teams. Harvard Business Press. ISBN-13: 978-0060522001 (but earlier editions are ok)
- Senge, P. (1994). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook. Crown Business. ISBN-13: 978-0385472562
- microphone-headphone for our live conference sessions

- webcam for occasional video activities

Weekly Schedule

Theme: Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams
    Week 1: [*dates*]
    Week 2: [*dates*]
    Week 3: [*dates*]
    Week 4: [*dates*]

Theme: Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking
    Week 5: [*dates*]
    Week 6: [*dates*]
    Spring break: [*dates*]
    Week 7: [*dates*]
    Week 8: [*dates*]

Theme: Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change
    Week 9: [*dates*]
    Week 10: [*dates*]
    Week 11: [*dates*]
    Week 12: [*dates*]

Final week: Course Reflections, Extensions, and Evaluation
    Week 13: [*dates*]

Online (Synchronous) Meetings

Our course uses occasional live, online, synchronous meetings (typically using Google+ Hangout or Blackboard tools). The course involves 4 whole-class meetings, and some of the time of each session is designated for discussion within individual peer groups about writing goals. The first whole-class meeting may include a brief technical overview related to synchronous conferencing, in addition to a course orientation and other discussions.

Attendance at all whole-class meetings is required, but there will always be an option to do make-up work in cases where you cannot attend either session in a week and if you alert the instructor ahead of time. Even so, it is strongly encouraged that you attempt to attend the live sessions as much as possible. Whole-class meetings run for no more than about 90 minutes.

General Course Logistics and Schedule

During spring break, no assignments are due or new materials released. Course weeks run from Monday to Sunday, and weekly materials are released on Mondays by 12:00noon ET. Due dates for most weekly assignments will be on the following Monday at the end of the day (that is, assignments released on one Monday morning will be due on the following week's Monday night). Other assignments extend beyond the current week. A few kinds of activities, such as certain discussion posts, may have mid-week due dates so that time is available for responses from others by the end of the week. All times referenced in course materials and by the instructor should be regarded as Eastern time zone if not otherwise noted.

Course Communication

Please use the General Course Questions and Answers discussion forum (linked on the main course page, and in the Student Resources section) for all public questions and discussion related to the course so that everyone may benefit and learn from the exchanges. Personal communication happens through direct email using umb.edu email accounts. The instructor will only direct individual email messages to your @umb.edu student email address. You are required to check this regularly (http://webmail.umb.edu/), or have your student email account forward messages to a personal email account that you do read. Please contact the instructor directly about any issues that are related to personal course participation, that is, which involve questions about specific assignment issues or needs that wouldn't be of interest to the class more broadly.

In Blackboard, there is a link labeled "Email (External)" that will allow you to send email through Blackboard to umb.edu email addresses. This is merely a convenience and accomplishes the same thing as if you opened up your own email program and sent a message "*To:*" that person/group.

Note that for any of the discussion forums in the course, you are able to "Subscribe". If you subscribe, you will automatically receive an email message when a new message has been added. For Reading Responses, you can subscribe to individual threads (for example, when you add your original Reading Response post for the week, you can subscribe to that thread so that you can see when someone replies). For other types of forums, you can subscribe to the forum as a whole, so that you can see when anyone adds any message or reply.

Peer Groups

Peer groups will be groups of 3-5 students in the course who join together to address some activity or assignment, in addition to supporting each other toward the development of individual writing goals. After the first week of the course, we will arrange these groups and then refer to them in some of the activities of upcoming weeks. There are no "group grades" in the course; groups are used to provide opportunities for direct interaction to complement the limited number of whole-class meetings. Peer groups persist throughout the semester, although adjustments may be made in the middle of the course term if needed due to changes in course enrollment.

At the beginning of the course, students will be asked to identify any personal goals for the course related to how they hope to address some issue or situation related to collaboration or organizational change. Students will also identify one goal that directly refers to their own academic writing and share this goal with their peer group. This goal may refer to some improvement in a specific area of writing that each student considers to be a priority in strengthening their work, relative to their own needs and academic path. For certain written assignments, peer feedback will be shared within the group that directly addresses the stated writing goal of each author. Additionally, occasional small-group synchronous conferences will be held to address certain other collaborative assignments, and these may also include discussion of writing goals. For additional background related to the use of peer groups to support writing in a graduate course on collaboration, please see my writing, [Toward Authentic Peer Support Around Writing in a Graduate Course on Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Organizational Change](#).

