Perspectives on Inquiry: “Making Your Way in the World Today”

UN 1001
Fall 2009

Cell phones, Blackberries, iPods, or PDAs are not to be used in the classroom. Turn them off.

Required Texts and Materials

Pirsig, Robert
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values
Photocopying or printing of various assignments, handouts.

Overall Goals of Perspectives
1. Engage in active inquiry into interdisciplinary questions
2. Integrate knowledge from a variety of perspectives into complex insights
3. Develop the following skills:
   • effective learning strategies and time management
   • critical reading and thinking
   • textual, empirical, and other kinds of research
   • using reasoning and evidence to support arguments
   • effective oral, written and visual communication
   • creativity
   • leadership and teamwork
4. While maintaining:
   • thoughtful consideration of others' ideas and positions
   • accuracy and thoroughness

Goals of This Course

In a service economy, the value of making (or producing) something locally seems to have diminished. When we think of artisans, those who craft what we consume, the images that come to mind are often beer or bread makers, rather than those who repair our cars or plumbing. The central question is: What are the ramifications if we accept/adopt these views?

In this section of Perspectives on Inquiry, we will start a discussion of what it means to make something, and why, we tend to separate the importance of the product from the importance of the skill of the producer. We will read and discuss historical and popular accounts of this phenomenon, and analyze how it might affect the way we make our way in our world.

Deeper questions might concern the ethics inherent in each side of the question, such as: How can the products of the farmer and carpenter be of less import, when we need food and shelter to survive? In ancient Greece (and there are more recent examples), often the more menial aspects of these tasks were performed by slaves. Does that history color our perceptions today?

An allied question is: Has technology itself become the measure of worth, rather than the capability of those who create and maintain it? Is this the outcome of the industrial revolution, when machines became the primary producers? Are we as makers becoming machines?
Reading Assignments
As a primary text we will read, reflect on, and discuss Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Begin reading as soon as you get the book. I will specify page numbers later. I will also send out short articles from time to time, and will consider assigning short selections that you discover in your research.

Research/Writing/Speaking Assignments
This semester we will combine analysis, doing research, and writing and oral presentations. Initially I ask you to come to class prepared with a short written question/reflection on the assigned material. These will be collected at the end of class, and count toward your participation grade.

In week three, I will assign the library research project, where you find and report on supporting material. As brief "book reports", these will be both written up and presented in class.

When you have identified sources that interest you, I ask that you expand on them in more formal writing, increasing the detail, and critically analyzing how that material supports, contradicts, or otherwise enlightens us on the questions at hand. For the longer or more complex texts this can be done as group projects, which I strongly encourage.

Grading
*****Late Assignments will not be accepted without prior approval*****
Grades will be based on three areas:
- Two formal papers (approx. weeks 7 and 14): 60%
- Informal writing/Participation (all semester): 40%
  Participation means attending class prepared to be involved in an active discussion of the readings. To help with this, you will write out questions/observations before each class. You will turn these in at the end of class.

Attendance Evaluation
In addition to the above assignments, you will be evaluated on your performance as a member of the class. The expectation here is that you will participate in class discussions, attend class regularly, and participate fully in group projects. However, if you are sick or have a previously arranged commitment let me know in writing (email). In the case of a previously planned commitment, just give me a short memo explaining the conflict in advance. Consistent lack of attendance can result in the loss of a letter grade over the semester.

Course Policy on Academic Integrity
Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. Plagiarism can be defined as "knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and the policy covers copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchasing academic papers. Plagiarism and cheating are not only dishonest but they cheat you out of learning. If you ever have any questions about this issue, or about how to cite someone else’s work properly, please talk with me or consult a coach in the Writing Center.

University Policy on Academic Integrity, Discrimination and Harassment
Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University’s policies.
If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:
*Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech please call the Dean of Students Office at x 2242.* For other concerns about discrimination you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office at x 3333.

**Academic Integrity:** [http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/admissions/policies/academic_integrity.html](http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/admissions/policies/academic_integrity.html)

**Affirmative Action:** [http://www.mtu.edu/aac](http://www.mtu.edu/aac)

**Disability Services:** [http://www.mtu.edu/student-handbook/student_services.html#disability](http://www.mtu.edu/student-handbook/student_services.html#disability)

**Equal Opportunity Statement:** [http://www.mtu.edu/admin/hlc/pedagogy/eqopp.html](http://www.mtu.edu/admin/hlc/pedagogy/eqopp.html)

Caveat:
There will possibly be modifications to this syllabus as the semester progresses.