

Guidance for Faculty: Applying for CRE (Creative & Innovative Thinking) Designation

What is the CRE Designation?

The Creative & Innovative Thinking (CRE) designation is a university-wide identifier that recognizes courses fostering creative thinking across all disciplines. Similar to the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) designation, CRE courses will be identified in the catalog and class schedule, helping students find opportunities to develop their creative capacities.

Why Apply for CRE Designation?

- **Visibility:** Attract students interested in innovative, engaging coursework
- **Recognition:** Highlight the creative dimensions of your teaching
- **Student Development:** Contribute to students' creative thinking competencies
- **Institutional Mission:** Support UToledo's commitment to enhancing and supporting innovative programs and faculty creative activity and research

What Qualifies a Course for CRE Designation?

Your course should provide substantial opportunities for students to develop creative thinking through **at least three** of these four dimensions:

1. Connecting Ideas in Novel Ways

Students synthesize knowledge, concepts, or methods from multiple sources or disciplines to form new relationships or approaches.

Specific Examples:

Chemistry: Students design cooking experiments demonstrating chemical reactions, explain the chemistry in lab reports, and compete in an end-of-semester "cook-off" judged on both scientific analysis and taste.

History: Students create a "historical evidence trial" prosecuting or defending a controversial figure using primary sources, integrating economic data, cultural context, and political theory, then write a judicial opinion synthesizing all perspectives.

Mechanical Engineering: Students analyze a biological system (bird wing) and design a mechanical device applying biomimetic principles to solve an engineering challenge.

English Literature: Students embody a novel's character in a modern scenario (Elizabeth Bennet on reality TV, Hamlet in corporate ethics crisis), performing a 10-minute piece with a companion essay analyzing how the adaptation reveals new textual insights.

2. Taking Intellectual Risks

Students venture beyond conventional approaches and explore uncertain outcomes with your support.

Specific Examples:

Business Management: Students pitch three strategic plans (conservative, moderate, high-risk) for a struggling company, then defend their most unconventional idea with 50% of the grade based on innovation and risk analysis rather than profit projections.

Biology: Students design and conduct original experiments testing unexplored variables in plant growth, with grades emphasizing scientific thinking and adaptation through failure over successful outcomes.

Music Composition: Students compose pieces that deliberately violate at least two traditional composition rules, then defend their artistic choices and the new possibilities created.

Nursing: Students design innovative patient education tools (video game, graphic novel, app, puppet show) for complex health concepts, pilot-test with classmates, revise based on feedback, with grading emphasizing creative problem-solving over first-attempt perfection.

3. Embracing Multiple Perspectives

Students actively engage with diverse viewpoints, disciplinary lenses, or contradictory ideas.

Specific Examples:

Environmental Science: Students interview five stakeholders in a local environmental controversy, then transform fieldwork into a public installation (interactive maze, pop-up café,

multimedia exhibit with water samples, audio, data visualizations, poetry) that communicates complexity while proposing solutions honoring all voices.

Philosophy: Students create "Ask a Philosopher" pop-up booths in campus courtyards, engaging passersby in Socratic dialogue about ethical dilemmas while surfacing utilitarian, deontological, virtue ethics, and care ethics perspectives, then reflect on how public dialogue challenged their thinking.

Civil Engineering: Students redesign a public space by gathering requirements from multiple user groups (pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, people with disabilities, elderly, children), demonstrating how conflicting needs were balanced.

Sociology: Students examine a social phenomenon through three theoretical frameworks, conduct mini-ethnographic observations testing which theory best explains findings, then synthesize all perspectives.

4. Transforming Learning into Innovative Solutions

Students apply course knowledge to address complex, authentic problems through original approaches.

Specific Examples:

Mathematics: Students create origami-based lessons demonstrating geometric principles (surface area, volume, symmetry, angles) for elementary students, including folding instructions, mathematical explanations, and hands-on challenges. They field-test lessons in local schools and refine based on student comprehension and engagement.

Psychology: Students design and launch a campus-wide "digital wellness" awareness campaign addressing smartphone addiction and problematic social media use. Using behavioral psychology principles, they create multi-platform interventions (TikTok videos using humor and peer testimonials, Instagram challenges promoting "phone-free hours," interactive dorm events, campus installations). They collect pre/post survey data on student awareness and behavior change, then present effectiveness analysis with recommendations for student health services.

Computer Science: Students collaborate with a local animal shelter or arts nonprofit to build a custom web application or mobile app addressing an organizational challenge (adoption matching system, volunteer scheduling, donation tracking, virtual gallery). They conduct stakeholder interviews, pitch multiple design concepts, develop a working prototype through

agile sprints, and present the final product to organizational leadership with documentation for future maintenance.

Art History: Students curate a virtual exhibition exploring a theme like "the evolution of landscape painting" or "portraiture across centuries" using the museum's collection. They write scholarly wall text and catalog essays, design interactive educational activities (scavenger hunts, family guides, audio tours), and create digital content (Instagram reels explaining artistic techniques, behind-the-scenes conservation stories) to engage diverse audiences with historical artworks.

How to Apply

Submit via [submission process TBD]:

- Current course syllabus
- Brief narrative (1-2 pages) explaining how your course meets at least **three** CRE criteria
- Specific examples of assignments and assessment criteria that foster creative thinking

The Faculty Senate CRE Subcommittee will review submissions using the established rubric. Courses must demonstrate substantial evidence in at least three of the four criteria.

Tips for Success

- **Be Specific:** Point to particular assignments, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria in your syllabus
- **Show Progression:** Explain how creative thinking develops throughout the semester
- **Connect to Assessment:** Share rubrics or grading criteria that reward originality, synthesis, or innovation
- **Emphasize Disciplinary Context:** Explain how your approach fosters creativity within your field's standards
- **Include Student Choice:** Highlight where students have agency in choosing topics, approaches, or methods

Common Questions

Q: Can introductory courses receive CRE designation?

A: Yes! Creative thinking can be fostered at all course levels. Ideally, CRE can be scaffolded through academic programs.

Q: Does my course need to meet all four criteria?

A: No. Courses must demonstrate substantial evidence in at least three of the four criteria.

Q: What if my course is primarily lecture-based?

A: CRE designation focuses on what students do. Even lecture courses can include creative assignments.

Q: Can I revise and resubmit?

A: Yes. The subcommittee provides feedback and welcomes revised applications.

Questions or Support?

Contact the Faculty Senate CRE Subcommittee at [**contact information TBD**] or attend our information sessions [**dates TBD**].

We look forward to recognizing and celebrating the creative teaching happening across UToledo!

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