

Interdisciplinary Expressive Arts 1100:
Interdisciplinary Foundations
Course Outline

Contents

Interdisciplinary Expressive Arts 1100:	3
Facilitator	3
Basic Philosophy of the Course	3
The IDEA Skill Set	4
Asking/Forming/Creating a “Good” Question	4
Critical Thinking and Crap Detecting	4
Finding, Using and Evaluating Resources	5
Communication (speaking, listening, writing, performing)	5
Working in a Group	5
Following Through on a Process	6
Self-Evaluation	6
Learning Experiences	7
Required Course Text	7
Demonstration of Learning	8
Learning Contract	8
Weekly Reflections	8
Individual Project	9
Group Project	10
Assessment for Group Presentations	12
Final Skills Interview and Evaluation	13
Grade Inflation	14
Due Dates	15

Interdisciplinary Expressive Arts 1100

Facilitator

Instructor: Sean Park, Ph.D (ABD).

Office: D308, Surrey campus (by appointment)

Telephone: 604-719-3777

Direct Email: seaninthepark@gmail.com

Basic Philosophy of the Course

This course explores interdisciplinary inquiry, creativity and personal purpose in university. We examine what it means to learn, how to learn and the process of evaluating and creating knowledge. The course is, for the most part, led by the initiatives and interests of students working individually and in groups. The course content will evolve as the course develops, but will include a diverse number of current interdisciplinary approaches to help students explore potential academic and career directions. This is not your normal course and is likely quite different from other educational experiences you've had. It's okay to be somewhat disoriented with the learning environment we'll be creating and we'll talk about it as we go.

Interdisciplinary studies encourage students to develop broader intellectual skills, greater facility for critical thinking, and greater awareness of the social relevance of their education. Interdisciplinary students have the opportunity to develop exemplary skills in problem solving, insight, team-building, lateral thinking, and multi-modal learning styles. Interdisciplinary strategies involve approaching an issue or problem from various perspectives. This typically entails inquiries that range beyond the borders of any single discipline or domain. While still respecting the function of the boundaries between domains, interdisciplinary approaches recognize that those boundaries are essentially arbitrary and do not always serve the goals of learning.

In IDEA, the expressive arts are seen as critical to learning and inquiry because they connect us to different ways of knowing and enable all of our different faculties to participate. In addition to rational thought, movement, emotion, intuition, touch, sight, sound, rhythmic awareness are also part of how we humans orient and make sense of the world. Creative writing, movement, storytelling, meditation, and many other practices support the ability to think and act in multi-dimensional ways. We will play with some of these arts in this course.

In the process of exploring various ways of inquiring and approaching problems, we not only broaden and deepen our knowledge and skills, but also learn to see who we are as individuals and where we stand in the world. Our sense of personal purpose and meaning in what we do with our lives becomes part of our search for truth. We see here that truth and fact are often provisional, and mythological; they are shapeshifters on the wide-open plain of human awareness. We will explore what this means, and what to do about it.

And, finally, the goal of the course is to play and have fun: to preserve and nurture the creative and imaginative spirit that is the foundation of all the arts and sciences.

The IDEA Skill Set

Perhaps it's most helpful to come at interdisciplinarity in terms of a skill set. Thinking and acting in an interdisciplinary way is really a matter of looking at the process of learning. Instead of focusing on the "content", we might ask questions about how we are identifying, interpreting, using, creating, and communicating this content. These are process questions.

Asking/Forming/Creating a "Good" Question

The questions we ask tell us a lot about how we think, the assumptions we make and what we're willing to accept as answers.

- What is a "good" question?
- How do questions emerge? Where do they come from?
- How does a question evolve?
- How do we hold space for our questions and how do they "work" on us?

Critical Thinking and Crap Detecting

We are often quick to believe what we read and what we hear, especially when it comes from sources that we deem "authoritative". Teachers, journal articles, media, books, professors, parents, and peers all have their own take on what is correct and true. Who is right? How do we know what we're hearing is not false or misconstrued?

- Is this true? From what perspective is it true? What other perspectives can be taken that are also true?
- What evidence is being used to support the claim? Is the evidence appropriate for the kind of claim being made?
- What ideologies, assumptions and beliefs are at play? How do they impact the interpretation of "facts"?

