HNRS 330 001 Multidisciplinary Challenges

*Early Identification Program: College Access (0-3 Credits; pass/fail; may be repeated for credit)*

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Mr. Richard Todd Stafford

Class

Section 001 9:00a-11:15a Friday in West 1001

Office Hours

Mr. Stafford – Buchanan Hall D203K (inside D205)
By appointment using Calendly:
https://calendly.com/richardtoddstafford

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Honors College

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**Course Description**

Student participants in HNRS 330 identify and address a challenge or question that emerges from the needs of a community stakeholder, in this case the Early Identification Program. Students contribute to and participate from rigorous discussion and collaboration among a cohort of students representing multiple disciplines. By conducting multidisciplinary research or design projects in structured collaboration with community stakeholders and/or mentors, students will learn to better account for their own and for other points of view and to integrate alternate, divergent, or contradictory perspectives or ideas. Through this process, they will deepen their understanding of the design, writing, and/or research processes, learn to appreciate the institutional and social dimensions of undertaking and/or teaching research, and learn to more effectively collaborate.

In Spring 2018, HNRS 330 001 students will conduct multidisciplinary research or design projects to improve college access in collaboration with the Early Identification Program. Many students’ socioeconomic, cultural, or familial lives make applying to- or attending- college more difficult. The EIP office works to help middle and high school students who would be the first in their families to attend college to prepare for college. During the first stage of the learning process, groups of students will assess and analyze the research needs of the EIP office. Students will then individually undertake self-directed skill-building plans necessary to address stakeholder needs, while groups of students work with the stakeholders and mentors to create a systematic plan for meeting EIP’s research needs that are agreeable to all participants. These plans will be formalized in a report proposing the specific development, implementation, and evaluation processes necessary to successfully fulfill EIP’s research need. Finally,
students will work collaboratively to develop the deliverable described in the plan and set in motion the implementation and evaluation procedures, as appropriate.

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**Learning Objectives**

Students will

- Effectively communicate and collaborate with those who do not share their disciplinary and/or professional perspectives
- Identify and refine a significant creative project, research question, or challenge responsive to the needs of a community stakeholder.
- Bring multiple perspectives to bear when addressing the questions or problems identified by a community stakeholder
- Discover and analyze appropriate evidence from a range of differing perspectives in order to address the question.
- Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively to achieve goals.
- Undertake individualized skill-development plan necessary to undertake the project that informs future professionalization or civic goals

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**Honors College Requirements**

HNRS 330 counts towards Honors College Requirement 3; the only pre-requisite for the class is that you received a C or higher in HNRS 110, 108-109, 210, or 302.

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**Grading**

So as to provide optimal circumstances for students to engage in the discovery process with relatively low stakes, this course is graded Satisfactory (S) or No Credit (NC). In order to receive a passing grade, students must satisfactorily complete all required assignments including class participation, reflections, and peer response.

Because this is a pass-fail class, I don't give normal grades on assignments, instead I use a 4-point scale that does not correspond to letter grades.

- **4 - Exemplary.** Students achieving at this level are doing work that I’d like to be able to show to other students as a model.
- **3 - On track.** This is the “normal” grade that a student who is doing very well in the class will receive: students who receive a 3 have done everything we expected. I might have some ideas about you you can continue to deepen and refine your engagement that we hope you'll incorporate into future assignments.
- **2 - Revise and resubmit.** If you receive a "2," then this means I would like you to resubmit the relevant assignment with the revisions I have suggested.
- **1 - Meet with us, then revise and resubmit.** If you receive a "1," then this means I will ask you to revise the assignment, but would like to meet with you first.
Assignment Descriptions

These descriptions are intended to provide the broad outlines of our assignments, but you will be graded on the basis of the assignments as they are described on Blackboard. In some cases, assignment descriptions may be updated to support student learning with notice in-class and on Blackboard.

Participation

In order to be a part of the project, punctual, prepared, and engaged attendance at all class meetings, meetings with stakeholders, and/or conferences with the instructor will be required. Failure to attend or be adequately prepared will adversely affect everyone -- and may be grounds for the instructor to request you to withdraw from the course.

Facilitation, Agenda, and Minutes

In order to develop group skills, we will rotate responsibility for facilitating class meetings, creating and circulating an agenda for class, and writing up minutes that record what happened in class. Ever class member will be responsible for each of these responsibilities more than once during the semester. They should take very little time outside of class to complete.

