

Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
CRCRTH 694 Synthesis of Theory and Practice
Hybrid, 2015 Spring

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) My personal goals were to tell my story of how CCT has influenced my teaching and my personal interactions. I did achieve them. Although I realize there is much work to be done. My time management in this course was much better than previous ones. I would have done a better job mapping out what I was trying to accomplish?? Personal obstacles included spending too much time on the project. Obsessed is a strong word, but maybe appropriate.
- b) My personal goals included trying to make sense of my entire CCT experience in some sort of narration that would be helpful for others that might find connection to the idea of gardening life. Yet I also wanted to try and connect the work I have been doing from a deeper personal level of awareness with the challenges ahead in creating a vision for the public garden I now work for while honoring the diversity of beliefs and values that influence that direction.
- c) My personal goals included trying to make sense of my entire CCT experience in some sort of narration that would be helpful for others that might find connection to the idea of gardening life. Yet I also wanted to try and connect the work I have been doing from a deeper personal level of awareness with the challenges ahead in creating a vision for the public garden I now work for while honoring the diversity of beliefs and values that influence that direction.
- d) My personal goals were to finally complete my program and plan for the next step in my career. I achieved the completion portion but I found that I am still on a journey to finding my future. I would not have done my synthesis differently- in doing it this way I cleared my path to the future by dealing with the past. My personal obstacle was having so much information gathered and sorting through it all to have a concise and consistent thought.
- e) My main goal in this course was to do my best to create an experience and support structure for myself to finish my synthesis in a way that allowed me to continue to grow in meaningful ways and to set myself up for continued growth as I move beyond my MA in CCT. A large piece of doing so was also helping to create that structure for my classmates, who were vital to my journey. I most certainly met these goals. My synthesis is something that I will draw strength and inspiration from for some time, something that I will continue to build on, and the group of classmates have become very good friends of mine who I will have no reservations about keeping in touch with. I don't know if I would do anything too much differently if I did the course over again. There were times when I felt overwhelmed by the tasks I had set up for myself, but the experience of being able to rely on myself to accomplish what I wanted sometimes despite other responsibilities was very important for me. While it may seem similar to some other challenges I've gone through, it is actually extremely significant for me at the moment simply because I was able to make the most of it while faced with other significant challenges. Admittedly, such challenges are just part of life. But this year in particular I knew I had a challenge coming. This consisted of taking on a new position at work (a second job, really), making up for

previous shortcomings and completing an accreditation process as part of that position, working through some significant personal challenges with my partner, and teaching in and of itself. My CCT work, relationships, and guidance provided me with a sense of confidence, assurance, and concern and care for my work. I am both very happy with what I've accomplished and sad to have the program "end."

- f) I started the synthesis class thinking it would be like a dissertation experience, a bit nervous but also excited because it was the achievement of a goal. I realized along the way than more than logistics, methodology as usual, and stiff requirements I would solidify my CCT tools and resources by practicing them in the class. Freewriting, peer sharing, mapping ideas, reference tracking, workbook daily writing, clipping, and other practices and synthesizing 2 years of readings, interests, and learning has been a great and fulfilling experience. Prof. Taylor is a great academic tutor and teacher. I loved the experience and I am satisfied with my work and my reflection on the experience. Although I am academically done with it, I am going to keep my research work and field practice because I love the topic.
- g) My personal goal was to complete this course with a WIP workshop that I could use as the foundation of a business. I absolutely achieved this goal. I don't think I would have changed anything if I took this course again. Perhaps, I would have made my final change to the presentation earlier. I don't feel like there were any major obstacles to learning. This class exceeded my expectations and even my hopes.
- h) To build curriculum that could increase critical thinking in secondary students. Yes I achieved my project and more. The project gave me a new perspective and approach to teaching and learning. If I was going to do something differently I would use the whiteboard and audio recording processes I utilized at the end of the project earlier. Those resources improved my process. Personal obstacles, are to continue see myself as an academic and intellectual and that my work and thinking are worthy of discussion and inquiry.