Finding, Using and Evaluating Resources

Resources are what we use to accomplish something. We have internal resources such as courage, compassion, mindfulness and so on to help us create, learn and work with the challenges of life. People in our lives such as teachers, peers, mentors, and guides have skills, experience, and knowledge that can potentially help us accomplish a goal. As well, the internet, books and other sources of information are valuable resources.

- How do we know what resources we need to accomplish a goal? Are they internal, interpersonal, or codified? What are the means by which we access these resources?
- How do we know if the sources we're accessing are good or the right ones for our goal? How do we evaluate their quality?

Communication (speaking, listening, writing, performing)

Language is expressed verbally and non-verbally in a particular relational context of culture, values and past experience. Our ability to translate ideas into words and actions, move an audience into a compelling dialogue, or simply be present to someone else, requires an awareness of these contexts and good communication skills.

- How does a mindful and embodied presence shape how we speak and listen?
- How do we write articulately, persuasively, and with accuracy and authenticity?
- How do our values shape the way we communicate?

Working in a Group

Groups offer invaluable opportunities for personal development, creating knowledge and performances that can transcend the efforts of any one individual, and developing interpersonal skills. The following elements are some of the important capabilities required for healthy group process.

- building trust and a culture of collaboration
- attending to individual needs and the needs of the group
- sharing responsibility
- giving and receiving feedback

- embracing and resolving minor conflicts

Following Through on a Process

Any creative process that generates new forms of knowledge (arts, sciences and otherwise) typically has a number of phases. These phases don't always happen in order and are not necessarily discreet events, but it's helpful to think about the ecocycle of creative work. First, there is the discovery of interest or passion. The question or idea may not even be fully formed at this point, but there's a spark that feels like it's worth following. Next, we immerse ourselves in the topic. We read, have conversations, mess around with different approaches. Basically, we commit to learning as much as we can about our passion. At some point we have consciously consumed as much as we can about the topic that we need a break from thinking about it. We let the questions incubate and trust that they are working under the surface in the dark soil. "Spring" eventually comes, perhaps after a long "winter" and some insights and breakthroughs emerge. Little shoots pop up out of the soil. We are careful to not jump to conclusions and create space for ideas and insights to slowly emerge through a process of articulating and capturing. In the last stages, we bring all the elements together in a creative synthesis and share the bounty of our harvest.

- What is happening at each stage of the creative process? What are the challenges of each stage? How do we support the work that needs to be done in this phase?
- How do we manage our time in such a way that we are able to do creative work sustainably? Doing the preparatory work, looking for and taking opportunities, experimenting, being realistic about time, taking care of mind/body/heart/soul, and attending to other responsibilities all require good skills in managing our time.

Self-Evaluation

Growing personally and professionally is a process that has no end point. Although growth is challenging, and at times painful, it is critical to finding a new sense of meaning and vitality in our life and work. Living systems that come to an equilibrium with their environment, stick with the status quo and are content with living in their comfort zone do not live for very long! Self-evaluation involves looking at our strengths and weaknesses, consider the evidence and feedback in these areas, identifying where we wish to grow, creating a game plan for how we plan to address our weaknesses, and celebrating our successes.

- Looking at the skill set above, what areas am I strong and weak in? What's the evidence that this is the case?

- Are there places where I wish to grow? What's involved in growing in this area?
- What opportunities can I find and/or create to grow? How do I take responsibility for working on myself?
- How does the feedback from others and the "results" of our attempts to develop a skill tell us how we're doing? How do we decide if the feedback means we should maintain our course of action or take a different path?
- Can I celebrate the journey and allow myself to appreciate where there is growth and change?

Learning Experiences

The course will include a variety of learning experiences contingent upon regular attendance and dedicated participation. Because authentic interdisciplinary inquiry is an interactive process, much of the class time will be devoted to group experiential exercises, individual reflective tasks, collaborative endeavors, and practical assignments.

We will create a collaborative environment in this class. We are not going to cobble together the type of group one often hears about in the arts and education: competitive, cut-throat, critical. Repeat: we are not creating such a group. Instead, we will direct our efforts toward building upon the individual strengths of each participant, finding ways for each of us to be self-reflective in terms of assessing our work together, discovering a means of protecting the quality and integrity of our contributions. The creative spirit is remarkably persistent, yet it is also fragile, especially at its inception, and we must be conscious of this fragility. Think about it: did you not experience, as a child, the strangulation of your creativity in school, by way of a culture of insensitive peers or teachers? Why do you think hardly anyone feels comfortable singing in public, or dancing, or drawing, or reading their written work to others? We have, most of us, been the victims of inappropriate feedback and judgment. We have to be careful about this, in our course, so that we do not harm one another.