Posts

We have a great opportunity to solicit feedback on our projects from students enrolled in another course that is related to this one, but is more focused on academics than being a multidisciplinary experiential learning process. Likewise, they are hoping to get some feedback from us. I’ll share details about this in class.

Project

The focus and major assignment in this class is a single project that we will work on together. This semester, we are working with the EIP office, who have identified four possible research projects that we may choose to undertake for our project:

- **Age of college preparedness programming.** What is the best available evidence concerning the impact of connecting college preparedness programming with students in early middle school? How can this evidence be interpreted to help EIP decide whether to expand their particular college preparedness programming to younger students?

- **College preparedness programming and interest in STEM-H careers.** What is the best evidence concerning the interest and readiness for STEM-H careers among first generation students? How can this evidence be synthesized with what we know about college access programs? How can these findings be interpreted to help EIP continue to improve their programming?

- **Philanthropic giving to college preparedness programs.** What do we know about the philanthropic giving to educational access and preparedness program? What are trends, under-explored mechanisms, or emerging ideas about how to increase and cultivate this
giving? What is known about cultivating alumni giving to these programs? What are the implications of this research for EIP/

- **Impacts of different programs on academic performance.** What does the best evidence say about the impacts of college access and preparedness programming on academic performance? What key indicators or measures are used in this literature? What are some of the different models for this programming and how does that affect student success? How can we use these models, measures, and indicators from this literature to evaluate the impacts of other college access and preparedness programs in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Northern Virginia?

Practically speaking, there are two major parts to the project:

**Proposal**
Students will work with individual institutional stakeholders who have begun to identify communication and/or research needs that will require the use of some technological medium or tool in the research, production, or communication process. You will work with your team of students to develop a proposal about how you are going to address their research need. The nature of this proposal will be tailored to the needs of our community stakeholder.

**Final Deliverable**
The focus of this class is your project’s final deliverable. The nature of this deliverable will be defined through the proposal-development process and feedback you received from the community stakeholder concerning the proposal.

**Skill development log and reflections**
In order to ensure that the experiences you have in this course may be applied in other potentially dissimilar contexts, one of the major emphases in this class is developing metacognitive and reflective skills. Writing reflectively is one way to develop these skills.

**Skill development log**
In order to complete the course project, you will identify a particular set of skills that you want to work on individually and we will work together to identify a set of skills we will work on as a group. You will have a skill development log in which you keep track of your progress towards meeting specific goals. Each week, you’ll write a brief paragraph discussing what you have done that week to develop the skills you have identified, any changes to your goals that have emerged from the week’s work, and what unexpected challenges are coming up for you. I will be assessing this at the midterm and conclusion of the semester, but please keep it up-to-date.

**Reflection essay 1**
Before we begin the proposal, you will write an essay in which you assess the skills, characteristics, and resources that you bring to your group’s project; the skills and areas for growth that you are most interested in developing in the course of the class; and the
challenges that you anticipate facing in this course. You will write this essay with me as the intended audience.

Reflection essay 2

After completing your final deliverable, you will write a reflective essay that imagines an audience outside of this class to whom you will want to communicate what you have gotten out of this class. You will be asked to look through reflection essay 1 before writing this essay. Please make sure to narrate challenges that you encountered and how working to address them has helped you develop skills, dispositions, or habits of mind that might be portable to other contexts. Be sure to address how working in a multidisciplinary team has contributed to this development.

Policy

If learning will be supported by the addition or revision of policies, assignment descriptions, or the schedule during the semester, I may choose to do so. In these cases, revisions will be reflected in the up-to-date version of the syllabus on Blackboard. Significant updates to policies, assignments, or due dates will additionally be announced in class.

Preparedness

To succeed in this class, you should expect to spend 2-4 hours outside of class on average. There may be some weeks which demand more time than this and are very likely to others which demand less. It will be your responsibility to maintain awareness of upcoming assignments and timelines so that you can be prepared for each class period.

Skill development

Students will work on developing new skills during this course to support the project that their group works upon.