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 still have to be authentic in an online course. Making connections is key in any format, but more so when you are communicating electronically.
- b) That I need to take risks without worry about whether they may or may not be received by others and keep honoring the knowing that creating that space of authenticity will eventually build trust and community for the supportive work of our individual and collective spaces of learning. I must also continually re-evaluate the effectiveness of creating the time and space in my daily life for the work of the course in order to support the reality of the slow right now design learning.
- c) That I need to take risks without worry about whether they may or may not be received by others and keep honoring the knowing that creating that space of authenticity will eventually build trust and community for the supportive work of our individual and collective spaces of learning. I must also continually re-evaluate the effectiveness of creating the time and space in my daily life for the work of the course in order to support the reality of the slow right now design learning.
- d) I have realized that one needs to be willing to share their ideas with the community. The class needs to have a safe and open policy for sharing, which most CCT classes employ, but as a learner one needs to use that space for sharing. Opening up to ideas and new processes and allowing ambiguity into the delivery of class is parallel to the teachings of CCT- one informs the other.
- e) I didn't learn too much about this beyond what I already knew with respect to the format. In an online course, one has to be proactive, willing to send emails, to reach out, to contribute without having to be asked, to take risks in sharing thoughts and concerns. Of course, one also has to be knowledgeable and comfortable with the technology being used. I believe I was all of these things. I am more comfortable

with online course than I was before. I credit the supportive and patient people in the class as well as the mostly user-friendly format of Google for this. I think I prefer it over Blackboard.

- f) Keep up to date with work, assignments, delivering what has to be delivered right on time and sharing with peers I believe is the key to really make the best out of experiences and really learn from them and create and reflect on work, problems, and ideas.
- g) I think the small group support I received from Team Awesome really helped. Looking back over other classes, I wish I would have had a similar experience in some of them.
- h) Participate more with my classmates.

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) I felt the relationships I developed with the other students was special. I also believe I needed to be held accountable for what I've been saying I am going to do for a long time. For me the course could be improved by having input on what night we met or having it on different nights during different weeks. Tuesday night is one of my busiest. It would have been helpful for me to meet on Thursdays once in a while.
- b) This course created a unique community of support among my peers where everyone felt listened to, supported to play with ideas, honored the complexities of their struggles and created genuine concern for each other. It would be an added bonus if this class could somehow support a short in-person workshop where everyone could meet face to face. We happened to create that for ourselves through the process of gathering for our synthesis presentations despite our long distances from each other and Boston. But this may not be feasible without additional monetary support for some in the future. And while this is not necessary, this added a depth of community to our already close and supportive group.
- c) This course created a unique community of support among my peers where everyone felt listened to, supported to play with ideas, honored the complexities of their struggles and created genuine concern for each other. It would be an added bonus if this class could somehow support a short in-person workshop where everyone could meet face to face. We happened to create that for ourselves through the process of gathering for our synthesis presentations despite our long distances from each other and Boston. But this may not be feasible without additional monetary support for some in the future. And while this is not necessary, this added a depth of community to our already close and supportive group.
- d) The community that one felt and was a part of made this a special experience. The diversity of people and ideas created a rich culture in which to thrive. This class exceeded my expectations in it being more personal and caring than I thought an on-line community could be. We were willing to listen, help and share with each other. It could be improved by switching buddy partners here and there.
- e) This course was special in that I was able to interact with, learn from, and become friends with individuals who have very different projects and interests from mine. I was able to meet people who I very likely would never have met or learned from otherwise. The different perspectives that I was introduced to helped me to challenge my own thinking and to grow as a result. The course exceeded my expectations--this was a special group of people, and the course provided just the right amount of support structures needed to help the group thrive. I can't quite think of an improvement--perhaps being able to literally transport folks from one place to another, simply because it sometimes becomes tiring to look at the computer screen for an extended period.

- f) The course was great, the bonding between students and teacher, among students, the topics and how we shared, and learned and the products we were able to create were a really impressive experience. I am proud of my and my fellow's reflections, efforts and end results.
- g) I felt a much more significant sense of community in this class than I did in any other. The chance to get involved in other student's lives and projects was really awesome and brought us all closer together. The course met my expectations in every way. I've put a lot of thought into how this course could be improved, but I really can't think of any.
- h) I really enjoyed the writer's workshop. Having a time to express my concerns, anxieties, and successes was comforting and reassuring. This course more than any other really challenged me to rethink my perspective on critical thinking and education in a different light. Thinking about teaching from the frame of reference of curiosity completely changes how one thinks about instruction and the classroom.

