

**Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston  
CRCRTH 618 Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Organizational Change  
Online, 2014 Fall**

The following are student responses to the fourth question of the final course evaluation in which students were asked to write a synthetic statement to summarize their evaluation of the course (and after answering previous more detailed questions). Items below only include comments from students who gave permission for these to be shared anonymously.

Student comments:

- This class is one of the greatest classes I ever taken throughout my graduate school journey. The readings that the instructor assign is compelling and thought provoking. As a student I really was challenged with my thought processes and how I perceived the systems that function in my life. I was able to see things a lot differently through the perspectives of my classmates. We had a weekly reading response blog that we had to write a response to the reading. The amount of knowledge and insight that my classmates and I shared in that blog is amazing. We did not meet every week on Blackboard Collaborate which is a good thing because of schedules. It was very flexible in that regard. But in this class in order to really appreciate the rich content in this course, a student really has to be organized, have good time management and read the assigned readings. Jeremy always did a great job with giving timely feedback and suggestions on how to improve your work. He is also very respectful in his responses about your ideas. I really enjoyed this class!
- This course was a fantastic introduction to graduate school. The instructor designed the course so that all learning could be applied and greatly applicable to what is currently happening in our lives. Each concept built off that last and we were able to track our learning and development through out the semester. I am leaving as a better versed professional, although it is to be noted that these concepts far outreach "organizational change" and also consider general change in both professional and personal settings.
- This course was rewarding for me. I signed up for this course as a requirement for one of the cores for my program, which is LTET. I was immediately excited about this course because of the lessons in organizational change. This course can help anybody in any field. The exercise are extremely applicable to your current employment situation. Every student can relate. If you need help deciding on a core class, or need an elective, it would behoove you to take this course. The readings and videos were especially helpful. If you pay attention, you can really learn something from each video you watch and each reading you read. This course helped in my personal and professional growth. I almost wanted to change my major to critical thinking and organizational change!
- This is a great course for anyone looking to grow within an organization, or understand themselves or others within an organization better. The instruction gives you the opportunity to practice the information in your real life, and gives you ample opportunity to reflect on your actions. There is a lot of information within the semester, but as a student certain aspects of the course will stick out to you and your personal situation. It is interesting to read other responses from classmates and their reactions to the readings and how they differ from your own.

### Instructor response:

Student comments help me to understand the effects of recent developments with the course after I took over the online section and built upon some of the themes while adjusting others. The comments help me to see that the organization of the course helps to make the material fairly clear, where expectations are well-defined, assignments are paced consistently, and objectives are stated clearly and align well with what actually happens in the course. There is some confirmation as well that there seems to be an appropriate mix of assignment types, where some involve shorter exercises, and others are allowed to develop over several weeks.

Starting this past semester, a new book was used, replacing another. For several years, Katzenbach & Smith's *The Wisdom of Teams* was the standard resource used in the course work around ways that the team concept might support creative collaboration and organizational change. While highly accessible, it seemed important to use a source that additionally addressed modern issues (such as virtual collaboration) and presented a more inclusive view of teams and leadership (since *The Wisdom of Teams* mainly emphasized the examination of high-performing teams experienced by the authors in their role as consultants for large institutions and corporate settings). Therefore, Michael A. West's *Effective Teamwork* was used for some readings instead this semester, using a more research-based approach with current findings related to use of teams in different kinds of settings. Because this book is perhaps more theoretical and content-rich than the previous one, though, a challenge remains in finding the best ways to support learning and discussion since there is focus on the teamwork theme for only about one-third of the course.

Other possible improvements include considering ways to improve collaborations among students, as some parts of the course focus on how an individual student develops personally as a strong collaborator and then brings this perspective to their own outside setting. There may be ways to improve how the students in the course also collaborate among themselves. While a number of the class activities ask students to move theory to practice by trying out applications in their workplaces or organizational life, a further consideration is how the class as a whole collaborates together. A challenge here is how to organize such interactions around genuine goals that serve the students' real lives, rather than, say, contriving group work around projects that don't acknowledge individual needs.

Another area for consideration is how to continue to organize the quantity of material in the course. Because there are three major themes covered (teams, systems thinking, personal vision and leadership as a developing collaborator), about one month apiece, there may be opportunities to support students to digest more deeply instead of more broadly, so one possibility is to adjust again the balance between written and synchronous voice discussion. I'm challenged, though, by what I observe as a fairly high number of students taking this course who have full-time work that carries into evenings as well, so it is a work-in-progress to arrange synchronous meetings.

The amount of work required in the course was made even more flexible compared to the previous year (25% fewer discussion post writings required, one of the multi-week written assignment was eliminated, and a few other cases where a single assignment was replaced with a

few options to address different styles of work). Comments on the time needed for this course and 'amount of work' of course are unclear to me at this time. One way to look at this might be to return to the themes and work on making them more cohesive so that there is more feeling of a continuous process of the course where these might be somewhat fragmented now.

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