

The PRAXIS Experience: Critical Theory, Emergent Digital Practices, English & Literary Arts

Project Description

We request three course releases so that we will be able to work together on curriculum design, program development, and strategic course reconfigurations: firstly, for three classes we're already scheduled to teach during Spring 2019; and secondly, for a new co-taught Keystone course in 2020. That effort will approach these courses with a new degree of cross-disciplinary collaboration in course design and delivery, including co-authoring syllabi across departments and programs, and coordinated visits to each other's courses. The three courses taught in Spring 2019 will anticipate the piloting of a new team-taught Keystone course experience at the 3000-level in the following Spring 2020. That Keystone course will involve the design of a new public-facing event for students to present the outcomes of their Keystone experience.

Inspired by a mission to "make critical thinkers who make," the PRAXIS initiative would point Critical Theory, EDP, and English & Literary Arts students toward the incorporation of new and emerging technologies and practices across disciplinary fields, and of making that work public, engaged and accessible to a broad audience. All student projects created throughout the PRAXIS experience must be directly related to the critical theory texts in the course and approved by the instructors. While projects in the three Spring 2019 courses may culminate with research papers, literary/digital art, and civic engagement, projects from the PRAXIS Keystone course in Spring 2020 must incorporate digital technologies and the emerging media landscape in order to expand ideas about what types of actions make one a "critical thinker" and how these actions relate to questions of the arts, knowledge, embodiment, expression, and experience in the 21st century.

Students and faculty will work together to use emergent media as part of project research and development, dissemination and presentation, and civic engagement. Students will work both individually and collaboratively, according to new guidelines (shared by our three, respective departments/programs) for courses requiring: at least 1 collaborative project in the 10-week quarter; at least 3 persons on each collaborative team; at least 2.5 week duration of the collaborative project; and reflective statements by each team member, which will be used for program assessment. Each project will be guided by one or more of the three faculty, and evaluated by all three faculty members.

Keystone projects will be publicly presented at DU. Faculty will organize an event coordinated with the philosophy club, ENGL's literary arts events, EDP's spring showcase, and other relevant campus and off campus groups. Participants will be recruited from the CT, EDP, and ENGL email/facebook lists, department email lists, and promoted with flyers and social media. Our plan for the Keystone class structure is simply to scale up the co-teaching model typically used in AHSS. All faculty will participate in all Keystone course sessions.

Evaluation Criteria

DU IMPACT 2025

This proposal supports “Strategic Initiative 4: Knowledge Bridges” because its primary aim is “Supporting knowledge bridges with institutional funds and other grants for as long as they are vital, typically one to three years but sometimes extending for many years or becoming permanent centers or institutes organized around issue areas” (16). The goal of the PRAXIS project is to “sponsor topical research, knowledge design and coursework,” across disciplines in AHSS. The hope is to connect faculty, who are working on shared topics through different modes, to one another in order to share resources, methods, and knowledge, while at the same time gathering student interest around these shared issues. PRAXIS also supports SI 2 because it “invests in research, scholarship and creative expression to support the discovery and design of knowledge both for long-term societal use as well as immediate application.” It directly supports the AHSS Keystone project as well.

Reach

The PRAXIS project will draw on the Critical Theory Initiative <https://www.du.edu/ahss/philosophy/criticaltheory/>, which already has a reach over 200 faculty and students (including email subscribers and facebook followers); and on ENGL’s literary arts community (which reaches approximately 500 faculty, graduates, and students in the DU, Denver metro, and front range communities). The aim of PRAXIS is to increase these numbers and connect CT, EDP, and ENGL students together. We expect that between 60-80 students will be directly involved in the courses and an additional 40 in the presentation of the material, for a total of 100-120 students in the project. Students for this project will be directly recruited through existing CT, EDP, and ENGL mailing lists, websites, and event flyers. The Praxis project will also contribute to EDP’s revamped Cultures and Collaboration requirements. All EDP majors (70) are required to take 2 Cultures designated classes, and all EDP minors (70) to take 1 Cultures course. EDP must offer five Collaboration component courses each year. Praxis courses will fulfill both of these EDP requirements, and so be of potential value to another 140 students.

