

Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
CRCRTH 611 Seminar in Critical Thinking: Design for Living Complexities
Instructors: Peter Taylor, Bobby Ricketts
Hybrid, 2018 Summer

Note: lettered responses represent the same individual across the questions, so that all "a)" responses come from the same person, and so on.

1. Start with an evaluation of yourself. What were your personal goals in taking this course? Did you achieve them? How would you have proceeded differently if you were doing this course again? What have been your major personal obstacles to learning more from this course?

- a) I felt like I took this course primarily to think about issues of design, but it transformed my thinking about "design" to encompass a much wider field of ways of thinking. My only obstacle were the personal things that happen (especially during the summer) that limited my capacity to attend class or be fully present.
- b) I wanted to do as well as I could with this course and learn all that I could about design and how to improve myself. I believe I now have a new appreciation and understanding of what the CCT course is expecting of me and what I have to do and change about myself to meet those requirements. My biggest obstacle for this course was overcoming my own limitations and preset beliefs of writing in order to maximize my revisions.
- c) When I began this course my goal was to maintain my GPA and move on. I believe I have achieved that. If I was doing this course again I would come in with a more open attitude, to enable myself to get into the rhythm of things more quickly. I think the biggest obstacle was just getting used to the non-traditional style of the course.
- d) My personal goals seem so amorphous and simplistic in hindsight, I'm not sure they can cleanly or accurately be stated. In a normal CCT course, I'd posit that "I want more time;" not so in this case. The pace was indispensable to my learning.
- e) To look at design from another perspective. To gain a basic understanding of critical thinking and its practices.
- f) I wanted to develop my design thinking. I did not achieve it. If I was doing it again, I would manage my time wisely and keep my focus on it. I am working as full-time position and very stressful.
- g) Honestly, I first enrolled in this class because I need an elective and it was recommended by my advisor. But then I was excited by the "design" aspect of the subject matter. My goal became to incorporate what I learned here into the "design" aspect of my Instructional Design degree program. I think I got a lot of very good ideas and perspectives in that regard, even if I have yet to gather all those thoughts together. If I were taking this course again...it would be an entirely different experience because there wouldn't be the same newness in the approach and the ideas, although doing it with a different group of people would expose me to a whole new crop of ideas and perspectives.
- h) I did achieve my goals by putting myself in uncomfortable situations, and getting my work done. A lot of the design thinking processes that I had challenged my thinking - also allowing me to connect it to my personal life.
- i) Starting with the most pragmatic, I'd have made my sketches more like "Sketches" and less like "drawings." Finally approaching cases with Bobby's recommendation was a very illuminating experiment, although I would have adjusted it to my own style after a while. No reason to say I won't have opportunities to try this approach again- or that I don't use this approach now but am not aware of it. As for my own goals, mine were unusual. I primarily wanted to stay involved in class by auditing to keep a connection with school over the summer to maintain some consistency in my chaotic life. So class was a reprieve for me when the pace of the class wasn't overwhelming. I do wish I'd better managed my pace, but this is a recurring theme in all that I do, and will some day more deeply examine the possibility that I experience time differently than many others do, especially when I'm engrossed in a process. This means generally that I need more gestation time and "recovery" from conversations I care

about. One specific item that I feel I missed out on was reading and smoking in all of the writing my classmates were submitting. Besides time constraints, I doubt if the limits of my brain would have appreciated that extra content at this time. For my initial goal, I wanted to play at each sketch as if it were a puzzle, and I feel I did that joyfully! Most significantly, for cumulative reasons, I somehow came into myself on a personal level more in this class than any other specific class. I don't know exactly what to attribute that to right now, but I'm grateful.

- j) To forward my progress as a learner in terms of CRITICAL THINKING. Though my production have not been as good as I wanted them to be becoming a better critical thinker has moved another step ahead. Better time management would have been key to doing this differently, maybe taking it during a regular paced semester instead of a 6 week summer session would have been better. Time and other obligations as well as current physical and emotional health issues were major obstacles during this course.
- k) I did not go into this course with clear goals aside from learning about design (I was not sure how that would look). In hindsight, having clear goals at the beginning would have helped me feel more grounded and focused. My major personal obstacles (and what I would have done differently) were time management and "submission anxiety." With the short timeframe of the course, I didn't have my usual week to digest and read at a relaxed pace. If I were to take it again, I would have designated time each day to do a little bit, rather than do most of the work the day before or the day of.

1. Self-evaluation (continued). What have you learned about what you have to do to make a course stimulating and productive (with respect to the format of this course: face-to-face, online, hybrid)?

