

**Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
CRCRTH 692 Processes of Research and Engagement
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:

- At this point, I think this is a great course to use as a bridge into your synthesis work, but can also be taken as a stand-alone journey that allows you to work on a project of your own choice and design. While it is a course that focuses on how one does research and engages others as a part of that, it might be also described as a journey through problem-solving in terms of needing to move between various stages that require transitioning between divergent and convergent thinking. As with most, if not all, CCT courses, the instructor works more as a guide than a professor who professes. This environment allows for students to work through things in such a way that builds confidence and allows for learning about oneself in the "messy" situation of developing one's own direction, completing research, and then revising that direction as needed and informed by the findings. The result is a meaningful exploration--even if one discovers something quite different than what he or she began with.
- CrCrTh 692 is one of the most valuable courses I have taken in the program. It teaches students how to effectively and efficiently research a topic. The step by step process makes sense and follows a well paced progression. Interaction with the instructors and fellow students plays helps all learners hash out their issues, share successes and struggles. The brunt of the course work is dedicated to students learn more about a subject of their choice. Assignments are not busy - work but helpful challenges.
- good course to learn how to engage others and overall research process comprehensively. But make sure that you have enough time to read and finish all home work assignments.
- I really enjoyed and appreciated all I had the opportunity to learn during this semester. It was not only to learn about research and tools, it was about relationships with experts, how to interview, how to connect with others, how to be flexible and learn to present and engage others to out interests, as well as to adapt them to the opportunities others have to offer, understand them and be able to see connections and reconnect the topics so we keep working together and get a project going.
- This course helps students learn about research through engaging them in the process itself and through ongoing reflection of that process. Students gather existing research, use multiple methods to organize ideas, and consider opposing viewpoints in order to create a project of their choosing. Online class meetings, instructor conferences, and peer partnerships give students the opportunity to share ideas with others as well as receive feedback on their progress. This class is ideal for anyone interested in improving their writing, critical thinking, and research skills,.
- This course is especially helpful for refining a research project. Due to the high-pace content, I would suggest starting it with some ideas ready to go. I had that, but I can

imagine how frustrating it might have felt for those who didn't. I'd consider it a mistake to take this class at the beginning of the CCT program. The course had a lot of content coming in from a lot of different directions, some of it felt unnecessary. For example, why wouldn't every assignment have a description, rather than "see course notes." The book is helpful, as was its online version during the course. The Blackboard sessions would have been perfect timeframes, had they not been hosted on Thursdays (any other day would have worked well, but nobody was asked about their availability). Just when I started considering ways to better focus our peer-buddy groups, the semester was over. I never heard back about what exactly was meant to come out of the mapping exercise, as what I originally submitted wasn't it, based on instructor feedback. I'd suggest refining the description for that assignment. I felt like the PD Workbook was a little excessive, but I appreciated how it's meant to help create a staging area. Somebody said it perfectly during one of our meetings: There's lots of work, but it's tough to know where something might get cut out.

- This course is very challenging and requires a lot of your attention. I would suggest taking this class by itself. It contains a lot of content and throughout the semester you will feel overwhelmed. However, what makes this course great is you get to choose your own research topic.
- This course of Research & Engagement is fundamental to understanding your preferences for research processes, especially when taken in the series of Action Research before or afterward. And while the experience may find you feeling as though there are a lot of assignments, each offers a unique opportunity to help move your work through the process of clarifying the What, Why and How of your focus and audience. You may find yourself revising work multiple times or letting go for a while and returning to assignments later (all while trying to meet deadlines that help you keep on track). This can be frustrating at times, but finding your inner creative space and honoring your known skills alongside trying out new ones will grow your project, your confidence as a researcher and your toolbox. The Buddy system might also seem a time consumer, but building a strong relationship with your Buddy Partner will help both of you through the course in ways beyond the simple progression of your own work. So spend the time and make the space to practice this well - and honor time for processing and time for reflection during the progression. My biggest struggle was honoring time for processing and asking others to listen without comment. Your struggle will be different. But whatever it is you will learn more about yourself as an engaged researcher through the process of doing the work for this class.
- To me, the learning objectives of this course are relevant to my expectation. Although I feel differently in terms of how to develop the research because I used to take other research courses from the different departments, this course provides me with the useful suggestion that I can use for conducting the academic research and other my own interest's things. The flexible and tailored attributes of this course helps me to learn based on my need. I think the research process is the appropriate framework that I could apply for self-learning in the future. Moreover, taking this course helps me to make a scholar connection with other classmates. I like the way students can interact by the buddy check-ins and online session. However, I think it will be better, if students will be able to change their partner during the semester. This helps learners to expand their experiences. I am very impressed the instructor's support. I like the way to set up the instructor

conference. This is to help me not only to keep track on myself, but also to gain the constructive feedback from the instructor as well.

