MMS 305 The Generative Way

This course fully embraces the Japanese proverb: If you want to understand something new, don’t study it, get used to it. We do that by actively working and playing at growing your creative capacity and developing your entrepreneurial instincts—to be and become more generative.

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A. Introduction

This course has a large ambition: I’m not here to teach you but to help you change the way you see what’s going on around you and the way you act when you get your work done.

My goal is to help you understand why there is nothing you can do that is more important to your future—in the workplace and in your personal and family life—than becoming the most generative version of yourself you can become. This class is designed to help you make that happen by practicing and playing with creative concepts and entrepreneurial strategies, organized in The Generative Way matrix.

A couple of years ago IBM surveyed 1,500 CEOs in 60 industries in 30 countries and asked them what employee quality they valued most of all. The number one answer was creative leadership, defined by them with all the attributes I ascribe to being creatively entrepreneurial.

And so if CEO’s want you to have creatively entrepreneurial skills and qualities, it’s logical that you should invest yourself in developing them.

This class will help you develop the creative and entrepreneurial perspectives that allow you to see problems as opportunities to make things better, the perspectives that result in you looking at what others have looked at and seeing what no one else has seen.
This class will help you grow your capacity to make good ideas better as you develop them. Don’t you want to learn how to add that extra element to whatever you are doing that others value?

We will have fun and we will be very active, with creative activities in every class.

B. Course Strategy

I’ve invested a good number of man hours over the years studying how to teach a course designed to help you become more creatively entrepreneurial, more generative. I’ve mined my 40 years’ experience as a creative worker—I’ve spent 25 years as an entrepreneur starting over a half dozen companies; I’ve worked in five of the creative industries. During my 13 years here I am continually trying out new ideas and have the feedback of nearly 3,000 students about what helps you most. And I regularly read the research of others on the topic of leading a creative classroom.

I’ve learned the following classroom strategies are important.

1. You must have your own grand ambition for what you want to accomplish during the semester.

I’ll state my grand ambition again: I want to have a hand in helping spark a radical transformation in your development as a creatively entrepreneurial person. What’s your grand ambition for yourself? It will be very useful to you if you articulate it, perhaps write it down in your journal—it’s just one way to get your journal to work for you.

2. The classes must be very active.

You must be constructing your education, not simply consuming it. Students need to be actively leading what the class is doing. And you must be actively turning my content into yours.

3. There must be lots of ambiguity.

This is very important; I would place it as #1 except that I know it can scare those students who have grown used to being told precisely what to do in a class. But
research demonstrates that the more I explain what I am looking for in an assignment, the less exploration you will do on your own, which is to say, the less creative you are.

This class asks you, implores you, to relax and learn to love the white spaces. You need to relax and learn to love the white spaces. Please relax and learn to love the white spaces. I hope you can relax and learn to love the white spaces. I mean, you need to relax and learn to love ambiguity, uncertainty, open-endedness, for life will offer mostly that. I will help, but you need to relax…

I intend to define very little, because a definition too often confuses us into thinking we now know something and we can stop considering it further. I plan to prompt mostly. I like open-ended assignments where you get to define both what to do and how to do it.

4. You must be willing to take risks, and that means you must be willing and even eager to fail.

What the…Eager to fail? Why would that be important? I can give you a bunch of reasons. Why not think of some reasons and examples to share with us in our first class discussions.

And I’ve learned that none of us will take those risks unless there is…

5. Great trust.

Between you and me, and between me and you, and between you and your classmates. Conventional wisdom is that we have to earn each other’s trust. You won’t have to earn mine; I offer it as a gift. Here it is, take it. And what does that mean, to give your trust rather than make someone earn it? Where’s the generative energy?

6. Repetition and duration.

If we want these creatively entrepreneurial principles and practices to really take hold, we need to repeat them over and over.
7. You must take on a leadership role in this class.

Peer to peer is where it’s at. The intelligence is in the network. Class leadership means lots of things. And we know it when we see it.

C. Readings

Bring your books to class. We will often read aloud together from them, to inform class discussion, and you want to have yours when I ask you to read.

The Social Animal, by David Brooks.