Grading and Summary of Requirements

1. Readings and related written discussion posts (20%)

- 8 Original posts (2-3 posts during each 4-week themed period)
- 12 Follow-up posts (at least one per week)

2. Weekly Assignments and Activities (35%)
    - 4 online meetings (including 1 brief presentation) [or makeup assignment/meeting]
    - 1 instructor conference at mid-semester
    - 13 weekly written assignments (based on experiential exercises and some peer group interactions)
3. Course Journal/Toolkit (10%)
    - 2 submissions of course journal, at mid-semester and at the end of the course
4. Short papers (30%)
    - 3 short papers + peer commentaries
5. Process Evaluation at the end of the course (5%)
    - Self-assessment of your achievement in the course (in relation to goals, participation, peer support, other contributions to the course)

Specific instructions and guidelines for each of the above will be provided through the course materials as needed.

Assignment Feedback

Assignments will be returned with the following notations:

1. **Completed**: submitted on time and receiving full credit; please review instructor comments; no further action is required
2. **Pending**: please review instructor comments, which provide feedback or suggestions that need to be addressed before the assignment is completed; such comments ask you to revise the work and submit it again, either because certain parts are unclear/incomplete, or because important aspects of the instructions were not observed, or because something else in the work requires additional follow up or explanation. Pending assignments at the end of the course are counted as not completed for final grading purposes. An assignment may continue to be resubmitted as many times as needed to reach the Completed level, as long as it was originally submitted on time.
3. **Not completed**: no attempt or insufficient work has been submitted for the assignment

Grades are calculated based on the total proportion of on-time, **Completed** work submitted within each of the four general requirement areas in the summary above. Minimum percent of total course work for grades is as follows: A=92; A-=85; B+=78; B=71; B-=64; C+=57; C=50

Late Work Policy

Formally, there are no individual extensions explicitly granted for due dates; the structure described here is unusual but removes the need for students to try to negotiate submission terms or even provide any reason for needing extra time to complete something. Even so, work may be submitted <u>up to 4 days after the due date</u> (by end of day Friday, for assignments normally due at the end of day Monday), within the following guidelines, which give you some room to be late on a few assignments without penalty. At the end of the course term, if the total days late of all initial submissions of written assignments + Course Journal submissions + Short Papers <= 10, full credit is given. If the sum of days late exceeds 10, the course grade will be lowered by 5 percentage points. For example, if you submit one of the weekly assignments **2** days late, another assignment **1** day late, and your course journal submissions and two of the short papers

are on time but the third short paper is **4** days late, your days late will be counted as **7** (2 + 1 + 4) , which is within the limit of 10. If your total days late adds up to 13, this exceeds 10

As mentioned, this applies to initial submissions only and doesn't consider time needed to revise Pending assignments (which should be resubmitted within 1 week of receiving feedback). This system is designed to encourage students to submit work on time even when not fully polished, since you will then receive feedback and be able to revise. This policy does not apply to the discussion posts, which must be completed on time to be counted. Assignments submitted over 4 days late won't be counted as part of this system and will be graded as Not Completed.

Grading Approach

In this course, you'll be expected to work independently and with each other to complete the requirements. Please note that all assignments are individually submitted and graded, though; there are no "group grades" for anything done in this course. Some activities involve concepts of collaboration and therefore it is beneficial (and convenient) to use small-group peer interactions rather than purely isolated thinking. Even so, your assignments will be evaluated on what you personally complete and submit, no matter how successful (or not) any group interactions actually turn out to be in the end.

In fact, we are counting on the likelihood that collaborative activities sometimes *do not* lead to perfect, tidy, or unambiguous results and well-formed interpersonal exchanges. Our objective, then, is not primarily to achieve some arbitrary goal of a class exercise by asking individuals to work together, but instead, to have experiences and reflect on the *process* by allowing peer interactions to inform how we connect these experiences to wider organizational change . We seek to learn from the process and focus on becoming aware of our own responses to its outcomes, so that we may translate this insight into our own work beyond this course. Please participate in such activities in this spirit.

