

# Syllabus

## **CRCRTH 618: Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Organizational Change**

**Fall 2014 online section (Class # 12811); September 8 – December 8, 2014**

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Office/phone call hours: contact the instructor for an appointment

### **Course Format**

Fully online (via Blackboard Learn 9.1), instructor-led, materials organized and released according to weekly modules, with occasional synchronous meetings. In Blackboard, our course is labeled "CRCRTH 618 OL CE1 01 Collab and Org Change Fall 2014".

### **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 (or don't 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 expand our understanding of how individual thinking relates to collaboration and organizational work. Through a number of activities, interactions, and readings, we encourage each student to build a body of knowledge that helps you to reflect on implications to your own work and to clarify how to make choices around future actions and make changes in your practices. 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.

## Preparation Assumed for this Course, and General Expectations

This course has no prerequisites. No specific preparation is required for this course, although students will hopefully have developed some perspective on working in teams and have an interest in developing practices around collaboration. While we don't specifically emphasize virtual teams over face-to-face teams, the online nature of the course provides a forum for exploring issues that arise in collaborating across distances, and the technological tools that support such interactions. Students may enter the course with some ongoing professional issue or organizational challenge in mind that they hope to address, but such an issue need not be well-defined by the time the course starts. Students are expected to meet all standards specified in the Student Code of Conduct, posted at:

[http://www.umb.edu/life\\_on\\_campus/policies/community/code](http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/community/code)

## Reference Links

- Blackboard login: <https://umb.umassonline.net/> (available to students at course start date)
- Help for Blackboard Learn:  
[http://www.umb.edu/it/getting\\_services/support\\_for\\_online\\_courses\\_blackboard/blackboard\\_learn\\_9\\_student\\_support](http://www.umb.edu/it/getting_services/support_for_online_courses_blackboard/blackboard_learn_9_student_support) (tutorials, tech. support contact information)
- Fall 2014 academic calendar for online courses/College of Advancing and Professional Studies:  
<http://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/credit/fall/calendar>

## 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.

## Required Texts and Materials

- Senge, P. M. (1994). *The Fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. New York: Currency, Doubleday. (ISBN-10: 0385472560, ISBN-13: 978-0385472562)
- West, M. A., & Work Foundation. (2012). *Effective teamwork: Practical lessons from organizational research*. Third Edition. Chichester, West Sussex: BPS Blackwell. (ISBN-10: 0470974974, ISBN-13: 978-0470974971). Available free in ebook format from the UMass Boston

library for students logging in with their student account:

<http://umassboston.worldcat.org/title/effective-teamwork-practical-lessons-from-organizational-research/oclc/778436281>

- microphone-headphone + webcam (optional) for our synchronous meetings

## Weekly Schedule

Theme: Moving Toward Real, High-Performance Teams

Week 1: September 8 - 14

Week 2: September 15 - 21

Week 3: September 22 - 28

Week 4: September 29 – October 5

Theme: Chaos, Creativity, and Systems Thinking

Week 5: October 6 - 12

Week 6: October 13 - 19

Week 7: October 20 - 26

Week 8: October 27 – November 2

Theme: Connecting Purpose and Organizational Change

Week 9: November 3 - 9

Week 10: November 10 - 16

Week 11: November 17 - 23

Week 12: November 24 - 30

Final week: Course Reflections, Extensions, and Evaluation

Week 13: December 1 – 7

## Online (Synchronous) Meetings

Our course will involve four live, online, synchronous meetings. These typically use Blackboard Collaborate, a feature of Blackboard that allows for conferencing, but ongoing developments and access to technical tools and support may lead to alternative approaches during a given term. The schedule of these meetings will be established early in the semester to best meet the availability of students, although the first meeting may be scheduled in advance of the semester and include time for testing/setup around technical issues. Attendance is a required part of the course, but in the cases where you simply cannot attend a given meeting, there will be an alternate make-up assignment that can be completed, often involving listening to part or all of the recording of the synchronous meeting once it has taken place, along with doing additional written work. Even so, please make an effort to attend scheduled meetings, as the dialogue and activities within the meetings work best when most of the class is present.

