**GST309 Millennial Imagination**
Elon University, January term 2015
Daily 1:30-4:30 Belk Pavilion 208
http://elon.mrooms3.net/course/view.php?id=14063

Professor Anthony Weston
Department of Philosophy, 109 Spence Pavilion
Phone: x5699 (278-5699) E-mail: <weston@elon.edu>
Office hours: before and after class daily – please ask!!

This course is an exploration of creative futures – of what might actually be possible for our society and world, right now, and without anything outrageous technologically but with a lot more imagination. We begin with two intensive days awakening and training our own social creativity – that is, learning over-the-top imagination as a genuine, practical skill. We then survey a wide range “out of the box” possibilities, each based in a thematic and adventurous book that we read at high speed, and read with an eye not only to the ideas each proposes but also the possibilities as far as we can go beyond each author’s ideas in turn. When you leave this course, then, you should be conversant with some radical new thinking across a wide range of issues, and you should have some experience of thinking more creatively about those issues yourself: that is, reframing those issues based on the readings, and then going still farther on your own, issue after issue. In the end I hope you will become more ready and able to think creatively about everything!

Procedure: This class is mostly a series of workshops, with widely varying and ever-changing topics, based on some difficult and provocative books. We’ll have three hours together each day. Each session will begin with warm-ups and an online check-in. Then we will devote ourselves to the ideas of the book at hand, transitioning when we are ready into energetic brainstorms carrying the book’s ideas and modes of thinking still farther. Student groups will quickly be established to share responsibility for planning and running our daily meetings: every student will join one. In general, this means that every class session will be highly energetic and ask a lot of you. Try to come at the top of your game. Activities will vary, sometimes unexpectedly: be ready... play along, try new things, see what happens.

➔ Please note that this class will involve one day-long field trip on Wednesday January 14th, beginning early in the day and ending in mid-evening or later, possibly with a (somewhat optional) campout. (See 1/14 schedule below.) Please put this on your calendar now.
**Tentative schedule**
All readings are due on the day indicated.

**T  6  Creative Thinking**
Read Weston, *Creativity for Critical Thinkers* – the whole book (it’s short). Then pick one challenge from Exercise 2, pp. 7-8 or Exercise 2, p. 73-4, think about it, write a few paragraphs in response, and submit them on our Moodle page (there’s a link under “Current Assignments”) by 8 pm the previous evening (Jan 5th).

**W  7  Social Creativity**
Read Weston, *How to Re-Imagine the World* – whole book. Also short (but read it slowly, in pieces... too much to digest otherwise). This is your single most important guide for this course.

**Th  8  The Question of Design**
Bruce Mau, *Massive Change*: pp. 30-105; then browse the rest.

**F  9  The Long View**

**M 12  The Question of Work**
Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American*: read Chapter 1, skim 2-3, read 5-6.

**T 13  How We Live**
P. M., *bolo'bolo* – read whole book (denser than it looks)

**W 14  Alternative Communities Field Trip – all day!!**
This will be a day-long field trip, visiting local alternative community projects, including Arcadia Cohousing in Carrboro, Circle Acres Community in Pittsboro (I hope), and Hart’s Mill Ecovillage near Mebane. We will start early and end well after dinner – two meals will be provided – possibly with campout at Hart’s Mill, weather permitting.

**Th 15  TBD/Eco-Cities?**
We’ll see where we are as we approach this day. We will need some time to process our field trip and possibly catch up on other topics; we should do a first brainstorm planning for the Final; we could look at some other visionary thinking about cities (Register, *Ecocities*: I will upload a scan.)

**F 16  Instead of Education**
John Holt, *Instead of Education*: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 16.
M 19  No Class – MLK Day
Hart's Mill Ecovillage is holding a Workday and Tour today, so depending on whether we have gotten there on our field trip last week, this could be a backup visit day and campout option. But nothing is required this day.

T 20  Gender roles
Read Kate Bornstein, *My New Gender Workbook*. This would be a good book to read over the Break if you can (leave it lying around and see what reactions you get).

W 21  Gender roles, cont.

Th 22  Reimagining Environmentalism

F 23  TBD/More Green Imagination?
Again we will see where we are. We could do more with Green Imagination; we will need to work on Final preparation; there may be other priorities too.

M 26  Final Project Work
How class meets, we will see. We might make it a workshop day, with me available to groups as needed.

→ Please note also: Monday morning 1/26 may be a make-up session if we have a weather-related cancelation earlier in the month. *Keep this morning open!*

T 27  Final Project Presentations, and Celebration/Sendoff
This is our official Final... and then the whirlwind ends.