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) My excitement ebbed and flowed. I would be excited about progress for a while then I would get tired of looking at it, then I would get excited again... My favorite of all the graduate courses. If you want to learn more about yourself and investigate a topic you are passionate about 694 is a wonderful option.
- b) I became more and more concerned about the time to do the work as the semester developed as the complexity of my work did not seem to be "synthesizing". But the community building and space for risks continued to deepen and build support for this unruly complexity as we moved week to week. Carving out sacred time helped manage some of the anxiety of completing such a large amount of work. And starting our writing in earnest in December was essential. Write as much as you can, even if you don't yet know how it will or will not fit into the final work. The writing itself frees thinking that may not at first seem important but later reveals itself through reflection.
- c) I became more and more concerned about the time to do the work as the semester developed as the complexity of my work did not seem to be "synthesizing". But the community building and space for risks continued to deepen and build support for this unruly complexity as we moved week to week. Carving out sacred time helped manage some of the anxiety of completing such a large amount of work. And starting our writing in earnest in December was essential. Write as much as you can, even if you don't yet know how it will or will not fit into the final work. The writing itself frees thinking that may not at first seem important but later reveals itself through reflection.
- d) My attitude toward the class improved each week as we became closer in our projects and invested in each other. It seemed that this class was more about our improvement in life and our work rather than checking a box of completion like you find in other graduate courses. Prospective students need to be aware that it takes time to realize what your synthesis is and you don't need to have it figured out on day one- there are people here to help you along the bumpy path.
- e) My attitude towards the course was a great roller coaster ride--not because of the course itself, however. Rather, it was because of the challenges I made for myself and the inevitable moments of doubt that creep up in significant undertakings! This course compares to other in the sense that I was able to build strong relationships with classmates. It is slightly in contrast with a few of the courses I've taken due to the nature of the class as a longer period of time to work on a single project (the synthesis). I would highly recommend the course.
- f) I was getting more and more involved as semester evolved, I got more into my topic and adapted to my group work and rhythm

- g) I would say my attitude grew and developed over the course of the semester as my project grew and developed. This class was much more small group work and sharing focused than other graduate courses. For prospective students, I would recommend having a clear idea of what your synthesis will be about before they get started. Time is so limited that you need to make solid progress every week.
- h) The course was what I expected it to be. My attitude remained steady throughout the process. It is much different than other courses because it is built around a project and reflection. For prospective students, I recommend choosing a topic that will push you to think, research, and question. Be prepared to struggle and overcome with the support of your classmates and advisor.

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.

Course Objectives:

This seminar provides participants with an opportunity to review and reflect on their work in their Master's program and its impact on their current and future professional and personal lives, through a final project that demonstrates knowledge and integration of skills, processes, and strategies of critical and creative thinking and reflective practice. To facilitate the formulation of a project and the synthesis of ideas, students meet weekly as a writing workshop as well as in small support groups to reflect and get feedback on their plans and writing. A project proposal must be approved before the semester starts. All projects are presented during the last three weeks.

(If you are a CCT or LTET student, the project is your capstone. Your paper and presentation will be evaluated by a reader from your program in addition to the CCT694 instructor.)

Frameworks

1. *Taking yourself seriously/ Finding your Vocation*
2. *Phases of Research and Engagement for Pacing of research, writing, and revision*
3. *Developing as a Reflective Practitioner, including Taking initiative in and through relationships*

Creative Habits

1. *Daily writing*
 2. *Weekly writing meetings for support and feedback in groups of 3 (buddy trios)*
 3. *Weekly writing workshop with the whole class for reflection in relation to the frameworks above*
 4. *Extended One-on-one conferences with an advisor (the instructor), at least once every three weeks.*
- a) 694 met all of the frameworks. I appreciated that we put into play information we previously learned. We didn't have to "learn" new material, but apply what we know to a involved project.
 - b) The Phases of Research and Engagement were outlined in the syllabus and followed much of the prior 692 and 693 processes. But I found them much less structured which was a blessing and a challenge. The blessing was that I felt freed to use whichever phases I needed at any particular time as it fit into my own creative process. But at the same time because I had experienced a very structured linear process of research and engagement prior, I found I forgot some of the possible tools when I needed them most.
 - c) The Phases of Research and Engagement were outlined in the syllabus and followed much of the prior 692 and 693 processes. But I found them much less structured which was a blessing and a challenge.

