

**University of Michigan**  
**Multidisciplinary Learning and Team Teaching Initiative**  
**University Arts (UARTS) 250: *Creative Process***  
**Winter 2009 Report**

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The MLTT proposal for ***Creative Process*** was submitted by the four North Campus deans who direct Arts on Earth (AoE). In advance of submission, a group of faculty from all four North Campus schools and colleges, organized by the AoE managing director, met on a regular basis to develop the proposal. The final proposal had input from and was vetted by all AoE deans.

Following notification that the MLTT proposal had been successful, a total of nine faculty members were appointed to deliver the course – two from each of the four North Campus schools represented in AoE (School of Art & Design; School of Music, Theatre & Dance; College of Engineering, College of Architecture & Urban Planning). After collaborative planning by the course faculty in the fall 2008 semester and a major advertising campaign, 48 students from Art & Design; Business; Engineering; LSA; Music, Theatre & Dance; and Nursing participated in the first iteration of the course in the winter 2009 term. The course was offered as an all-day Friday experience and utilized four School of Art & Design studios to deliver the four foci of the course (language, sound, visual images/objects, movement).

University Arts (UARTS), a new category of interdisciplinary University arts courses, was created in consultation with the Office of the Registrar, and the

Office of Budget and Planning, so that a course supported by four academic units could be offered to undergraduate students from across the University without being identified as one academic unit's offering. Arts on Earth, because it is not an academic unit, could not list the course in Wolverine Access. (In the future, additional interdisciplinary arts focus courses will have the UARTS designation available for listing courses.)

UARTS is a School of Art & Design MPathways "Plan," though advertising for the course indicates only Arts on Earth sponsorship. No literature suggests A&D-only affiliation. The A&D associate dean for undergraduate education does oversee course administration and enrollment. The A&D chief administrative officer does manage finances for MLTT funding and tuition attribution, distributes funds to the other North Campus units appropriately, and provides financial reports for the Arts on Earth deans.

**1. Course Goals:** UARTS 250: *Creative Process* was created to provide an experiential and conceptual foundation for the cultivation of creativity across academic fields with no expectations for predictable outcomes. Goals of the course, which have not changed because of the overwhelming success in the first iteration, are to help students

- Recognize and demystify "creativity," understanding that it is not the province of a select few, but an inherent potential of all humans;
- Understand that creative expression in any field is not an event but a process that can take many different forms and has recognizable

- breakthrough moments;
- Develop a first-hand knowledge of the interplay among creative impulse, media, modes of expression, and shared meanings in the creative process;
  - Develop a conceptual and contextual foundation for understanding the creative impulse and the processes of creative work, drawing examples from multiple cultures, disciplines, and historical periods; and
  - Become more confident and creative makers and doers, able and willing throughout their private and public lives to follow their creative process toward positive, productive, and unforeseen ends.

Students were to assume that interdisciplinary approaches were *de rigueur*, rather than exotic or new. Final projects, as such, ranged from the highly theoretical to the autobiographical. They included sculptures, speeches, web-applications, installation works, musical compositions and interactive mobiles and more. A website provides a virtual visit to some of the final projects from winter 2009 - <http://web.me.com/tangun/creativeprocess/Welcome.html>.

The structure of the course was complex. Each student was given a Prompt (keyword or phrase) at the beginning of the semester. These Prompts were as varied as the 9 faculty who wrote them, including vague keywords/phrases like “taste it,” “yellow,” and “bifurcation.” Students, over the course of the semester were required to abstract from these basic concepts **three iterations**, one of which would be the idea for their Final Project. On the way to the emergence of these iterations, however, each student experienced two intensive all-day Friday

modules with each pair of faculty members from the Four North Campus units. Students rotated round-robin through the faculty teams, completing hands-on assignments, which engaged students in four different approaches to creative process. After this 8-week series of “disciplinary intensives,” students were shuffled into new sections, and met weekly to discuss their work on their Final Project. Each student had a primary mentor from one of the four main disciplines, but met with each of the 8 primary faculty members for feedback on their Final Project.

This modality provided optimum exposure for the students and the faculty. Each student became familiar with the creative approach of each faculty member. And each faculty member had ample opportunity to provide input to each student’s Final Project. Weekly faculty meetings kept all faculty abreast of developments in students’ projects. As much as possible, faculty sought to insure maximum transparency in the process of helping students learn about creativity. Each student could receive direct input from a faculty member in any of the four North Campus units as they worked on their Final Project for the last 5 weeks of the course.

**2. The interdisciplinary instructional model** used for this course could be illustrated with the following diagram:



The diagram features four elements - a musical note, a beaker, an outline of a building, and a green stick (a paintbrush?) - with a brown through-line pointing upward. The diagram illustrates four disciplines, all overlapping somewhat haphazardly, with a constant through-line that connects and even interrupts them all. This diagram also illustrates that faculty taught as teams, both in “like-disciplined pairs” (Art/Art) and “unlike pairs” (Music/Engineering). The brown through-line illustrates the role of the coordinator, who observed the classes, organized the material, and also taught the philosophical underpinning for the course during weekly one-hour colloquia - in this first iteration of the course based on the Medieval mystic Meister Eckhardt whose theories on Creativity relate creative activity to the realm of awe, healing, addressing suffering in the world, and transformation of society (Via Positiva/Negativa, Via Creativa/Transformativa).