For some, this may involve developing specific research, design, or writing skills; for others, it might involve deepening your understanding of new topical areas you have never investigated relevant to your group’s project; some projects might call on students to focus on more technical skills, like using a new piece of software relevant to your group’s work or using video or audio equipment; still others might work on social skills like project management, oral communication, etc. Working diligently on skill development plans you establish collaboratively with the team will be a crucial part of this class.

Computers and Mobile Devices in the Classroom

We will be using computers frequently. If students have a laptop they are able to bring to class, they will be asked to bring them. For students without access to laptops, the Honors College will attempt to provide adequate computing tools during class periods. Please reach out to the instructor if you need access to a laptop during our class meetings. It is, of course, quite rude to surf the internet on unrelated topics, work on other assignments, look at Blackboard sites for other
classes, answer emails, check social media, write text messages, or receive phone calls during class. The instructor may ask students who are misusing technologies to stop and/or leave the class for the remainder of a class period.

**Academic Integrity**
Correctly acknowledging sources of information and concepts is a core value of civil intellectual discourse. The University Honor Code ([http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/](http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/)) prohibits
1. plagiarism, which includes quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing without appropriate acknowledgement of sources.
2. “patch writing,” a special case of plagiarism which involves the selective appropriation of short snippets or paraphrases of the work of others where this is not explicitly called for by the assignment
3. representing work done by others as your own
4. submitting work you have completed for another class without permission of both instructors
5. giving false excuses regarding assignments or otherwise misrepresenting yourself in academically significant ways
6. making up data, evidence, or sources
7. negligent or intentional misattribution of data, evidence, or sources

Perhaps more importantly, providing acknowledgement of your sources helps our external stakeholders follow up on any ideas or facts you make use of and is, consequently, important to meaningfully communicating with your audience.

Depending on how your final project is designed, you may find that academic conventions for citations restrict your creativity. In such cases, you need to consult with me about how you plan to provide appropriate acknowledgement of sources in advance.

**Class Conduct**
It is important that in-class discussions and any work generated for the course be conducted in a civil and respectful manner. If you are concerned about the conduct of another student, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

**Disability Accommodations**
If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

**Mason Diversity Statement**
Diversity is broadly defined at Mason to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, class background, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Additionally, we recognize the diversity of viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives found in our learning community.
Attention to these aspects of diversity will help us promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where a diversity of opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard, and respected.

Each course offers an opportunity for us to develop this commitment together, not just as an attitude but a mode of critical practice that can involve, among other things:

- listening to other perspectives and hearing criticism of one’s own views;
- expressing criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices;
- evaluating different positions and avoiding premature certainty;
- grounding one’s own views in evidence, but being willing to consider countervailing evidence or arguments;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another perspective as one can manage;
- and being willing to accept that at any particular time, there will always be things one cannot see or understand.

An important aspect of the commitment to diversity is that it does not mean we should avoid being critical: respecting others means taking their views seriously, i.e., treating them as worthy of close attention, critical interrogation, and evaluation. It also means being open to the ways in which the views of others can challenge and change our own existing views and commitments.

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**Campus Resources**

George Mason University offers a variety of resources to help you succeed.

**Counseling and Psychological Services**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of services to students, faculty and staff. Services are provided by a staff of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers and counselors. CAPS provides individual counseling, workshops and outreach programs. Find out more at [http://caps.gmu.edu/](http://caps.gmu.edu/)

Counseling and Psychological Services provides crisis intervention services to students, faculty and staff who find themselves or other members of the George Mason community in a crisis. If you are in a crisis and need assistance to deal with the psychological impact of this crisis, please contact CAPS at 703-993-2380. A counselor will consult with you to assess your situation and to identify options for dealing with the crisis. If you are having an emergency, call 911.

**Mason Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Lab**

The STAR lab in Johnson Center 229 provides access to video production and editing software, including Adobe Premiere Pro, Adobe After Effects, and Final Cut Pro. It additionally allows you
to check out video equipment, including cameras, lights, microphones, and tripods. Student mentors are available at the STAR lab to help students with problems they encounter at any stage in the production and editing process, from getting started to polishing projects. Mentors do not provide structured instruction, however; for this, you will want to use the University’s subscription to lynda.com to learn the basics. [http://goo.gl/xwMJ2j](http://goo.gl/xwMJ2j)