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- d) The class expectations were met and exceeded by the involvement of the fellow practitioners and the support of the professor. I found that the process was clear and direct with the only questions being on the syllabus. Some of the directions/dates were hard to follow. It was quite long and for those of us that like to print paper versions the multiple links to other resources were troubling having to go back each time and connect to those. The daily writing was invaluable and will be something I continue in the future.
- e) I think this description provides an great overview of the goals of the course in a succinct and inclusive manner. I suppose that if I were teaching course and considering my experience as a student in it, I might adjust the description or nature of the Daily Writing so that it is more inclusive and adjustable to the students' needs (I think this may have happened anyways--so perhaps it was my own understanding of the task that was limiting my perception of it). I took the task of Daily Writing and made it suit my needs time-wise--some days it would be free-writing, some it would be revising my draft, some it would be working on the creative pieces for my project (which was not always literally writing). While I think writing is a great tool to regain focus and to clarify thinking, there were times when I may have referred this time as Daily CCT.
- f) The course meets all the goals and expectations of its description... In order to start my work on the synthesis I started by reviewing every course I had taken and then the main words that would describe my learning from each. Now that I have finished my paper, every one of those words has a space on it... I saw a first attempt to describe what I wanted to do in an Independent study with Prof. Brinker and I realized how difficult it was for me then to describe to her my interests and terms involved, how distant there were for me the words Conceptual Change and Human Development... Now to say the least, I know how to use them properly and where to search for the main authors and research on the topic... I am very satisfied with my CCT road and with what is to come afterwards. I hope to stay connected and keep somehow participating in courses, events and research for the program.
- g) I think this describes my experience very well.
- h) I feel like the description was met. As I mention earlier, the one component that surprised me was how much I enjoyed the writing workshops. I was not expecting them to help me as much as they did. It amazes me how much that small amount of time can really refocus me and help me feel good about my own progress.

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) For me 694 was the most challenging of all my CCT coursework. Not challenging because the material was difficult to understand, but challenging because it made me look within myself to determine what it is I am truly looking for. Through the course of 694 I realized I have a story worth telling. Secondly, I noticed that I am in a group of thoughtful, caring people who have my best interest at heart who I would contact today with questions. During sessions we were asked to share our thoughts

or discuss what was on our minds. There is no other place like that for me and I am afraid I will miss it. The class progressed at a nice pace, I never felt rushed to turn something in I wasn't ready to. The instructor was more interested in where I was headed than where I presently was. His thought-provoking comments drove me to consider things I might not have alone. Writing this is sad for me because I feel like a long journey has come to an end. I understand we will keep pursuing our dreams, but it won't be the same. It's like a good book I want to keep reading to find out what's going to happen next, but I don't want to get to the final chapter.

