

Creativity, Chaos, and Consciousness

Where does the creative spirit come from? Can human beings affect conditions under which it thrives? How can we re-integrate creativity and imagination into our own lives? How can creative endeavor be applied to the evolution of cultural as well as personal consciousness? How is the chaos metaphor useful in addressing these questions? This course explores such issues through interdisciplinary studies in the arts, creativity, psychology, consciousness, and chaos.

We will explore experiential, interdisciplinary paths through creative media (visual artmaking, writing, movement, music, voice, story-telling) as ways of knowing. Our explorations will be grounded in studies of the creative process, innovation, improvisation, and chaos (aka the science of change). Through self-study as well as the study of other cultures, students will experience the creative process as a natural, universal phenomenon, embracing concepts such as left brain/right brain; multiple intelligences; the link between contemplation and creativity; energy, prana, or chi; spirituality, mystery, and the soul; liminal or ritual space; and the role of creative activity in learning and building community. Readings will be assigned from the books below. Other requirements: daily journaling; student-led discussions; final presentations.

Projects

Because you will be the primary research subject, your written work for the course will take the form of reflective, phenomenological journaling. You should include responses to, and questions about, the assigned readings, classwork, and other projects, and record what you've learned, felt, wondered. Artwork is encouraged. Dream reporting is also welcome.

You will be working on projects both inside and outside the classroom that involve the creative process as ways of bringing to life the ideas in the readings. For each class hour, a minimum of one additional hour of reflective time outside class is expected. Discussions, classwork, readings, and the making of art itself should help guide your reflection and writing. To help me follow your progress, each Monday you will be required to hand in a neatly typed copy (2 to 3 pages) of your written journal entries. After I've handed these back, I encourage you to elaborate by responding to my comments.

Your final project will explore through the arts a theme of your choosing, preferably a question of personal importance to you; the process will include research from the literature and from your own experience. You will give a 20-minute final presentation, at a scheduled time during the last three days of the semester (signup sheet to be circulated). You will be expected to discuss and respond to questions about your work

and your creative process. (You will also be expected to give aesthetic feedback in response to the presentations of your classmates.) You will hand in copies of all writings (including journals) and other artwork, after your final presentation.

Generally, this course is intended to expand your awareness of the creative process and the many forms it takes. You should gain a deeper understanding of perspectives on this process and on our mainstream culture and other cultures, and the impacts of these perspectives and related assumptions.

Grading Policy

Grading will be based equally on journaling and other assignments, class participation, and final project. Attendance is important – maximum one unexcused absence – more than that will impact negatively on grades.

Books for Purchase

- Barron, Frank, Alfonso Montuori, & Anthea Barron (Eds., 1997). *Creators on creating*. NY: Tarcher.
- Briggs, John, & F. David Peat (2000). *Seven life lessons of chaos: Spiritual wisdom from the science of change*. NY: HarperCollins.
- Nachmanovitch, Stephen (1990). *Free play*. NY: Tarcher.

Supplies for purchase

- Spiral notebook of unlined heavyweight paper, page size at least 8 ½ X 11 inches. This will serve as your journal for the semester: daily reflections in words plus any other media, such as collage, drawing, painting, printmaking, photos, poems.
- Oil pastels (box of 25), assorted markers, scissors, glue stick, scissors.

Course Schedule (Note: Specifics may be modified as we go along.)

Week 1

- Class 1 - Monday, July 6: Introductions; review syllabus; overview of psychology of creativity; experiential exercise; online pre-evaluation; begin reading Barron et al (to p 54 for tomorrow - complete by next Monday, July 13); in journal, respond to questions on p 4; include narrative of your own art history).
- Class 2 - Tuesday, July 7: Pop quiz on syllabus; phenomenological exercise in artmaking; Barron pp 55-86 for tomorrow.
- Class 3 - Wednesday, July 8: Ken Robinson video on creativity; Jill Bolte-Taylor on what it feels like to have a stroke; artistic responses; Barron pp 87-124 for tomorrow.

- Class 4 - Thursday, July 9: Music, painting, and writing poetry; Barron pp 125 – 227 (skip pp 120-124; 135-144, 173-188) for Monday.

Week 2

- Class 5 – Monday, July 13 – Hand in first journal compilation. Class meets with artist Norbert Irvine in informal gallery talk on campus. Respond artistically to Irvine, Barron, politics of the art world. Read Briggs & Peat (complete by next Monday – to p 30 for tomorrow).
- Class 6 – Tuesday, July 14 – relationship between chaos and creativity; sign up to meet outside of class in the coming days to discuss ideas for your final project; sign up for final project; read Briggs & Peat, pp 31-78 for tomorrow.
- Class 7 - Wednesday, July 15 – homo aestheticus: humans as art-making species (read Briggs & Peat, pp 79-124 for tomorrow).
- Class 8 – Thursday, July 16 – MC Richards video, artistic responses (Briggs & Peat, pp 125-175 for Monday).

Week 3

- Class 9 – Monday, July 20 - read Nachmanovitch (to p 41 for tomorrow; complete by next Monday); Elizabeth Gilbert video, artistic response to Gilbert as well as Briggs & Peat. Hand in second journal compilation.
- Class 10 – Tuesday, July 21 – arts as community-building tools; improvisation and the arts; Nachmanovitch, pp. 42-93 for tomorrow.
- Class 11 – Wednesday, July 22 – shamanism; ritual; arts, and awareness; Nachmanovitch, pp. 94-146 for tomorrow.
- Class 12 – Thursday, July 23 – attitudes of other cultures toward creativity, chaos, and consciousness; read Nachmanovitch, pp. 147 to end for Monday.

Week 4

- Class 13 - Monday, July 27: artistic responses to Nachmanovitch; hand in third journal compilation; online course evaluation.
- Class 14 - Tuesday, July 28: Final Presentations
- Class 15 - Wednesday, July 29: Final Presentations
- Class 16 - Thursday, July 30: Final Presentations

Course Requirements

Please come to class each day prepared to participate, having completed and digested readings and other assignments, bringing your journal and supplies, and ready to work and to share. The emphasis in class will be on collaborative learning. Outside of class, there will be extensive reading and daily journaling, in words and in other media. All class meetings will involve discussion; some will include personal process work in the arts (no experience or expertise in the arts is assumed).

Generally, in this course, you will expand your perspectives on the definition of creativity, chaos, and consciousness, as well as the power of the arts, and increase your fluency and sense of empowerment in the creative process. Through exploring the arts

and your inner world, you should gain a fuller, richer, and more inclusive sense of what the process of artmaking is and can be.

Vision Statement

This course is intended to open minds around the creative process, and to deepen critical thinking to question current assumptions. Self-examination, as well as readings, viewings, and discussions, are intended to lead to transformative experiences with and about creativity.

Students will be exposed to the perspectives of philosophers and artists in the field, looking critically at our dominant cultural attitudes, and thus opening a window on assumptions that most of us have grown up with. The videos – one from the late, legendary Black Mt. College potter and poet M.C. Richards, one from author Elizabeth Gilbert, and one from educator Ken Robinson – will serve to examine the biases of our culture toward creativity (and how it has created an exclusionary “art world”), and the wisdom to be found in going beyond these biases.

Making a safe space for creative experimentation and self-expression is another goal of this course. The course material should validate what some of you have thought, felt, and experienced; with all of you, thinking should be qualitatively expanded. I anticipate that controversies will arise (e.g., to what extent should/does creativity entail originality? Is outsider art really art? If your art hasn’t made you rich, are you a failure? What is good art, really? How is what we’re doing here different from therapy?). These questions will in turn generate themes for reflection and discussion.