- a) I loved the presentation format and face to face time. The online lectures were hard for me to engage with and I would have preferred doing more reading/viewing ahead of time and having more discussion time in class itself.
- b) I now believe more than ever that hybrid courses like this one work best for me, as it allows me to pursue my work at a good pace while also allowing me to keep in contact with my instructors when I need them.
- c) I have found that I need to focus on things like active listening to keep myself engaged during the online course. It can be easy to drift away and not pay attention, but through actively listening to people and mentally engaging with what they are saying I stay more engaged.
- d) A consistent theme occurred to me which, for lack of a better phrasing, seems to be: "trust to risk." I could not force control into the constraints at hand, and it emboldened quick action and demanded a supportive community.
- e) I thoroughly enjoyed the online synchronous aspect of this course. Having regular class meetings where I can see and speak with my professors and peers is very much what I need to feel engaged. It helps to motivate me and pushes me to do better.
- f) At least I have known that the design thinking requires the community engagement, interpersonal communication, and prototype. I need time to absorb the cases and make reflections on my idea and prototype.
- g) I think this course was stimulating and productive for me--I think I did do what I had to do. I was pleasantly surprised by the value I received from the online/synchronous format of the course.
- h) I do appreciate how much interesting policy and ecology-like information was in this course, motivating me to learn more on both topics.
- i) I often felt over stimulated, in both positive and not so constructive ways. Creative ideas sometimes make my head spin, which is such a lovely thing to experience. I might've found a way to process or even "dump" some of my thoughts, even if non-sequitur, so that I could move on.
- j) Better time management (again) in order to allow myself to have better quality engagement with material, getting items posted on time in order to really connect one sketch to the next effectively.
- k) I struggled with the recorded lectures, but realized 3/4 of the way through that if I treated them as pod-casts and did something else while I listened, I absorbed a TON more than just sitting in front of my

computer screen getting distracted by all the internet has to offer. Making dinner while listening was key to my success in the last few sessions of the course.

2. General Evaluation of course. What was special about this course (+positive and/or -negative)? How did the course meet or not meet your expectations? In what ways do you think this course could be improved?

- a) + The speed was amazing and really supported me to be a successful learner. I felt like I gained more in new thinking from this class than all four of the previous CCT courses I've taken combined (not a knock to those classes, just this class really meshed with my personal learning style). - As mentioned above, I found the pre-recorded lectures hard to get into and felt there could have been a more productive format & more discussion. + Having two instructors was great!
- b) + Good, positive atmosphere + Very in depth and helpful comments and critiques from my instructors. - Revision requirements were a little obtuse at times."
- c) I thought a big positive was the grading structure. It keeps people accountable, but also removes the stress associated with taking a risk and expressing your ideas. With the emphasis on progress as opposed to getting the right answer, it was much easier to engage in critical thinking. I think an improvement to this course could be finding more ways to engage as a class as a whole.
- d) Co-lecturers and mixed-immersion was really special. I enjoyed the small, trusted (holding) environment, and that it was routinely disrupted. I'd like a small amount more time in-class for breakaways, even if only to stare blankly, and even if it meant a longer class period.
- e) The overwhelming pace of the course helped to push me beyond my structured and elaborate way of working. However, I wish there were less revisions. Perhaps we only revise half of them. This would give me more time to reflect and make connections between cases (and get more sleep). I wish that the first class covered a little bit of critical thinking concepts because they were new to me and I struggled with not having any kind of an introduction to them.
- f) The cases are very challenging. I did not think this course helped my capability of the design thinking efficiently. I want to reduce the amount of the cases.
- g) Special: the online interactions, the live sharing of ideas, the diversity of viewpoints, the value that each participant brought to the discussions. Not meet expectations: I did not know what to expect so I don't remember having any expectations that remain unmet. Improvement: the open question for me is, what makes a principle a "critical thinking" principle, or a "critical thinking principle in design?" In later sketches I explicitly stated (what I thought were) these principles, but I felt I was shooting somewhat in the dark. BUT perhaps I am looking for more structure, like I would get from a course in logic, than there really needs to be.
- h) Although the challenges and short time made it difficult and stressful, I am still grateful for the course. The course could be improved by maybe having fewer cases. It is a lot of information to take in.
- i) Having had a previous peek at the curriculum, I still had no idea how potent the solutions of each case would be, or how much freedom would be granted in creating solutions. So this surpassed my anticipation. I might've preferred if the revisions came much closer to the initial submission, to minimize major shifting of brain gears. I agree with a few of the other points made just now in class, especially more break off group discussion. Maybe one way to manage that time constraint is to have the break off groups meet at another time, previously "carved out" in our schedules as if it were a class commitment. I don't know if that adds more time on our part, or takes some of the class time down to less than 3 hours. This is basically an inversion of Casey's suggestion to prep for class by reading or listening to the lecture. I like the youtube lectures. They are something like TED Talks and I can listen and look on while doing other small tasks (folding laundry, or chopping vegetables for dinner).
- j) I really enjoyed the experience of working with two instructors for feedback but found it somewhat difficult to go back and forth, though ultimately this likely lends towards becoming a better critical thinker. I have not had a team-taught environment since grade school so it was interesting to experience it in a new way in a new time. I did not have course expectations except to have instructors present,

available and interactive, and that was met. Some initial guidance towards what constitutes a good design sketch might have helped my progress.