- b) This class will help you give voice to the work you have been doing in the CCT program. And you may begin the class with a specific synthesis goal. But if you keep yourself open to listening to yourself as you move through the process of synthesis, you may find something more deeply connected to something meaningful to your life, not just work. Allow yourself the time it will take to do the writing. Allow yourself the time it will take to take your work seriously. But don't forget to play and create connection with your fellow travelers. Bring your true self and bring the tools you've learned in prior CCT classes. And spend the time to build scaffolding with your fellow travelers. You may well deeply discover what it means for yourself to care about the welfare of fellow learners, having that translate into your workplace and life beyond the program.
- c) This class will help you give voice to the work you have been doing in the CCT program. And you may begin the class with a specific synthesis goal. But if you keep yourself open to listening to yourself as you move through the process of synthesis, you may find something more deeply connected to something meaningful to your life, not just work. Allow yourself the time it will take to do the writing. Allow yourself the time it will take to take your work seriously. But don't forget to play and create connection with your fellow travelers. Bring your true self and bring the tools you've learned in prior CCT classes. And spend the time to build scaffolding with your fellow travelers. You may well deeply discover what it means for yourself to care about the welfare of fellow learners, having that translate into your workplace and life beyond the program.
- d) This course being a synthesis of ideas over a period of time and of other courses was a bit daunting to begin with. Once the instructor guided us to share ourselves and our goals not just our past accomplishments I felt relief and excitement. To have a new beginning this far into my degree was astounding and appreciated. I was able to explore in depth a new path as I chose guided by the CCT principles. In my exploration, daily writing and community enrichment (buddy partners) I was able to see that my path was clear all along and was right in front of me. Sharing with others opened up my ideas but centered me back to where I had been and allowed me to move ahead. The strength of this class is that it allows you to explore your path while sharing the ride with others. You are all on a journey together, supporting each other but coming to different conclusions and creating your own work. Support and freedom are the hallmarks of this course.
- e) This course provides a thoughtfully designed space for the completion of the Synthesis at the close of the CCT program. It had the perfect balance of pacing and flexibility, with the instructor providing a sort of base for check-in's, dialogue, and guidance. It was the perfect transition to have at the end of the CCT journey because it asked me to jump out of the nest and start flying on my own (perhaps this didn't start with this course, but it was an even more emphatic version of the experience). I really appreciate how the course provided me with the support I needed, be it through flexibility, inquiry, dialogue, sharing, responding, presenting, and genuinely making sure I focused on what was important to me and the others in the class. Future students might be forewarned that there are some tacit pre-requisites: you need to have listened to yourself enough at this point to have a topic that is of personal significance to you; you need to be open-minded and receptive to challenges to your thinking and to provide the

same for others in a supportive way; you need to be independently organized and adventurous; you need to be willing and able to put in the time to invest in you, your goals, and those of a few others in a symbiotic way. In most cases I've encountered (my own included), such investment seems to be the most significant and perhaps the greatest risk--taking yourself seriously is funny like that.

- f) I realized along the way than more than logistics, methodology as usual, and stiff requirements, 694 would solidify my knowledge of CCT tools and resources by giving me another opportunity to practice them. Freewriting, peer sharing, mapping, reference tracking, workbook daily writing, clipping, and other practices and synthesizing 2 years of readings, interests, and learning has been a great and fulfilling experience. Prof. Taylor is a great academic tutor and teacher. I loved the experience and I am satisfied with my work and my reflection on the experience. Although I am academically done with it, I am going to keep my research work and field practice because I love the topic. The course was great, the bonding between students and teacher, among students, the topics and how we shared, and learned and the products we were able to create were a really impressive experience. I am proud of my and my fellow's reflections, efforts and end results. The course meets all the goals and expectations of its description... In order to start my work on the synthesis I started by reviewing every course I had taken and then the main words that would describe my learning from each. Now that I have finished my paper, every one of those words has a space on it...
- g) Overall, I feel like this class was the perfect capstone of the CCT program. From the collaborative and dialogue driven classes to the supportive writer's workshops, this class offered the perfect environment to reflect on my experience within the CCT program and produce a representative work. More so than any other class in the CCT program, 694 fostered a phenomenal environment and a sense of closeness among the students. It really was the perfect capstone.
- h) This course gave me the license to explore my own beliefs and assumptions about my project. The support I received from my advisor and classmates pushed me to think beyond my previous thinking of CT and teaching. I was inspired to look at and research what I see as foundational components of learning and thinking. It has truly change my view and thoughts about teaching. I will be a much better teacher because of this project and program. I am fundamentally different than when I joined this program two years ago. My thinking and perspective is more fair minded and open. Most importantly, I want to share and inspire others to be more critical and creative. Thanks

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

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this course? [1. Very Poor, 2. Poor, 3. Average, 4. Good, 5. Excellent]

(AVERAGE = 4.9)

- a) 5
- b) 5
- c) 5
- d) 5
- e) 5
- f) 5
- g) 5
- h) 4

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this instructor? [1. Very Poor, 2. Poor, 3. Average, 4. Good, 5. Excellent]

(AVERAGE = 5.0)

- a) 5
- b) 5
- c) 5
- d) 5
- e) 5
- f) 5
- g) 5
- h) 5