

How to Weave Creative Thinking into the Institutional Fabric

When we were researching creative thinking for both our *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* (2012) and our *Teaching Applied Creative Thinking* (2013) courses, we ran across an interesting detail. How many courses focused on developing applied creative thinking in universities across the world—in Asia, the Americas and Europe—do you think actually exist? According to Xu et al. (2005), only 39 such courses are on the books, and the bulk of them are isolated in departments and not tied to any specific program, major or minor. Similarly, our research into universities offering minors in creativity back in those dark ages only showed one university even offering a master's degree in creative thinking.

Given the popularity of insightful books such as Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), McWilliam's *The Creative Workforce* (2008) and Pink's *A Whole New Mind* (2005), as well as the IBM report (2010) that said creative thinking was the number-one skill American CEOs wanted from college graduates, we expected more. More courses, more programs, more colleges and universities responding to a need and a desire.

For the past four years, our institution's catalog has contained our Minor in Applied Creating Thinking, and we're pretty certain in the nine years since the Xu et al. report that other schools have likewise responded with courses, minors and programs. If that isn't the case, however, and you are interested in weaving applied creative thinking into your institution's curricula, how might you go about that task?

One, **consider responding to your accrediting agency**. Our mode of attack early in the twenty-first century came to us when we discovered that our university's accrediting agency, SACS, was insisting institutions implement a new accreditation piece, the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP), a sort of value-added academic piece. We insinuated our way onto the University's QEP committee and helped steer the discussion toward creative thinking. As a result, in 2007, the institution declared as its QEP theme that it would "develop [later graduate] informed critical and creative thinkers who communicate effectively."

Two, since every QEP needs a home, **consider what type of organization will be needed to support the QEP**. Here, EKU launched the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, the centerpiece of the university community and hub of communication and creative activity. It houses the Minor in Applied Creative Thinking and annually hosts programs for members of the university community.

Three, **utilize professional learning communities**. As soon as our QEP was instituted, the University created QEP Coaches, who helped train the faculty in critical thinking. As creative thinking was being neglected, we started a campus-wide professional learning community (PLC) with twelve faculty members. This PLC was tasked with researching creative initiatives and suggesting ways to encourage creative thinking across our campus. Because of the unique structure of the PLC, we were able to permeate the campus community (both academic and social) with creative endeavors.

Four, **create a course**. When we taught creative writing, we developed all sorts of courses on the subject, from Teaching Creative Writing to Becoming a Professional Writer. Invention is such an important concept in writing that it would have been a natural, but alas, we never worked on it. For our creative

thinking initiative, we decided to lead off with a course introducing the concept and treating the basics of implementation. We named the course *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* and even wrote its textbook built on our years of research and application in the field. The success of this initial class has led to the creation of several additional courses designed specifically for the minor, including its capstone course.

Five, **develop extant courses on creativity into a minor.** When we facilitated our PLC, we found various faculty were teaching courses related to creativity. One member was teaching a course in business that we tried to appropriate; another member had a friend teaching a Creative Collaboration course in Psychology; and still another taught the College of Education's Gifted and Talented course.

Six, **tie to extant or developing programs.** Last year, the University found that a significant number of students were not finishing up their degree when they were less than 30 hours from graduation. At the same time, another task force zeroed in on our extended campuses (we have ten regional appendices) that were unable to offer outlying populations enough majors. As a result of these two problems, a Bachelor of General Studies degree was created, but it needed some core courses. Of course we suggested that *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* provided skills desired by employers in all fields. We have also tied our introductory course, CRE 101, to a capstone program in the University's College of Justice and Safety.

Where do we go from here? If the minor does well, maybe we need to transform it into a major. Perhaps the creativity initiatives developed on campus should extend to the community or local schools? Or maybe creativity programs will find a home online.

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