This is a great book, a comprehensive survey of the current knowledge about why humans do what we do when we do what we do, and why we are so deeply and completely intertwined with each other. It will nurture a rich understanding of the human condition, and that understanding will feed your creative growth and tune your entrepreneurial instincts. Your fellow students generally become big fans of this book.

This Will Make You Smarter, edited by John Brockman

I’ve recently discovered this book and I have found that each of the very short entries has an important insight into being and becoming creatively entrepreneurial.

Welcome to the Creative Populist Revolution, by Carl Nordgren

I make the case that each of us and all of us must grow our generative capacities for our own benefit, and for our collective benefit. There is a logic to this case that I find compelling and hope you do too.

Along with reading and discussing these three books, I will send you links to selected articles.
D. Guest Speakers

We will have a handful, and I will keep you informed of the schedule as it comes together.

E. The course assignments

1. Creative Research project

You will be a member of a three or four person team. You want to form your team and get started on this assignment right away.

Your team will select and study a recent piece of research on creativity or innovation or entrepreneurship. This might be neuroscientists’ work on what is going on the brain when the mind calls upon it to be creative, or social behavior research on how we work in groups to start new enterprises or what they are learning about concepts like empathy or motivation.

Then you will design a research project riff that extends or enhances or somehow pivots off the piece of research you selected. You are trying to build more understanding by experiencing the research.

You will identify the practical implications of these research findings, considering both the research project you study and the research project you execute.

Deliverable: A 5 minute presentation to the class about what you have learned as you help us find ways to integrate the findings in our own practices, and a two page synopsis. Along with the synopsis is the Team Contribution page, where each team member writes a paragraph describing your role in this project; it will be signed by all team members.

Your grade will be based on:

a. The usefulness of your original research selection and your ability to help us understand it.

b. The creative thinking you bring to the research riff you run off of the original research.
c. The balance you find between being action oriented with your own research riff and your ambition.

d. Your development of the practical applications of the research findings.

e. Your grade will also be influenced by your presentation of your material, from how much you respect your audiences’ time to how creative you are in helping us ‘get used to it’.

These research presentations must be completed by October 26th. And I don’t schedule more than three presentations per class. The first two presentations get preferential grading. Any project presented after 10/26 will be penalized when I grade it. Scheduling is your responsibility and is on a first come basis.

I do not like power point presentations.

2. Your Creative Journal

You will keep a weekly journal, making a minimum of 3 entries every week. I want this to be a place you are both disciplined in your regular use but also where you let your freak flag fly and really let loose with your creative riffs and rambles.

Besides writing your entries, I want you to play with visual representations of your ideas. Graphs, doodles, maps, drawings, all are important. Please get visual at the very start. And the students who play with some color find that also helps them think more creatively. Hit the Internet for a tutorial on some basics of visual thinking and we will talk about this in class.

Required categories of entries are:

- One of your entries each week—14 weeks—will be from the current reading. Please reference the reading in the entry header. I want to read your thinking about the idea or concept covered. A special focus for these entries will be the book This Will Make You Smarter. I want you to include at least four journal entries that each relate two or more of this books’ articles.

- The second week of the semester is Visual Week; all entries that week will be visual.
We will learn of 4 Generative Behaviors in this class. You will do one entry on each behavior. Please identify the behavior in the entry header.

You will include a minimum of two entries on good or bad design. Again, please clearly identify these in the entry header.

Fourteen weeks of three entries is forty two, twenty of which are required entries. Along with these required entries I want you to have fun exploring your own ideas for entry categories. The deliverable is the journal itself.

Your grade will be based on:

a. First I skim it to see if it looks like a creative mind was hanging out and having fun. Is it visual? Is it playful, colorful; have you constructed pages? Have you been creative in your format, in your design?

b. The quantity of entries. Again, the minimum is three per week, or forty two for the semester. That’s the minimum. What grade do you expect in other classes when you deliver the minimum?

c. Did you do all the required entries? Again, please identify them clearly for me.

c. The diversity of entries. Did you discover a broad range of topics outside the required topics?

d. The quality of the entries. The main quality determinant is: Am I finding your original thinking represented here? If your original thinking is visually represented, don’t be shy about giving me a text clue.

Please bring me your work in progress journal to review when we have breaks in class.

The journal will be due the last day of class.

Research demonstrates that if you commit to a daily program of intentionally creative behavior, after 30 days you will have a material impact on your creative capacity.