Long-Term Effects

The long-term effects of these courses is to increase wider and more diverse participation in Critical Theory, EDP, and ENGL curricula, which are composed of faculty, courses, students, and events organized and promoted through our DU webpages and hosted by our respective departments/programs. With roots in the PHIL and ENGL departments, the CT initiative has affiliated faculty, a curriculum, and has been active in promoting critical theory events on campus. We currently have over 200 involved faculty and students but we have no interdisciplinary team-taught keystone. The long-term effect would thus be a regularly taught (every two years) truly interdisciplinary keystone in AHSS. The 2020 Keystone course would begin with Trace, Scott, and Thomas, and will be designed for inclusiveness so that

faculty from other departments/programs who would wish to teach the course may do so in subsequent years. Increased participation from this CILCA grant will help CT, EDP, and ENGL show larger numbers and thus make it possible to apply for other internal and external grants to grow this collaborative program.

Clarity of Outcomes

There are three outcomes: 1) to encourage interdisciplinary teaching and research among AHSS faculty; 2) to encourage students to take the Critical Theory, EDP, and ENGL courses across the AHSS disciplines; 3) to gauge public and scholarly interest in continuing and growing this initiative at DU.

In particular, we hope to have new faculty and students sign up for our PRAXIS mailing list, attend future events, and increase enrollments. Most importantly, seeing significant numbers at these events will be key to gauging if there is interest and thus grounds for further internal and external funding.

Learning outcomes for students are: 1) to read about and discuss major issues in contemporary critical theory, literary arts and cultural studies; 2) to research and write about these issues; and 3) to understand and directly use new media technologies related to theoretical issues in art, literature, science, politics, and philosophy.

Viability of the Plan

The plan is easy to achieve because it simply brings together common work already being done among faculty and students in English, Philosophy, and EDP. PRAXIS is a way for AHSS to combine already existing resources into a new and long-term interdisciplinary keystone course.

The plan requires no additional funds, except for a one-time course release for faculty to do the initial collaborative work of setting up the structure.

Proposed Course Releases

Courses that will not be taught in Winter 2019

Trace Reddell, Emergent Digital Practices: EDPX 3490/4490 "Expanded Cinema."

W. Scott Howard, English & Literary Arts: ENGL 1010 "Introductory Topics"

Thomas Nail, Philosophy: PHIL 2001 "Philosophy and Fiction"

Three course releases are needed to make this work. Team taught classes are often done with two faculty in AHSS, but CILCA is about increasing interdisciplinarity, not just maintaining the status quo. Since our (Trace, Scott, Thomas) classes always fill, we see no reason to worry about enrollments for our PRAXIS courses.

That said, if the committee is absolutely opposed to three course releases, we are willing to compromise with two releases for 2019 with the encouraging chance of applying for two more course releases for 2020 so that we may rotate faculty. However, we do believe that the collaborative integrity of PRAXIS will be compromised with only two course releases during this first phase of significant work in 2019.

Planned use of Release Time

During Winter 2019, we propose to have 1-2hr weekly meetings in order to: 1) plan the integration of our separate classes for Spring 2019; 2) grow the PRAXIS community of faculty and students; and 3) plan the structure of the Keystone for Spring 2020. In addition to weekly meetings, we will spend 4-10 hours a week reading each other's course materials and deciding on how to organize and include them in our respective 2019 classes. We will need to generate a radically new form of syllabus for the PRAXIS Keystone that clearly spells out the project-based and public nature of those projects, protocol for group work, and other details that can only be worked out in collaboration.

We will also use our course release time to grow the PRAXIS community of faculty and students, and prepare marketing and promotional materials for 2019 as we build the foundations for 2020. Scott will redesign "Shakespeare Seminar", Trace will redesign "Speculative Cultures," and Thomas will redesign "Aesthetics." These courses have been chosen because they already include critical theory and aesthetic themes and content.

Thank you for your consideration,
Trace Reddell, Thomas Nail, W. Scott Howard