*Expectations*. Again, this class is mostly a series of social-creativity workshops, with widely varying and ever-changing topics, based on some difficult but provocative books. I do not lecture on the “content”, but always aim to approach the material *with* you through a variety of exercises, discussions, simulations, Improv games, and other kinds of challenges. This in turn presupposes that you come into the class already having done the reading and thought about it. It also presupposes that you will regularly get up, move around, do venturesome things, try unexpected and offbeat methods, etc. Again, try to come at the top of your game, and play along. You may expect me to do the same, and not to let up!

Daily class meetings will usually begin with a Moodle-based check-in on the day’s assigned readings. For this and other reasons (such as needing web access for group brainstorm),
please bring your laptops daily. If this is a difficulty for anyone, we can work with it – just let me know.

Grades. Four elements determine your grade in this class. Each counts equally (one-quarter).

1) Attendance and Participation. We meet 16 times, total – each session is like almost a week of regular term – and many of the course’s various topics and activities build on each other. Any pattern of missed classes will make the class much less useful to you and less helpful to others too. You can only make your creative contribution to our joint work if you are present and speaking up – in the small-group work as well as the general class discussions. Accordingly, attendance is always expected unless you are completely non-functional (or sick and contagious), and more than attendance too. Come to class not just physically but mentally too, ready to take part. If you have ever been on a sports team or in a musical or theatrical group, think of this class the same way – showing up is obviously necessary, but just showing up is nowhere near enough!

Lay Back Days: On the other hand, I know that asking this level of energy for three hours a day for many days in a row is a lot to ask. So there is also an occasional out. One the first class day I will give each of you two colored index cards. If on some day you just feel like you are not up to the level of energy I will usually expect, you should still come to class, but put your name on one of your cards and give it to me at the start of class. You’ll still be expected to do the check-in and follow along with the class, but otherwise I and your fellow students will cut you the slack to just quietly listen. You’ll have two cards so you can do this twice if you wish – no penalties.

2) Check-ins. Normally we will start each session with a short-answer check-in: a quick writing based on the day’s reading. I want both to get a sense of how you are keeping up and to give you some feedback on how you are doing. We’ll do these online, on Moodle, so again, you will need your laptops. On Moodle you will get feedback and a grade on a very simple GPA-like scale, and Moodle will track your average as well.

3) Your Group Day. From Thursday January 8 through Thursday the 21st, student groups will help plan and lead most of the sessions. Each student will sign up for one group (I will put up a sign-up schedule as a Googledoc), so you’ll be working with 2-3 other students. This is your chance to take some special leadership in pushing the class’s imagination on the week’s topic even farther and in more new directions.

Groups’ tasks include:

a) briefly giving some context for the author (who is this person? etc.) and book (some are dated, so you’ll want to also look at recent developments along the same lines, e.g. websites, projects, institutes, etc.)
b) getting the class engaged in *exploring the book's basic ideas* and the case the author makes for them

c) offering and inviting some *critique* of those ideas and cases as well

d) and then *provoking and facilitating class brainstorming* beyond the ideas and proposals in the book toward something even more ambitious and creative. This step should probably take the most time.

e) *compiling a report* of the best ideas from step (d) and sending it to me within a day to post on our Moodle site.

f) providing some *snacks* for the day.

After a few days of class you'll have a better idea of how to do this. We'll start group responsibilities on day 3. You will get a group grade for this with individual variations as appropriate.

4) Final project. We are going to survey a wide range of topics and new ideas and resources. Our final project will be to take some problem area and initial great idea, work it out much farther, and then *launch it* – begin to actually make it happen. We might choose to do several such projects, even some individual ones, but my guess is that probably we will end up doing one project all together as a class. Anyway, the structure and direction of the project are wide open, along with the topic area. We’ll begin brainstorming and giving shape to the eventual project right away. Also, we’ll have a very short time at the end to actually get it together (so that will be another challenge to our creativity – for example, we could aim for something *viral*, something that we set going and then it goes by itself.) Your contribution to the eventual final project(s) will determine the last part of your grade. Note that this may or may not be a piece of writing – my guess is that it will involve some writing aspects, but also many other aspects too – something for everyone. But we’ll have to wait and see. You will get a group grade for your work on the Final with individual variations as appropriate.

**So finally… be sure this class is for you!** This class asks you to “stretch the envelope” in various ways. It is meant to offer a serious challenge to your creativity and imagination, all the time. It is a class, all right, but it is also an adventure, and an invitation, with uncertain outcomes. Be sure you are ready for this. **There are certainly easier ways to get your upper-level GST credit.** Please talk me *now* if you have questions or concerns. On the other hand, if this sort of opportunity is what you always hoped for in college, you’re in the right place. Welcome aboard!