Required Course Text

Robinson, K. (2009). *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. Penguin Books: Toronto

Demonstration of Learning

Learning Contract

The learning contract is a written and evolving document that you create for yourself and with me at the beginning of the course. The idea is simple. You pick three areas from the skill set above that you wish to work on over the term. Identify why you want to work on these areas and the kinds of opportunities and resources you think would help you. **Write this up in two pages (~500 words).** It will be due sometime in the first two weeks of class (date TBD). I will work with each of you in creating/refining this document. It is a work-in-progress and we will revisit it at the end of the course.

This course is designed so that the individual project, the class experience, and the group project are all opportunities for you to work and develop in the areas you wish to grow. The questions asked for each skill area above are intended to help you think about what's involved in growing in that area. Invariably, students start to see that these skills apply to many areas outside the boundaries of the course and you are encouraged to consider your learning contract in other contexts. Other courses, work, volunteer initiatives, family life, art projects, meditating, trips in nature, random encounters with strangers in the street, etc. all become your classroom. Part of the process is learning how to see, create and take the opportunities.

You demonstrate your growth by collecting "evidence" that shows you have been working on your skill area and what the outcomes are. Evidence takes many different forms and is not always of the formal, scholarly kind. For example, an email exchange between you and another student might illustrate wonderfully where you are practicing new approaches to communication. Or, if you are working on time-management skills, your calendar could offer solid proof of how you're working on making time to accomplish your goals. We will have many conversations about evidence.

Weekly Reflections

Once a week, before the evening before class, you will submit a "reflection" that addresses some or all of the following elements:

- Any insights you're having and connections you're making (in relation to the large class, your small group, your individual project, readings that you are doing)
- What you're struggling with

- Questions that are arising for you

The reflection can be in a variety of mediums including:

- poems
- stories
- prose
- craftwork
- drawing/painting/photography etc.
- dance/movement
- song/sound/music
- something else of your choosing (*see list group project section for more ideas)

Choose **at least 3 mediums** over the course of the term. Post these reflections on Moodle. You may decide to take a photograph (if you made something) or short video (if you made a dance or song). Please include some short written reflection with your piece if it is not expressed in words. When possible, there will be opportunities in class to share some of this work.

Individual Project

The individual and group project may be comprised of any type of expression (writing, music, imagery, dance, movement, photography, etc.). The central idea of each project is for you to choose a specific theme or thread and explore it in some depth. We will discuss these projects at length in class. They are opportunities for you to discover and explore your own life.

The individual project is an opportunity for you to explore a given domain, or set of domains, in your own way. For example, you might wish to complete an art project, or a mathematics challenge, or a community service initiative. It's up to you; there are no specific restrictions on the type of inquiry you undertake. However, your inquiry must be applicable to higher education and the university context and must include research into a specific university context. (So, to use the art project example from above, your project would include some research into arts programs at Kwantlen or elsewhere). As well, it must give you some opportunities to develop your skill set.

The individual project is due one week before your final interview and will include a written self-assessment of at least 500 words. You may wish to write about some or all of the skills you worked on and the ways in which you grew. To this end, the self-assessment should include answers to some of the following questions (answers need not be itemized):

- What research did you do to prepare for this project? Research might include readings, investigative interviews, online searches, self-reflections, ruminations, and many other modalities.
- What learning resources did you use? These might include books, articles, online resources, and so on.
- Of the research and readings you undertook, what impressed you as being most interesting or relevant?
- What kinds of experiments did you undertake with this project? What did you build, write, craft, or try? How did you spend your time, and how did it go? (Look at the criteria on the next page.)
- What went well, where did you struggle, and how do you feel about the process you undertook during this project?
- What were the best and worst moments of this project? What did you learn from these moments?
- Are you proud of this project? Is it your best work? What grade would you give yourself?
- How might you have improved this project, of your experience of it?
- What did you learn about interdisciplinarity while working on this project?
- What did you learn about yourself while working on this project?
- What will you remember about this project in five years?
- How does what you learned apply to your studies at Kwantlen and to your sense of your future direction?
- What advice would you give to others who might be undertaking a similar project?
- What did this project mean to you? What might it mean for others?
- Do you plan to continue this project further, or to work on similar projects in the future?
- You learned something crucial in this project which you won't discover for a while. Make a guess now about what that might be.