## General Course Logistics and Schedule

Course weeks run from Monday to Sunday, and 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). Some other assignments may extend beyond a single 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 use umb.edu student email addresses (rather than personal email addresses). You are required to check these regularly (<http://webmail.umb.edu/>), or else you may have your umb.edu 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, (Reading Response Essays, General Course Q&A, etc.), you are able to "Subscribe". If you subscribe, you will automatically receive an email message when a new posting has been added. For Reading Responses, you can subscribe to individual threads (for example, when you post an original message, 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 new posting or replies to an existing post.

## Peer Groups

Depending upon the class makeup, peer groups may be used. Peer groups will be groups of 2-5 students in the course who join together to address some activity or assignment. As mentioned elsewhere, there are no group grades in the course, so peer groups are used for collaborative processes when it makes sense for each student to interact with a small number of others. Peer groups may be maintained for multiple weeks so that the same individuals may continue to work together for a while, but these also may be occasionally changed based on course progress and student feedback at a few points throughout the semester.

## Grading and Summary of Requirements

1. Readings and related written discussion posts (20%)
  - Completion of assigned readings for all weeks of the course.
  - Submission of at least 8 weekly Reading Responses (four by mid-semester, four more by the end of the course)
  - 18 Follow-up Posts (at least one per week, plus others to add up to at least 18 by the end of the course)

2. Weekly Activities and Participation (40%)
  - Weekly written assignments (each week's assignment may involve multiple parts).
  - Attendance at 4 synchronous online meetings (including one where a short presentation will be given)
  - 1 instructor conference around mid-semester
3. General Principles Journal (10%)
  - 2 submissions of course journal (mid semester, end of course)
4. Papers (30%)
  - 2 short papers + 1 final Plan for Practice paper

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

### Assignment Feedback

In Blackboard, some items that you'll turn in are submitted through the "Assignment" feature (which allows you to submit plain text or a file/document for instructor review). Please note that all assignments are evaluated according to a simple rubric, which indicates the level of completion. The possible values are:

1. **Completed:** submitted on time; please review instructor feedback included within the returned assignment; no further action is required [*receives full credit*]
2. **Completed-Late:** submitted late but within 3 days of the due date [*receives 50% credit*]
3. **Completed-No Credit:** submitted late, beyond 3 days after the due date [*receives no credit, but considered at end of the course if needed to boost borderline grade*]
4. **Pending:** please review instructor comments and revise and resubmit as requested; comments may ask you to finish incomplete work or expand upon what you've done to better meet the expectations of the assignment. Revise and resubmit all Pending assignments by the last date in which the current theme is being covered in the course (see the Weekly Schedule above). Assignments still Pending after that time will be changed to Not Completed. 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.
5. **Not Completed:** no attempt has been submitted for the assignment, or assignment not addressed [*receives no credit*]

At the end of the semester, up to three assignments originally marked as Completed-Late or Completed-No Credit may be changed to Completed (and therefore counted as being on time and receiving full credit) *based on exceptional quality of the work and the instructor's discretion.*

The feedback above applies to all course work except for items related to Reading Response essays and replies on the discussion board. Because discussion board items depend upon timeliness, late submissions won't be accepted. Therefore, all Reading Response essays are only counted as either Completed or Not Completed for each week.

Formally, there are no individual extensions explicitly granted for due dates; this structure is in place so that students do not feel pressured to negotiate submission terms or feel that they have to provide reasons for needing extra time to complete something. Instead, the guidelines above provide some room to be late on some assignments and still receive full or partial credit.

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 final grades is as follows: A=92; A-=85; B+=78; B=71; B-=64; C+=57; C=50

### **Expectations around Group Interactions**

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.

### **Syllabus Version**

August 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.