

The PRAXIS Initiative (A Status Report)

December 10, 2018

Inspired by a mission to foster “critical thinkers who make,” the PRAXIS initiative will involve Critical Theory, Emergent Digital Practices, English & Literary Arts, Computer Science, Engineering, and Entrepreneurship students in the incorporation of new and emerging technologies and practices across disciplinary fields. During Spring Quarter 2019, students will take preparatory, co-designed classes emphasizing multidisciplinary and multimodal critical theoretical practices. Those three courses (from EDP, ENGL, and PHIL) will include guest presentations (from DU faculty) as well as one public-facing event (featuring an invited guest from outside of DU) that will connect all three classes to public-engagement activities and initiatives. Our three preparatory courses will therefore be collaborative, multimodal, and praxical, emphasizing multidisciplinary design and delivery; including the co-authoring of syllabi across departments and programs, and coordinated events among courses, faculty, and invited guests. DU will then host an intensive workshop in the summer of 2019 at DU’s Innovation Floor—a center for experiential learning located in the Ritchie School of Engineering and Computer Science—consisting of a fully equipped makerspace, incubator, and event space open to all DU students, faculty, and staff. The combination of these preparatory courses and the intensive summer workshop will prepare students for new levels of multidisciplinary and multimodal collaboration during Fall Quarter 2019, which will see the piloting of a new Keystone course co-taught by three faculty (from EDP, ENGL, and PHIL) and involving the design and creation of works that will be presented at a public-facing event. All student projects created throughout the PRAXIS experience during 2019 will be directly related to the critical theory methods and works studied in the preparatory courses. The PRAXIS program may culminate with research papers, literary/digital art, or entrepreneurial projects incorporating digital technologies and the emerging media landscape to expand ideas about what types of actions make one a “critical thinker” and how these actions relate to questions of collaboration and production. The students will make the works they create public, accessible to a broad audience beyond DU.

During Fall 2018, the three faculty authors of the initial PRAXIS proposal (W. Scott Howard, Thomas Nail, and Trace Reddell) have worked with CILCA to author a proposal for Mellon Foundation funds. This proposal was approved by the Director of CILCA, the Dean of CAHSS, and the DU Chancellor, and was submitted to the Mellon Foundation. We met with Michael Caston, toured the Innovation Floor, and added Michael to the PRAXIS collaborative team. PRAXIS faculty have participated in three meetings of the new materialism discussion group, which now consists of approximately 30 people (DU undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty; faculty and students from CU-Boulder; faculty and students from CO School of Mines). We have begun planning for our Spring 2019 PRAXIS courses, which we will continue to develop during Winter 2019. In coordination with these Spring courses and in an effort to begin engaging other DU faculty, Trace Reddell and Rafael Fajardo submitted a Marsico proposal for a pair of visiting scholars/artists to present their work across disciplines and media through the frame of Afrofuturist multicultural excellence and disability engagement. (Although the proposal was not funded, that experience offers a valuable data point, indicating that Marsico may not be a reliable zone of supplementary funding for PRAXIS events.) We have begun preliminary planning for our proposed Summer 2019 symposium, as well as for our co-taught Keystone Experience (as noted above)—all of which, we recognize, is contingent upon Mellon funding and/or ongoing institutional support. While all of the PRAXIS faculty have been active in conference participation during Fall Quarter, W. Scott Howard was invited to the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland to present his creative and critical work within context of digital humanities initiatives at DU. Scott was also awarded a 2018 – 2019 CCESL fellowship in preparation for PRAXIS community-engagement.