

# IMD561: Research Studio II (Collaborative Practices)

Syllabus v0.9

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## Course Description

This course engages students in an exploration of the meaning and methods of a collaborative art process. Multiple models for collaboration are introduced at the beginning of the semester. As we move forward you will be required to adopt these models in the production of collaborative projects; but, as with any abstract model, you will quickly discover that there is a difference between what works in theory and what works in practice. You will be expected to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the models you test as well as modify them to accommodate your personal creative practice and the practices of the other people you work with. Your introspective collaborative methods and the group work you generate through the semester are both foci of the class so it is important that you give careful consideration to both process and output.

## Course Goals

1. Learn how different types of creative professionals approach working on large-scale collaborative projects.
2. Develop your own personal best practices for collaboration.
3. Produce a significant final project by collaborating with your colleagues to implement work that you could not have completed on your own.

## Readings

- Required: *Creative Collaboration*, Vera John-Steiner (ISBN 978-0195307702)
- Required: *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*, Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman (ISBN 978-0201339895)
- Additional readings will be made available as you develop your collaboration style

## Course Structure

At the beginning of the semester we will primarily read about and discuss successful collaborations from the past, with some small in-class projects scattered throughout to give you experience working with the different models. After these readings are complete we will split into small groups to apply your models towards hands-on projects; these projects may be internal to the class or made to present as part of your ongoing practice, whichever your group decides. The second half of the semester will be devoted to a large-scale group project in which everybody in the class must come together to complete a work for public display. This final project should require the many diverse skills that each individual brings to the group in order to succeed.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is critical because of the group focus of the class; missing a class means you have not contributed to the group. You will be allowed to miss up to two classes due to illness or emergency, provided you notify me by email before class time. Each additional absence, or any unexcused absence, will result in the loss of a full letter grade. During inclement weather you should check the course folder on FirstClass for possible cancellations and check to see if the entire University has been closed for the afternoon.

## **Collaboration Documentation**

Collaboration is the centerpiece of the class, but understanding the collaboration process means more than just producing a work with some other people. Documenting your process is a requirement throughout the semester. This documentation will take two forms: a private journal in which you self-record your own observations and a transparent record of your group's communications that will be available to the entire class. Depending on the project chosen there may be specific requirements about what technologies or practices you use to share your group's communications; if so, your consistency in following those requirements will become a factor in how your class participation is evaluated.

## **University Policies**

Disabilities (ADA) Statement:

Students with disabilities who may need services or accommodations to fully participate in this class should contact Ann Smith, Director of Disability Services in 121 East Annex, (voice) 581-2319, (TTY) 581-2325 as early as possible in the semester.

Academic Honesty (plagiarism, etc):

Academic honesty is very important. It is dishonest to cheat on exams, to copy term papers, to submit papers written by another person, to fake experimental results, or to copy or reword parts of books or articles into your own papers without appropriately citing the source. Students committing or aiding in any of these violations may be given failing grades for an assignment or for an entire course, at the discretion of the instructor. In addition to any academic action taken by an instructor, these violations are also subject to action under the University of Maine Student Conduct Code. The maximum possible sanction under the student conduct code is dismissal from the University.

Class Disruption:

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

## **Participation**

If the only time you talk is when you are giving a presentation then you will have little opportunity to display your understanding of the processes being discussed and I will not have much information to use when evaluating your success in the class. Ask questions, answer questions, throw in comments, and generally add to the discussion as much as possible, particularly if you think you missed something or you have a stupid question. Odds are I just failed to explain it completely and other people are as confused as you are.

As with all classes, it is expected that you will treat others with respect. This is particularly critical in a class that is based on collaboration because once respect is lost it is very hard to regain. Be aware that an important part of collaboration is being responsive to the ideas of others and not overly wedded to your own ideas; make reasonable arguments in support of what you believe, but if a disagreement is intractable just realize that sometimes reasonable people will disagree and figure out the best way to move on from the situation without poisoning the rest of the process.

## **Grading**

There are four components to the final grade in this class: your introspective analysis, class/group participation, the output of your small group project and the output of the final project. They are weighted as follows:

Introspective Analysis:	30%
Class Participation:	20%
Small Group Project:	20%
Final Project:	30%

Note that your though your final project likely has a relatively lower grade weighting than you might be used to from other classes it is still a large-scale public work. That means that, regardless of your grade, you will need to treat it as a professional presentation. Failure to do so will be embarrassing for you, your classmates, and the MFA program as a whole...in other words, pay attention and do good work, it's more important than the grade you get.

## **Small Group Projects**

Your small group projects will be variations on the theme of the exquisite corpse. In this case the variation will be that you are working together to produce a three dimensional space. Each person will only be allowed to see a limited perspective of the work created by the other people in their group, so you will have to find ways to convey the information necessary to make everybody's contribution work together cohesively without actually seeing each others' contributions. This is easier to do than to describe, so if it sounds confusing don't worry: we'll talk about it a lot more when the time comes.

## **Final Project**

Your final project will be determined by the entire class. The only requirements are the ones mentioned earlier: it must be large-scale, public, professional, and require a diverse set of talents to pull off.