MMS 490 The Generative Way

This is a course of active study to help you grow your creative capacity and develop 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, I want to help you change your life.

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 by The Generative Way.

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 being creatively entrepreneurial.

And so if CEO’s want you to have creatively entrepreneurial skills and qualities, it’s logical that we should invest ourselves 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 develop the 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; we will be very active, with in-class activities in just about every class.
B. Course Strategy

I study how to teach a course designed to help you become more creatively entrepreneurial. My 40 years’ experience as a creative worker—including 25 as an entrepreneur starting over a half dozen companies—are mined for lessons. During my 13 years here I am continually trying out new ideas and have the feedback of over 2,000 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. **All students must have their own grand ambition for what they 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.

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.

3. **There must be lots of ambiguity.**

This is very important, and often a challenge for Duke students who are typically 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 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 the white spaces.

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. **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 occasionally read aloud together from them, to inform class discussion, and you want to have yours if 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 and.
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 two books, I will send you links to selected articles.

D. Guest Speakers

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

E. The course work

1. Applying the Generative Way

I am identifying real world creative challenges. You will form a team and apply what you are learning from our study of The Generative Way to take on one of these challenges and build something of lasting value.

Here’s how I will evaluate this work:

a. Your team’s bias for action. We’ll talk about why taking action is more important than a plan when taking on creative and entrepreneurial work. I will look for evidence of very quick experimentation as well as momentum building early victories.

b. A mid-term accomplishment. What has your early action orientation accomplished that has created value?

c. The final accomplishment. What did your team do that has created value today and tomorrow?

d. The creative expression of your final presentation. Whatever you have accomplished in your work on your creative challenge, show and tell us how
important it was and what you learned in a presentation that also demonstrates your
design and writing and video skills. And fyi, I hate power point presentations.

I will present the choice of creative projects in our second class.

Your team presentations will be no more than 15 minutes long and will be the
final week of class.

2. Creative Research project

You will be a member of a four person team.

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.

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.

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

Your final deliverable is the 10 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.

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 research riff and
   your ambition.
d. Your development of the practical applications of the research findings.

e. Your grade will also be influenced by the creative presentation of your material.

These research presentations must be completed by October 27th. And the very first ones get preferential grading.

3. Your Creative Journal

You will keep a weekly journal, making a minimum of 3 entries a 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 try to bring in 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.

These categories of entries are required:

- One of your entries each week will be from the current reading. Reference the reading, then expand or extrapolate.

- The second or third week of the semester is Visual Week and 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.

- You will include a minimum of three entries on good or bad design.

- You will design an entire page.

I want you to cover these required categories of entries and then I want you to have fun exploring your own ideas for entry categories.

I will evaluate your journal:
a. First skimming it to see if it looks like a creative mind was hanging out and having fun. Is it visual? Is it playful? Have you been creative in your format, in your design?

b. The quantity of entries. Again, the minimum is three per week.

c. The diversity of entries. Did you range across a number of topics?

d. The quality of the entries. The main quality determinant is, am I finding your original thinking represented here?

We will do work in progress reviews of your journals throughout the semester.

**The journal will be due the last day of class.**

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4. Your Creatively Entrepreneurial Journey

You will craft an aspirational story that captures your thinking about how you are intentionally being and becoming the most generative, the most creatively entrepreneurial version of yourself you can possibly be, starting now and throughout the year, then next year, and from now on.

This aspirational story should be both adventurous and doable at the same time. It should be action oriented.

You will capture your CE Journey in two formats.

One format must be visual, designed, constructed. It could be a map. It could be a diorama. It could be a web site/page. There are many other options to explore.

The other format is written, a narrative.

The content presented in the two formats will complement each other.

It is hard to be specific about lengths or quantities. You’ll know what it takes to fully communicate your CE Journey to me, to show me you are committed to intentionally growing your creative and entrepreneurial capacity and skills.
And you will be required to deliver a one minute version of your story as a class presentation.

As you are envisioning the story you will be making it real through your new behavior and activities, through your early execution.

This assignment will be evaluated based on:

a. Your ambition for your CE Journey.

b. Your ambition in your representation of your CE Journey.

c. Your early action orientation—how have you gotten started and how did you feed into your CE Journey what you learn from your early efforts?

d. How you make the ideas we study and practice in this class your own.

There will be work in progress reports throughout the semester.

The two formats representing your MGW and your one minute presentation will be due the second to the last week of class.

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 if you miss more than two classes when we meet but once a week, well it is sure hard for me to see you got what you need to get out of this to have earned 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. You uncertainty
about a thought that is forming might help another 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+

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 executed well.

Earning an A means everything above, but perhaps some of your executional talents aren’t as developed as they soon will be.

The Being Creatively Entrepreneurial Challenge 25% of your grade

Creative Research Project 15% of your grade

Creative Journal 30% of your grade

Your Creatively Entrepreneurial Journey 30% of your grade