Group Project

Each student will be a member of a group of about six; each group will present at the end of the course (roughly thirty minutes) on a topic of choice. These presentations will happen in the last three weeks of the course. Class time will be given for working in groups although groups will need to find time outside of class to work with each other. The structure and content of the presentations will be discussed in class.

Presentation Methods and Goals

The central idea of the group project and presentation is to give you opportunities to practice interdisciplinary thinking and expression. As such, the presentation should be interdisciplinary. Essentially, this means that you should try to

use multiple presentation strategies and modalities. These might include (but are certainly not limited to) any of the following:

- Storytelling
- Poetry
- Music (playing)
- Drumming
- Singing
- Dance
- Movement
- Sport
- Ritual
- Film (showing)
- Film making
- Photography
- Web content
- Craft work
- Art making
- Individual reflection
- Meditation
- Health practices
- Creative process (any type)
- Group communication
- Cultural practices
- Nature experiences

Whenever possible (and workable), try to mix together multiple modalities into a single presentation. For example, you might ask the group to do some individual reflection using the modality of poetry, then create a series of movements based on the poetry, then work in small groups to talk about and share the process. Many configurations are possible. The trick is to choose an activity that you enjoy, then find a way to apply it to the content (suggested presentation topics are listed below). Please do not create your presentations using only written and/or spoken materials. In other words, don't just stand up at the front of the class and talk about the presentation topic. Utilize the energy of the group. Remember that in interdisciplinary work divergences are valued as unique opportunities. So, feel free to experiment with activities and modalities that may not seem, on the surface, to be related to the topic at hand but which might, upon experiment, yield surprising connections and results. Be playful. Allow yourself to laugh at yourself, to be embarrassed, to engage with the process in novel and interesting ways.

In interdisciplinary work, riddles and puzzles are highly prized. Accordingly, the presentations should (ideally) not be complete explanations or presentations of material. Feel free to play with challenging exercises, with impossible scenarios, and other conundra. One way to think about this is to consider insoluble riddles, such as the one in *Alice in Wonderland*: Why is a raven like a writing desk?

"Have you guessed the riddle yet? " the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.

"No, I give it up," Alice replied. "What's the answer? "

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.

"Nor I," said the March Hare.

Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."

The best interdisciplinary topics offer more questions than answers. They, are essentially, gateways into the mysterious—which, as Einstein will tell you, is an important place to be:

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Assessment for Group Presentations

Class and Instructor Assessment

After your presentation, time will be set aside for your peers and I to assess and give your group feedback on your presentation. Your group will need to design a rubric and questions for us to assess your presentation with. This feedback can sometimes be the most valuable part of the performance for everyone involved. It's an opportunity to see what worked and what landed with the audience and what didn't. This conversation can help the audience articulate it's struggles, questions and insights about what makes for an "effective" performance. By designing a rubric and questions for the audience to contemplate (either during or after the performance, depending on the goals and the presentation), you invite everyone into critically reflecting on what constitutes "effective" performance.

Self and Group Assessment

This course utilizes experiential learning approaches, which depend upon student involvement and active participation. Accordingly, the following criteria are used to evaluate overall participation and engagement in the group presentations and the class:

- Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself.
- Willingness to speak up and to lead.
- Openness to interpersonal process.
- Willingness to collaborate with others.

- Consideration of and responsiveness to others.
- Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of everyone in the group.
- Willingness to examine personal values, beliefs, and judgments.
- Ability to take personal responsibility for learning.
- Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise.
- Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback.

Using these areas of assessment, you will complete a self-assessment and group assessment. These are to be handed in **three days** after your group presentation. Forms will be provided for you to complete. Depending on the ability of peer tutors/mentors to be involved in your group process, they will also be asked to offer a assessment for each person.

Final Skills Interview and Evaluation

This is the difficult part. I recognize that there are many constraints and concerns. My concern is to maintain my obligation to you in terms of fair assessment and a mark. On the other hand, it can be difficult (or at least different) to translate evaluation in an IDEA course into a letter grade. I prefer to speak about evaluation and assessment, not marks.