- k) The rapid fire pace of the course was challenging, but ultimately exposed me to a ton of new topics I'm curious about and also revealed aspects of my study habits that could be improved upon. We covered many aspects of design, and many topics that I had not previously thought of as design-related, but are. I wish that we had more dialogue time focused on our sketch presentations in class as we relied mostly on plus deltas for feedback.

2. General evaluation (continued). In what ways did your attitude to doing the course change through the semester? How does it compare with other graduate courses? What would be your overall recommendation to prospective students?

- a) I felt more and more excited about my sketches. I would 100% recommend this course to everyone.
- b) At first, I was wary of the course and its requirements, but now I have found that I greatly enjoyed it and its content. I would say that this course was about middling in regards to difficulty compared to my previous courses in CCT. I would recommend this course to CCT students if they enjoy design, writing, and/or require a summer elective for their degree.
- c) I became more interested and invested in the class throughout the semester. I would recommend that people keep an open mind, and allow themselves to be creative.
- d) Began at overwhelmed, advanced to whelmed and, in my finer moments, to something approaching flow. This course does not resemble other courses, and that's much to the benefit. Recommendation to prospective students: Dive in, your classmates, and your enthusiasm, will keep your head above water.
- e) I become more confident after I had the experience of doing a few revisions and was able to tackle them more quickly. This was my first synchronous course and it offered something I felt was lacking in all the other courses. It was a more enriching experience.
- f) This course required a lot of energy and time for preparation and process.
- g) This course made room for experimentation and provided a safe place to fail. I saw that early on and enjoyed playing there. Most courses don't provide that environment.
- h) After a while, I became more confident with the course even though I might have not been entirely confident about the topic.
- i) Prior to taking the class, I'd thought that this whole curriculum could go on tour to various types of places, businesses, community centers, schools, or the kind of party I'd like to attend. So, I obviously recommend this class, and I don't necessarily think a lot of background description needs to be made about what critical thinking is, besides a suggestion about means to get at the outcome- less of an explicit definition of what CT is. Cara mentioned that a definition would've been better for her, but this class asked for a different kind of CT than any other class. The pace of this class was on par with Jeremy's Critical Thinking as of Fall '16 and possibly even Luanne's Critical Thinking, but the way the material accumulated was probably more cohesive than Creative Thinking and created more of an arc than both of those classes. My recommendation for other students is to have: an efficient approach to getting a sketch made and submitted without making is a full-on "drawing", to keep notes and refer back to it often, to contact other students if one feels the need to share overwhelm or get feedback, to revisit YouTube presentations or even the recordings of class whenever possible, to conference with teachers (something I should take more heed of!), to not be bashful about contributing to class discussion.
- j) As I became overwhelmed and affected by outside influences my attitude became slightly negative, but I tried to keep this managed by acknowledging that this was my personal issue, not the course itself. I did struggle with the direction in terms of instructions towards cases, a little more formality towards expectations in each case might have been beneficial for me. Recommendation for prospective students would be to stay ahead of the readings and materials as much as possible, remain in contact with instructors, and keep sketches contained as the pace of the course does not allow for highly expanded research.
- k) At first I didn't like it, I had a hard time with the pace and the content and couldn't see the connections between the examples in the videos. As we progressed through the course and I got in a groove I was

able to take more away from the conversations and ideas of my fellow students. For future students: 1) your sketch doesn't have to be perfect, 2) be sincere and thoughtful with your plus deltas because they're helpful and welcomed feedback 3) ask for help if you are having a hard time because the instructors are extremely supportive.

3. Evaluation in relation to the course description. Read the course description/goals below. Comment on how well the goals expressed in the syllabus were met. Make general and specific suggestions about how these could be better met.