Instructor response:

Because I've been able to teach this course in the online format on multiple occasions, the student comments are helping to identify some key issues around how to support students in a semester-long research and writing process. After a number of revisions where I've refined the additional explanations and instructions related to written assignments and participation requirements, my impression from the comments are that these items are generally organized and understood quite well. Within Blackboard, I've centralized materials in a way that reduces clicking between pages, for example, to help students be confident that they are seeing the appropriate information when addressing any part of the work. At the same time, this means that there is a single document, along with the course text, where assignment instructions are presented. The consequence is that such instructions are not repeated within each assignment submission space in Blackboard, so there is some need to reinforce that assignment information is kept in one place, while the formal "Assignment" in Blackboard is simply a slot in which to submit a file. Additionally, it comes up that some students struggle with a lack of precise step-by-step instructions around some types of work, so I continue to work on encouraging students to be confident to make choices around issues that might be ambiguous and offer reasoning as much as possible, and to trust the course process to help build understanding (which often takes longer than expected).

Because this course involves multiple submissions and returns of each individual written assignment, I've found a good system for managing this process -- of tracking revisions and different versions of a document, and for commenting on student work and returning it in a timely way. My view is that this is one strength that I bring to the teaching of the course where I'm able to give thorough attention to reviewing and responding students' writing, supporting a foundational principle of "dialogue around written work" in the course. Also, past comments from students occasionally referred to confusion about why revisions might be requested when the initial submission was "already fine", I feel that in this past semester, I was able to convey more clearly how the revision process was not a value judgment of written work as much as a support for the critical and creative thinking that can be extended through understanding and responding to others' comments.

The course peer work seemed to work relatively well, and I understood further how to keep developing this. Peer interactions (especially private buddy-partner discussions between pairs of students outside of class meeting times), are recognized to be essential, so this encourages me to continue supporting them and possibly find ways to increase small-group discussions during class meetings as well. Certain issues seem to surface every semester with some students (such as the limitations of buddy-pair partnerships where the individuals have limited expertise about each other's project areas), but this seems to be aided by the quality of the discussions about the research process itself. A key learning for me is to know that I'll always have to be responsive -- to notice when peer meetings are not happening or when the two individuals in the buddy-pair have different ideas about how to make their interactions most valuable, and to mediate gently.

I've made improvements to my system for collecting completed assignments (and permissions) to share student work as examples for future classes; the next step is to review what I've collected and organize these further.

There are other areas where improvement will be considered; there are some items that need to be read very carefully at the beginning of the course, and when this hasn't happened, it can lead to difficulties that surface later; I wish to improve my process communicating around these ideas. As a whole group, such as in our synchronous class meetings, it will help if we spend more time addressing a few different issues, including developing one's research organization and time management. Also, we should be more explicit about the process of returning to previous phases of research and reflecting upon them; now, this mainly comes up in terms of current assignment revisions that make previous assignments more clear, but we could discuss that way that we are building upon previous phases more directly to help show the overall progression of the course as a process involving related ideas.

More specifically, I think it may be helpful to develop ways to continue helping students find balance of the "engagement" part of the course. Some students continue to refer to "research" to mean just the activity of reading and note taking with published literature, so they raise questions and concerns about the time needed for the other parts of the course. At times, a comment reflecting an idea such as "when I get to the weekend, I end up spending time with the written assignments and don't have enough time left for research...", showing me that it is possible to not actually see the entire course and all of its processes as "research". One area for my improvement then is to work with the class to think through how time is used, and what it means to leave space for oneself for reflection rather than the sense that one is simply moving through course tasks.

Another issue that continues to need attention is the approach to coaching students to develop and refine their governing question (getting this to a state where it guides them toward further refinement and clarity around what they actually want to do in their research). There is a tension between leaving the question in a more broad form and finding focus quickly, so this might also be a concept to make more explicit in the course at an early point as well.

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