You will execute your 30 Day CAP beginning on September 14\textsuperscript{th}, through October 6\textsuperscript{th}.

The research identified and applied two broad categories of intentional behavior that were effective—either doing something you’ve never done before or doing something you regularly do but in a radically different way.

An example of the first might be that you never listen to opera, so one day you listen closely to an aria and write about what you heard or imagined. An example of the second might be you find a new route to get from your apartment to a regular destination, or you dress in an unconventional—for you—style or manner for the day.

Deliverable:

A 2 or 3 page paper on what you learned from your 30 Day CAP, and a copy of your calendar. Note that the date for turning in your paper is a couple of weeks after the 30 CAP period ends, so one thing I will be looking for is your thoughtful response to what occurred.

Your grade will be based on:

- your insights delivered in the paper
- your creative selection of daily activities

This paper is due October 26\textsuperscript{th}. 

You will become very familiar with The Generative Way matrix that I have been creating for a few years now. In class we will set time aside three or four times for you to begin to visualize and then develop your own generative matrix. We will talk about this plenty in class.

Deliverable:

A visual representation of your matrix with whatever text support you think is useful to me understanding it.

We will talk about why I prefer that you construct your final visual without using digital technology.

Your grade will be based on

- your ambition
- your thoroughness
- making this your own

It will be due the last day of class

5. Duke Celebrates Creative Durham


When you check that web link you will discover that a couple of years ago Durham North Carolina was identified by a highly respected demographer as the most creative city in the US. We are going to explore that, understand it, and do what we can to promote and celebrate it.

You will form 8 teams of 5 folks each.
Each team will have its own agenda, taking on a particular aspect of this opportunity.

I will work with each team to find a productive starting place for their efforts.

Topics for team work include education, events, promotion, networking, resource identification, and more.

Each team will be evaluated for its own work.

Deliverable:

Your final ten minute presentation of your team’s work. Each team will also submit a one pager with a paragraph of contribution from each team member.

This will be presented the last day of class.

Your work will be graded for:

- The ambition of your team’s efforts.

- Your team’s application and demonstration of a bias for action, captured in the Ready Fire Aim strategic steps we will be discussing. We’ll focus hard in the first classes about why taking action is more important than waiting for The Plan when taking on creative and entrepreneurial work. I will look for evidence of very quick experimentation as well as momentum building early victories.

- The usefulness of your effort

- The creative expression of your final presentation

Each team’s grade can get elevated when it finds ways to leverage the work of other teams.

Each team’s grade can get elevated when it finds ways for its work to carry on beyond the class.

And I don’t like power point presentations.
F. Thoughts about the Class Vibe

You will find I am a pretty informal guy.

Please share your ideas and thoughts with us all.

I want you here. I don’t like the idea of taking attendance, but I do pay attention and if you miss more than two classes when we meet but once a week you will not be able to earn an A.

I want you here on time. Late arrivals, no matter how gracefully managed, are disruptive.

No digital devices unless an in-class project benefits from it.

Please talk about what you are thinking about so others can have your thinking impact their thinking. You don’t have to be certain to speak up. Your uncertainty about a thought that is forming might help others understand their own thinking better.

Do you want to sit in rows?

Ask questions.

What does that mean to you?

Please ask questions.

G. Grades and how to Earn an A+

In some classes no one earns an A+. Earning an A+ means you have been a leader in the class; that you have taken creative risks with your work; that you have shown what you are learning in a way that teaches us as well; that you had a grand ambition for this class and you declared it boldly; that you demonstrated an original approach to your work; that you executed well.

Earning an A means everything above, but perhaps some of your executional talents aren’t as developed as they soon will be.
When I am grading all your work you will be earning my subjective bias when I see:

- Ambition and risk taking vs. you taking the easy safe route
- Making the content your own vs. repeating the concepts back as I shared them with you
- Developing an original approach or perspective vs. pursuing a path others have created
- Action-oriented from the beginning vs. trying to get the work done at the end

Creative Research Project  15% of your grade
Creative Journal  20% of your grade
The 30 Day CAP  20%
Your Generative Matrix  20%
Duke Celebrates Creative Durham  25% of your grade

Your class leadership shows up, in my grading, as a general prejudice in your favor, tilting a B+/A- to an A-.