Learning objectives: By fully participating in this course, you should be able to:

--understand, apply, and supplement a set of principles for critical thinking in design;

--support the thinking and communication by others regarding the previous objective

- a) They were definitely met. The structure of the course was useful in challenging students to build principles and work with other people. Someone said in our dialogue hour that there could have been fewer revisions. I think this could make a profound difference in being able to do BETTER revisions. For example, perhaps you have to do 6 out of 11 sketches as revisions. I would have really loved diving deeper into those six rather than having to come up with ideas for sketches I was happier to abandon. This was the only part of the course that sometimes felt forced to me (as much as I'm all for forcing a diving in, this felt like going too far into something that I knew I wasn't going to stick with).
- b) I believe these goals were very well met throughout the course. I now understand design and critical thinking more than I did before. In the future, however, perhaps it would be prudent to make the intended principles for each session/case more obvious.
- c) I think the goals of the syllabus were met. I think there was not enough emphasis on actually writing down principles and keeping a list however. Although I feel I have identified some, there are probably some I did not identify because I did not write them out.
- d) The course goals were well met. My only suggestion would be something on the order of improved practices around plus/deltas. Encouragement/praise is not always so cursory as it seems; critical feedback is exceptionally helpful when extended from a place of deep engagement and support.
- e) I lacked a basic knowledge of critical thinking coming into this course and I wish the first class covered critical thinking concepts. I struggled with not having any kind of an introduction to them and would have benefited from a quick lesson.
- f) No change. They are clear.
- g) See my answer to Question 2. That notwithstanding, if the principles I did put forth in my sketches are indeed valid principles for critical thinking in design, then I think I could add my own structure to those principles. Perhaps also I need more time for reflection to see what holds that set of principles together. That said, my suggestion would be to either provide a more explicit framework or rubric for defining the principles, or give students a heuristic (new word!) up front for developing their own framework.
- h) The goals of the course are met really well. It is mainly that there is so much content covered in a short period of time. It can get really exhausting to reflect on so much. Although, it does help me figure out what is most important and most interesting to me.
- i) Sometimes supplementing the principles seemed less evident in our work, or we weren't held fast to that requirement. A criteria for feedback might be to state our objectives in a case and for classmates to help us know if we hit our intended mark.
- j) At the close of the course, in reflection they are met. Being confused about the expectations for much of the course, my personal experience was uncertain if these goals would be met, but by completion they were realized. Struggling with instructions/expectations might have been lessened with a change to case instructions - more information towards designing sketches.
- k) I took one major principle away from this course: "Hold ideas in tension with alternatives." We applied that principle to many different scenarios related to design. There was a lot of support re: thinking and communication, but sometimes I wasn't sure what we were talking about. This could be due to my own level of participation but also at times I was unclear. It may have thrown off the open nature of inquiry, but having the design principles stated more obviously for each case might have helped provide

direction. Discussing critical thinking at the beginning of the course for those who haven't taken Critical Thinking would be helpful, as well as more time in breakout groups.

4. Synthetic statement (1 or 2 paragraphs). Building on your comments from Qs 1-3, compose a synthetic statement (1 or 2 paragraphs) evaluating this course. (Imagine readers who might not be willing to wade through all the answers to Qs 1-3, but are willing to read more than simply the numerical averages of standard course evaluations.) Please make comments that help the instructor develop the course in the future and that enable some third party appreciate the course's strengths and weaknesses. Among other things you might comment on the overall content and progression of classes, the session activities, and the use of mentors to support the learning in the course.

- a) This course is a demanding and highly engaging series of investigations that build on one another to build your ability to design. Through these interactive projects, students get to think about how to address issues in their own lives, their communities, and the world at large. This course also allows for a variety of entry points, learning styles, and practical applications of the themes.
- b) This course was a very well thought out, in depth analysis of critical thinking in regards to design. Each case was unique, but also helped to build off of and expand each previous case as the course went on. The requirements for revisions can be strict at times, but in the end these requirements have greatly benefited me and have helped to better understand CCT and what is expected of me. The instructors were incredibly supportive and approachable throughout the course, and I greatly appreciate all the help they have given me and my classmates over the semester. Overall, I greatly enjoyed this course, and would happily recommend it to prospective summer students.
- c) The mentors in this course typically do well in assisting student learning. At times they can give answers that become convoluted and deviate from answering the original question. Although this is due to the complicated nature of the topics addressed, it can still be frustrating. The overall progression of the course works well, as the topics build upon one another and easily connect.
- d) This is a course like none other. I imagine I could re-enroll the following semester, or at an indeterminate point in the future, and have an entirely different, though just as rich, an experience. The pace is high, and is demanding, but well worth the rate of learning.
- e) Having regular class meetings where I could see and speak with my professors and peers was an enriching and engaging experience. The overwhelming pace of the course helped to push me beyond my structured and elaborate way of working. However, I wish there were less revisions so that I had more time to reflect and make connections between cases. I become more confident after I had the experience of doing a few revisions and was able to tackle them more quickly. I lacked a basic knowledge of critical thinking coming into this course and I wish the first class covered critical thinking concepts.
- f) This course of the design thinking is prepare the students to create alternative choices as solutions for the community problems of environments, technology, ethics and privacy.
- g) This is a challenging but rewarding course. As a student who is not in the CCT program, (I don't know if this would apply to CCT students as well), this course challenged my usual approach to what a university course is and how to succeed in it. The structure and expectations were not as certain as I am used to, but that gave me room to experiment and even learn through failure. The schedule was intense but that forced me to make decisions and put my thoughts down without overthinking them. The synchronous sessions were also intense but the community formed and the sharing of ideas were more than worth the extra time commitment. My recommendations to future students are: clear your calendar, unset your expectations, and open your mind.
- h) Thinking deeper into how the course could be improved in the future would involve probably how to make the recorded lecture of the course done in our own time, that way we are not taking in so much information at once. Although the information is very interesting and informative, it is a lot to process. It would be interesting to see if those recordings would be required before the class begins that day? Or what if there was another way to make that section more engaging : recordings required before class begins and then more workshop time/collaboration time during class.