There was no “consecutive presentation of disciplines” in this model. Teachers *and* students all overlapped in time and discipline. There was no apparent dualism between disciplines, since this faculty agreed that all disciplines are innately *creative*, and the Final Projects would probably have elements of

multiple represented disciplines, not just “discipline-specific” (a painting, a String Quartet, a computer program).

**3. Assignments:** Each student received, as mentioned above, a “prompt” from which their Final Project was to emerge. Each student, then, presented three iterations of their Final Project to each of the faculty members from the four North Campus units. As such, the projects were influenced by the represented disciplines as well as other University disciplines with which students were familiar. There was never, in other words, a “target teacher” to please. There was never an agenda to create a Final Project that pushed toward one discipline or the other.

**4. Value to Faculty:** The faculty had to wrestle with grading projects that were not necessarily virtuosic in their home discipline. They were extremely experienced and accustomed to teaching graduate students (evaluating dissertations, etc.) as well as undergraduates. In addition, grading projects that were by their very nature interdisciplinary was not unusual. All nine faculty were quite accustomed to working in this domain. Some students were trying sculpture for the first time, or writing code for the first time. This forced the faculty to look at the creative process underlying each project, and to look at the process of ideation, rather than the final result, as a methodology for grading. There was, in the end, some disagreement about what made a “good” Final Project, but these problems were overshadowed by many deeply-felt and marvelously executed

projects. The faculty, in the end, were amazed at the broad range of projects. And students were surprised that they were receiving similar feedback from faculty regardless of the faculty member's home discipline. Having a course coordinator who delivered weekly colloquia, witnessed classes in session, and provided weekly summaries was a significant factor in the overall instructional and evaluative cohesiveness.

### **How do UARTS 250 students report that the class affected them?**

Journal entries and a CRLT survey revealed that this was an extraordinary learning experience. One student said that every freshman at the University should enroll in this course; he would have embarked upon a different major if he had. Another said that working with so many different majors from all over the University was exciting and generated shared learning experiences. A third didn't expect to be so "touched/moved" by this course and was surprised by the connections to be made between projects and the lessons for living. They learned from their faculty mentors that failure was okay; taking risks / stepping outside one's comfort zone unleashes creativity in every endeavor.

According to the survey, over 80% of students reported that they are more inclined to:

- Deal with ambiguity
- Experience awe weekly
- Bring creativity to academic work
- Be resourceful in achieving goals and purpose

Over 70% are more inclined to:

- Take risks in their academic and personal lives
- Think with the use of analogies and metaphors

### **Key Participants:**

Winter 2009 faculty:

Sophia Psarra and Tszyan Ng, Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning

Michael Gould and Mark Kirschenmann, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Elona Van Gent and David Chung, School of Art & Design

Herbert Winful and John Nees, College of Engineering

Stephen Rush, Coordinator, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Arts on Earth Deans:

Monica Ponce de Leon, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

Bryan Rogers, School of Art & Design

Dave Munson, College of Engineering

Christopher Kendall, School of Music Theatre & Dance

Arts on Earth Managing Director, Theresa Reid

Course Administrator, Mary Schmidt, Associate Dean, School of Art & Design

**A second iteration of UARTS 250: *Creative Process*** was taught without MLTT

funding as a four-week, intensive course at the Abbey of Pontlevoy, France.

Fourteen students from the four North Campus units plus LSA along with two faculty (engineering and music) lived together, worked together, challenged and nurtured each other, and staged a final exhibition/performance attended by citizens from the town including the mayor. All were amazed at the students' Final Projects. There were both advantages and disadvantages to the four-week

learning experience. The primary disadvantage in comparison with the winter term course was a lack of time for students' ideas to percolate and incubate over one-week periods between all-day Friday classes. Instead, students were intensely involved in all-day classes four days a week. On the other hand, there were not four other courses to require their attention each week. Students had the advantage of single focus and, in the end, their projects for the most part were about the time and place they inhabited and the experiences they shared – the Abbey, the village of Pontlevoy, and the Loire Valley. They were inspired by trips to Leonardo's home in Amboise (just 30 minutes away), Loire Valley chateaux, and weekends in Paris. Ultimately, the advantage of being immersed in a different location developed solid bonds and gave inspiration to wonderfully creative ideas.

Ideally, Creative Process will become a sustainable course, offered at a minimum every year as both a full-semester course and a four-week, intensive spring course at the Abbey of Pontlevoy – or somewhere else in the world.

***Creative Process* in the winter 2009 term stimulated much Campus interest. For example:**

[http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Feb02\\_09/22.php](http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Feb02_09/22.php) is a link to a *University Record* article written by a reporter who spent a whole day attending the course in February.

[http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Mar02\\_09/30.php](http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Mar02_09/30.php) is a link to an article written for the *University Record* in March.

<http://www.michigandaily.com/content/video/uarts-250-creative-process-daily-investigates-one-universitys-most-intriguing-classes> is a link to a movie developed by undergraduate reporters for the *Michigan Daily* in April.

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