Weekly Schedule and Assignments

Week	Duration	Summary	Readings	Assignments
1	[*dates*]	Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams	• WOT: Prologue, Chap 1, Chap 2 • FDF: 351-364	• Week 1 Written Assignment (Bio, Course Goals + Writing Goal, Core Ideas, Focus Issue)
2	[*dates*]	Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams	• WOT: 3, 4 • FDF: 374-384 • Essay on Communication Strategies	• Week 2 Written Assignment (Peer groups formation) • Short Paper 1 assigned (Reflection) • Online meeting #1
3	[*dates*]	Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams	• WOT: 5,6 • FDF: 385-398 • Teamwork video	• Week 3 Written Assignment (Focus Issue) • Online meeting makeup assignment (if needed)
4	[*dates*]	Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams	WOT: 7,8 FDF: 401-416	• Week 4 Written Assignment (Force Field Analysis, part 1) • Short Paper 1 DUE

5	[*dates*]	Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking	WOT: 10 (9 optional) FDF: 417-21, 424-29	• Week 5 Written Assignment (Force Field Analysis, part 2; Listening with Empathy) • Peer Commentary #1 (on Short Paper 1) • Short Paper 2 assigned (Case Study/Core Principles) • Online meeting #2
6	[*dates*]	Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking	FDF: 242-52, 253-59, 263 Other articles as assigned	• Course Journal, mid-semester • Online meeting makeup assignment (if needed) • Instructor conference scheduled
	[*dates*]	*No new topics*		
7	[*dates*]	Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking	FDF: 87-112 Other articles as assigned	• Week 7 Written Assignment (Systems Thinking)
8	[*dates*]	Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking	(optional: FDF: 169-172, 113-124) Other articles as assigned	• Week 8 Written Assignment (Experiment in Conversations) • Online meeting #3 • Short Paper 2 DUE • Short Paper 3 assigned (Plan for Practice)
9	[*dates*]	Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change	(optional FDF as desired) Other articles as assigned	• Week 9 Written Assignment (Discussion Sensemaking) • Peer Commentary #2 (on Short Paper 2) • Online meeting makeup assignment (if needed)
10	[*dates*]	Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change	FDF: 193-211 Other articles as assigned	• Week 10 Written Assignment (Presentation Prep.)
11	[*dates*]	Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change	Other articles as assigned	• Week 11 Written Assignment (Individual Purpose, Goals Review)
12	[*dates*]	Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change	Other articles as assigned	• Week 12 Written Assignment (Appreciative Inquiry) • Online meeting #4 • Short Paper 3 DUE

13	[*dates*]	Course Reflections, Extensions, and Evaluation	Other articles as assigned	• Week 13 Written Assignment (Presentation and Course Evaluations, Experiment in Conversations follow-up) • Peer Commentary #3 (on Short Paper 3) • Course Journal, final

Syllabus Version

June 2014; This syllabus is subject to change and updated versions may be distributed after the course begins, but the workload expectations will not be increased after the semester starts. Course curriculum based on the original design by Allyn Bradford and amendments by Jeremy Szteiter.

Reflective Practice Portfolio

This only applies to students in the Critical and Creative Thinking MA Program: the third short paper (Plan for Practice) is appropriate and recommended for inclusion in your MA program's Reflective Practice Portfolio, although other assignments may be appropriate as well based on your directions throughout the course.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the course, you will be asked to complete an anonymous, online course evaluation (http://bit.ly/CCTEval) as required by the Critical and Creative Thinking program. No personally identifiable information is captured from this evaluation; at the same time, the comments made benefit the program as a whole and wider university in continuing to develop the course, and so evaluation responses may be made viewable to faculty, administrators, and future prospective students so that all may learn from the experiences of past students. No responses will be released until final course grades have been posted.

Accommodation Statement

Sections 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (617-287-7430). The student must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Drop/Add period.

Instructor Background and Experience

Jeremy Szteiter is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University (Cognitive Science) and University of Massachusetts Boston (Critical and Creative Thinking) and now serves as the Assistant Director of the graduate program in Critical and Creative Thinking at UMass Boston. His work has centered on program and organizational development, particularly in adult education in community-based human services and has involved managing, developing, and teaching programs to lifelong learners, with an emphasis on a learning process that involves the teaching of others what has been learned and supporting the growth of individuals to become nonformal teachers of what they know. Jeremy's work draws upon principles and

practices of social change pedagogy, technology-enhanced collaboration, instructional design, and participatory theater.