The PRAXIS Keystone: Critical Theory & Emergent Digital Practices

Project Description

The PRAXIS keystone experience has so far been more successful that we could have imagined. With the external funding we have received from the Andrew Mellon foundation we have been able to invite a total of 24 interdisciplinary speakers, which we plan to host at four major public events in 2019. We have also partnered with Denver Museum of Nature and Science and are scheduled to host an impactful public event that will bring together our scholarly work, invited speakers, and the general public. There are now *a lot* of people invested in and part of the PRAXIS project.

With all this support we are happy to report that we only need one more course release from CILCA to complete the project and make it a sustainable and permanent CAHSS keystone. It has taken an incredible amount of work to alter our existing courses that feed into our keystone; create a new PRAXIS keystone course from scratch; and to solicit, organize, and promote our speakers and events. However, without at least one more course release we will not be able to do the necessary work of putting in place a revised structure for future faculty to step into that will make this a sustainable project.

In particular, if we want to keep PRAXIS going we need to do the following:

1) **Revision**: We need to have a series of meetings during and after our courses and events to record what worked, what did not, and why. The aim of these meetings will be to produce a revised PRAXIS keystone syllabus and event calendar for future faculty—so they will not have to reinvent the wheel each time the keystone is taught. This will make it much easier for future faculty to simply jump in without needing future course releases.

2) **Archive**: We need to archive and organize the large amount of materials generated from our efforts so far into Canvas or Portfolio so that future faculty will not be starting from scratch. Furthermore, creating this ongoing archive will allow future PRAXIS faculty to contribute their revisions and materials as well. Specifically, we would like to gather and organize the following archives: a) an archive of all our syllabi and revised syllabi for our related and co-taught courses, b) an archive of all the relevant readings that we chose from and would suggest to future PRAXIS faculty, c) an archive of all the images, videos, and audio we used over the year in all our classes, d) an archive of all the activities we did that we found successful, e) an archive of all the contact information of all our invited speakers and their abstracts so that future PRAXIS faculty have a wide list of interdisciplinary DU and local PRAXIS speakers to invite for the events.

3) **Replacement**: We need to meet several times with our next faculty participant (Michael Brent, from Philosophy) to discuss what we have learned from the PRAXIS keystone experience and explain the archive and events. Thomas is already co-teaching his feeder class with him on Aesthetics (Spring 2019).

4) **Future Funding**: Finally, we need to have a few meetings with our department chairs to explain the PRAXIS keynote project and develop a small ongoing budget to pay for some honoraria ($100 per person per quarter) to support the roundtables that are part of the PRAXIS experience. Based on our current discussions this seems possible, but our chairs will need to hear a larger plan for the sustainability of PRAXIS, which will only happen if we do have time to meet and make our results sustainable in the above-mentioned ways. Furthermore, we would also like to apply for external funding based on our success with the Mellon foundation, but this takes time and research, thus contributing to the need of at least one more course release.

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 courses may culminate with research papers, literary/digital art, and civic engagement, projects from the PRAXIS Keystone course 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 Keystone course began with Trace, Scott, and Thomas, and is designed for inclusiveness so that faculty from other departments/programs who would wish to teach the course may do so in subsequent years. However, only if we have another course release to institutionalize, archive, and pass on our results will we be able to keep the project going and expand to other faculty. Increased participation from this CILCA grant and external sources 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 four 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; 4) in this second phase of PRAXIS we aim to institutionalize the fruits of our labor so new faculty will not need course releases each year to keep it going.

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
Our plan for sustainability should be much easier to achieve since the hard work of inventing everything from scratch will already be done. But programs only last when some kind of institutional memory is retained and transferred on. PRAXIS is a way for AHSS to combine already existing resources into a new and long-term interdisciplinary keystone course.

Our first CILCA application requested three course releases because this is what we believe would is required for us invent *and preserve* a lasting and sustainable PRAXIS keystone course. We received two course releases last year but still strongly feel that sustainability requires that third course release to insure that the keystone will be institutionally retained. Without this final labor of consolidation and institutionalization we doubt the prospects for a sustainable future PRAXIS keystone at DU.

Proposed Course Releases

Courses that will not be taught in Spring 2020
Thomas Nail, Philosophy: PHIL 2001 "Philosophy and Fiction"

Planned use of Release Time

We need to meet a couple times after our Spring 2019 courses to revise and archive our syllabi. We need to meet after our speaker events to record our suggestions and feedback for future faculty. We need to meet during and after our keystone for the purposes of organizing and recording all the materials for future faculty. This requires additional reading and discussion of materials not used in the class but that will go into the archive. We also need to meet to invent the archive itself and how to best guide new faculty to the materials. We also need several meetings to talk with the next faculty who will replace Thomas from Philosophy (Michael Brent, Philosophy). We also need several meetings to talk with department chairs about ongoing funding. Finally, we will need time together and apart to seek and apply for external funding.

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