- i) In an intensive-paced, workshop style curriculum, students have the great opportunity to contact real world tensions with out of the box solutions. Classmates are supportive listeners who are enriched by the pushing of creative boundaries of the peer group, and take their turn expanding their thinking. The cases and their themes or principles seem to arc as if chapters in a narrative. (this is something I'd like to mention as another PLUS and a Delta could be to find that arc and discuss). The experience isn't perfect, and that suits the dilemmas presented in the cases and promotes real life gathering of resources to manage. Case solutions aren't aimed at being perfect either. They're meant to immerse the student in visible and invisible dynamics within any scenario, so that they quickly become accustomed to fielding the question/problem/tension at hand and detecting routes to organize one's thinking about it.
- j) This course offers a very rewarding process of learning towards Critical Thinking for students towards Design in a broad and expanded sense of the term. The title of the course does not really capture the very rich scope of material and study done through the course and to that end doesn't quite do the course justice as it is really quite an enriching study for students from any number of backgrounds and with diverse goals. Students must exercise strong time management skills to keep pace if the course is offered during condensed semesters (6 week summer sessions) as well they should seek clarification on specific expectations towards design cases and communicate with instructors regularly in order to succeed and take as much as possible away from this course.
- k) Design shows up in our lives in infinitely many ways. This course will expose you to many facets of design and you'll have the opportunity to participate in thought provoking conversation with your classmates regarding the week's topic and also share your creations (design sketches)/receive feedback from the facilitator/classmates. My cohort developed friendly and supportive relationships and I appreciate that we were expected to actually create something. It felt very participatory. Your mentors are readily available and really value you as not only a student but as a person with important insight. Be prepared for fast paced consumption of material and production of ideas/sketches. They won't be perfect the first time around, but you'll have the chance to revise with good feedback. You've got to stay on your toes for this one - don't fall behind or be a perfectionist.

I give permission for my response to Question 4 to be included anonymously in the compilation posted to the CCT wiki (and thus viewable to the public).

- a) Yes
- b) Yes
- c) Yes
- d) Yes
- e) Yes
- f) Yes
- g) Yes
- h) No
- i) Yes
- j) No
- k) Yes

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this course?

1. Very Poor 2. Poor 3. Average 4. Good 5. Excellent

- a) 5. Excellent
- b) 5. Excellent
- c) 4. Good
- d) 5. Excellent
- e) 4. Good

- f) 3. Average
- g) 5. Excellent
- h) 4. Good
- i) 5. Excellent
- j) 5. Excellent
- k) 4. Good

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this instructor (Taylor)?

1. Very Poor 2. Poor 3. Average 4. Good 5. Excellent

- a) 5. Excellent
- b) 5. Excellent
- c) 3. Average
- d) 5. Excellent
- e) 4. Good
- f) 5. Excellent
- g) 5. Excellent
- h) 5. Excellent
- i) 5. Excellent
- j) 5. Excellent
- k) 5. Excellent

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this instructor (Ricketts)?

1. Very Poor 2. Poor 3. Average 4. Good 5. Excellent

- a) 5. Excellent
- b) 5. Excellent
- c) 5. Excellent
- d) 5. Excellent
- e) 5. Excellent
- f) 5. Excellent
- g) 5. Excellent
- h) 5. Excellent
- i) 5. Excellent
- j) 5. Excellent
- k) 5. Excellent