Evaluation in this course will take several forms; I evaluate you, you evaluate yourself and you evaluate each other. I have started by describing a skill set. This is the focus of the evaluation. You need to demonstrate to yourself and to me, objectively, that you have changed (better skills) from the start of the course to the end of the course. It is really that simple, in principle. I will sit down with you and have several discussions. The skills and your level of improvement will translate to a letter grade using the following descriptors.

A-/ A/ A+... has attained a high level of competency in all, or almost all, of the stated skill areas. This competency would allow the student to complete excellent interdisciplinary inquiry projects in any area. This would be recognizable by any facilitator and the peer group. The student is aware of any remaining area of weakness, has shown improvement in that area, has developed strategies for minimizing its adverse effects, and has a plan of action for eliminating the weakness.

B-/ B/ B+... has attained a high level of competency in many (but not all) of the stated skill areas, or has attained moderate competency in all of the skill areas. This competency allows the completion of good inquiry projects. The student will have developed a plan of action for further development in those areas which need it.

C- /C /C+... has attained a moderate level of competency in some of the stated skill areas or has attained a low level of competency in all of the skill areas. The student will

recognize the deficiencies or concerns and will have discussed a plan of action to deal with the concerns during their university career.

The evidence will develop as a consequence of your involvement with many tools and learning contexts. The tools will include the development and utilization of criteria for evaluating yourself, your peers, and the works you read and create. The contexts include group work, your individual project, writing, presentations, and discussions. This course is a space for participating in a variety of formats and to work on those skills that need the most attention.

We sit down and have a final skills interview (~30mins) and you are asked to bring this evidence and your learning contract with you. Based on the evidence and using the following criteria I ask you to propose a grade for yourself. We will negotiate a grade that seems fitting based on the evidence.

Evaluation Criteria

- Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself.
- Willingness to try new things, especially when doing so provokes discomfort.
- Openness to personal and interpersonal process.
- Willingness to collaborate with others.
- Consideration of and responsiveness to others.
- Willingness to examine personal values, beliefs, and judgments.
- Ability to take personal responsibility and initiative for learning.
- Willingness to approach academic and creative inquiry as a set of skills with discrete steps and standards.
- Commitment to improvement in writing and creative work.
- Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback.

Grade Inflation

Almost every semester there are students who do well on the assignments, complete all the associated learning goals of the course, participate well, and wonder why they do not receive an A+. Here is the reason: almost every semester there are students who demonstrates a level of commitment that goes beyond the course requirement. Such students complete extra work, or hand in exemplary assignments, or undertake a significant amount of personal development in addition to the course expectations. Such students typically receive the highest grades.

If you do reasonably well in the course you will receive a reasonable grade. Very high grades are intended for extra or exemplary work. Unfortunately, over the past thirty years the post-secondary educational system in North America has participated in a process of grade inflation. Since the 1980's, the average grade for typical course work has been increasing by about 25 per cent each decade. Elevated assessments do not accurately reflect the work of most students. Even worse, grade inflation has caused

many students to expect high grades for average work. I am not a overly stringent assessor; but I will not inflate grades artificially.

In this course a small number of students will (likely) receive high grades; most students will receive grades in the middle range; and a few students will struggle with lower grades. If you are uncertain about your assessment for a given assignment, or if you wish to know where, roughly, you are along the distribution curve of the class, or if you would like suggestions for how to improve your grade, please ask me for clarification.

If you wish to achieve a good grade, please do the following:

- Show up for class – every class. This course depends on student engagement. (This becomes especially important during the final weeks of the semester.)
- Be attentive and mindful to the various criteria listed for each of the projects and the course overall.
- Take the initiative to plan and develop your projects and presentations. This course is (very likely) more fluid and spontaneous than you are used to. Your ability to manage your time, commitment, and energy is crucial.
- Speak up in every class (review the criteria for group engagement and presentations).
- Don't look for the right answer to a question or challenge. Instead, find the answer that is meaningful to you.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Commit to your projects in a substantial way. Good projects take time. Rushed projects are obviously rushed.

Finally, please be attentive to the Kwantlen policies on academic honesty and plagiarism, which can be found at the following URLs:

Academic Honesty: http://www.kwantlen.ca/__shared/assets/Honesty1432.pdf

Plagiarism and Cheating: <http://www.kwantlen.ca/policies/C-LearnerSupport/c08.pdf>

Due Dates

- Group presentation dates will be assigned in class (last three weeks of the course)
- The Individual project is due one week before your interview (by midnight on Sunday of that week)