

Why You Should take Creative Process (UARTS 250)?

Your Education May Have Failed You Up To This Point:

Education in the US and Europe tends to focus on the STEM disciplines: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or the 3 R's – Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. This is all fine and useful, but it is emphasized and valued strongly over the 4 C's - Critical thinking (problem solving), Communication, Collaboration and Creativity/innovation. The popular way to define this problem is to say that schooling is too "Left-Brained" (critical thinking) and not "Right-Brained" enough (creative or "out-of-the-box" thinking). **This is correct. Elementary and Secondary schools are not rewarded, and often punished, for taking time out of the schedule for "Creative Courses"** (including the Music and Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Dance, and Physical Education). The idea that "play" could lead to learning is being completely expurgated by modern educational practices.

Classes that teach or encourage the 4 C's are difficult to teach because they are innately personalized – they can't be really fashioned for classrooms of 350 students with one Prof and 2 GSI's (for grading and attendance). Such classes need flexible scheduling and space, professors with a gift for metaphor, and breadth and scope that avoids definable and predictable outcomes. Academic structures (including U-M) work against this kind of approach. The students and professors, to coin a word, are "dis-rewarded" for even teaching this way!

Modern society is diverse and complex:

There is no longer "one way to do things". Old White Men with Ties are not your only future coworkers. And successful businesses have more "flow between departments" than ever before – thanks both to forward thinking as well as the Internet. You need to take classes that encourage your development in collaborative thinking, force you to work in ways that are "outside your comfort zone", but also encourage you find your "sweet spot" or what really "gets you out of bed in the morning" or...your bliss. This is the best preparation for a more diverse and connected work environment of the future (and present).

Creative Process, UARTS250, is designed in such a way that you are asked to learn abstraction as a way of life – given prompt words to create projects, or given simple materials (like a ball of wire or electric Legos) to create something interesting (to you) and new (for society). You are "required" (requested) to work in groups and by yourself, to listen critically to suggestions about your own work, as well as offer helpful suggestions for others' work.

This is *exactly* the kind of modality expected in the modern work force. Great companies such as IDEO, Google and Pixar expect transparency in the workplace – everybody is encouraged to be curious and informed about every level of production – **not just one's own**. Research learns about Marketing, CAD artists

discuss Budgeting, and Production knows about Advertising. Further, you are encouraged to have and develop your own ideas, not just “fulfill expectation”.

You *need* to discover your passion:

Companies like Google, Motorola, and Cisco allow workers to explore their own innovations and interests on *company time*, and incorporate them into the company’s new line of product – as opposed to discouraging workers from following their noses to really interesting ways of improving or diversifying company interests. **This is talent meeting passion**, versus mindless “worker-bee” ethic. UARTS 250 helps you join talent and passion, rather than discouraging this process. Of course, the basic joy of life itself is increased manifold by connecting one’s inner longing to one’s life journey, including your job. Occupation need not be different than Avocation (literally, “your calling”).

(keep reading.....)

(almost there.....)

(and.....)

Why you **CAN'T** take Creative Process UARTS/250:

- 1) *"I don't have time in my schedule."* You are absolutely right. Your schedule is filled with classes that help you specialize in your "home discipline". You are "stuck on Central Campus". You don't have electives (left) in your degree program. This class won't "count". You may indeed have to sacrifice time, money, and comfort to take this class. You have been taught that sacrifices such as this are foolish, endanger your academic success, or prolong your time at U-M. All of these presumptions, frankly, are patently false. It is a proven fact that students that take UARTS 250 create time for themselves in innovative ways, work more efficiently and creatively, and are more likely to succeed both during their study at U-M, but also in the workplace. Google, it is wellknown, allows workers up to 20% of their time to "do things that really interest them". Do you allow 20% of your academic time to follow your dreams, or challenge your own way of thinking in fun and creative ways?

- 2) *"I am afraid that taking a Creative Process class might endanger my grade point. I'm not that Creative or Original, and I might not be able to succeed at this!"* It is hard to get less than an A in this course. Read the syllabus carefully on this website. Creativity, you will notice, takes **time**, because one needs to learn failure through iteration. Once again, great companies thrive on both failure (then redesigning), and iteration (and more redesigning). A common interview question is this: "how do you deal with failure"? Great products or ideas don't come fully baked. Well-known examples such as the light bulb, the airplane, and audio engineering all demonstrate continual improvement and change over the course of time, both to adapt to increased use as well as to simply create a more interesting or enjoyable product. Rarely do classes require, or allow for, repeated iterations for each and every project in the course. UARTS 250 demands that you are willing to regroup, revamp, and retry your ideas, with input from fellow students, as well as the five (5!) professors that teach the course. Note that most classes are "one-chance". You blow the midterm, there goes your grade. This class asks you to redesign constantly, and the turn-around time for major projects is patient and caring.

More importantly, perhaps, Creativity cannot be taught, but it *can* be encouraged. **You are innately creative, you just might not realize it.** The over-200 students that have taken UARTS 250 have all said the same thing at the end of the semester, "I didn't know I had it in me!" You will say the same thing. You were created with innate Creativity – it is our job to help you discover and explore that more deeply, without fear.

- 3) *"I am a "thinking person", but not a "feeling person", will I flunk?"* This isn't your fault – and we will help you. You have been taught to think, evaluate

and enumerate. Science and mathematics (which you have been taught), helps you understand data or evidence. This is fine. But you also need to understand human culture (Humanities) and express human experience (the Arts). Doing all three makes you a full human being; the opposite, sadly is also true. Schools that include the Arts, Humanities, as well as Physical Education (including Dance) like the “Blue School” founded by the Blue Man Group have a higher degree of success/graduation/literacy, and students go on to contribute to society in fuller and more meaningful ways.

- 4) *“I need clear directions, or I don’t know what to do in a class. This class is too vague in it’s demands.”* You have a valid fear, once again! But “soft skills” such as listening and synthesizing, as well as “EQ” or emotional quotient, are all being touted as the new currency in job recruitment. If you feel you can’t listen to diverse opinions about your work, and synthesize them well, this is a course you not only should take, you *need to take it*. In the future, input about work will come from top and bottom, outside and in, Internet *and* personal contact. Single-modality workplaces are **over**. New management skills now include listening, not just “number crunching” (hours, money, HR-concerns). Synthesizing diverse viewpoints translates into profitable, compassionate and interesting workplaces, capable of competing through creative approaches and efficient innovations that suit a diverse and ever-changing world culture. Let’s help the world change for the better.

(This document owes a huge debt of gratitude to Sir Ken Robinson, author of “Out of Our Minds” and the “Element”, and is a synthesis of the thoughts and practices compiled by the over 20 developers of UARTS 250, the 14 people who have taught the course in collaboration with me. However, these thoughts represent my honest view on the importance of this course, which I have directed for three years. – Stephen Rush, Summer, 2011)