**Mason Collaborative Learning Hub (CLUB) Lab**

The CLUB lab in Johnson Center 311 is intended to support teaching and learning with technology. The lab provides access to web development software. Lab staff are able to help with some technical issues, but you will need to use Lynda.com and freely available sources on the web to learn the skills you need. [http://goo.gl/U5Sz1E](http://goo.gl/U5Sz1E)

**Mason Writing Center**

The quality and clarity of your writing is something that can be dramatically improved through tutoring and coaching. The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides tutorial services intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. Appointments are limited, so it is a good idea to plan your appointments early in the semester. [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/)

**Lynda.com**

As a Mason student, you have free access to the high quality media software, web development, and programming tutorials provided by subscription service Lynda.com. Many students will find these tools useful when building skills in this class. [http://lynda.gmu.edu/](http://lynda.gmu.edu/)

**Assignment schedule (to be filled out as we go)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Week 1. 21 Jan - 27 Jan</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due at our first class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Read syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Week 2. 28 Jan - 3 Jan</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due at our second class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Do some looking into the topics we might be investigating.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● If something is so good that everyone needs to see it, share it; if it is something that you can summarize, come to class ready to summarize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The purpose here is simply to get us ready to select a topic and dig in.</td>
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Week 3. 4 Feb - 10 Feb

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 5 Feb

**Reflection essay 1:** you will write an essay in which you assess the skills, characteristics, and resources that you bring to your group’s project; the skills and areas for growth that you are most interested in developing in the course of the class; and the challenges that you anticipate facing in this course. You will write this essay with me as the intended audience.

Week 4. 11 Feb - 17 Feb

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 12 Feb

**Topic Identification Post.** You will make a post to the blog we share with the HNRS 230 class working on the intersection of education and social justice. In this post, you will identify the topic your group is focusing on and provide a suggested reading list of things you think will inform this research.

- **Topic summary.** Provide a brief description of your topic. Be sure to answer the following questions so that the HNRS 230 students can give you effective feedback:
  - What does this have to do with EIP’s mission/function of improving access to college education?
  - Why is it an important issue to research?
  - How does it grow out of the description of the EIP office’s needs?
- **Suggested reading/resource list.** Provide a list of at least 20 sources that you think will be useful to get your group started working on this problem
  - Provide a 2-3 sentence description for each source explaining why it belongs in the list.
  - Your citations should be in APA format.

Week 5. 18 Feb - 24 Feb

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 19 Feb

**Blog Comments and Replies.** You will comment on 2 other topic identification posts. You will also reply to 1 comment on your groups’ blog post. Each comment or reply must be at least 100 words.

- Comment on **one post** that you find most interesting
- Comment on the post with the **least number** of comments at the time you choose to comment. For example, if after commenting on the two posts with which you’re most interested and Group A has 4 comments, Group B has 7 comments, and Group C has 5 comments, you will comment on Group A’s post. If you were one of the commenters on Group A, then you would comment on Group B.
- **Reply to one** comment to your groups’ blog post.
Week 6. 25 Feb - 3 March

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 26 Feb

Problem Definition Post. In this post you will narrow the scope of your topic, possibly by specifying specific research questions and subquestions and beginning to identify the methods you will use to begin answering them. Be sure to include the following in your post:

- Briefly describe your narrowed topic.
- Narrate: Why did your group decide to narrow this way? What interactions or evidence is leading you this direction at this point in the project.
- Identify 5-7 key sources of information on your narrowed topic. Include the APA citation of the work, as well as 3-5 sentences as to why your group considers it a key source of information. These publications can be from your original suggested reading list, but are not required to be from it.

Week 7. 4 March - 10 March

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 5 March

Blog Comments and Replies. You will comment on 2 other problem definition posts. You will also reply to 1 comment on your groups’ blog post. Each comment or reply must be at least 100 words.

- Comment on one post that you find most interesting
- Comment on the post with the least number of comments at the time you choose to comment. For example, if after commenting on the two posts with which you’re most interested and Group A has 4 comments, Group B has 7 comments, and Group C has 5 comments, you will comment on Group A’s post. If you were one of the commenters on Group A, then you would comment on Group B.
- Reply to one comment to your groups’ blog post.

Week 8. 11 March - 17 March

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Week 9. 18 March - 24 March
**Week 10. 25 March - 31 March**

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 26 March

**Project Report Blog Post.** In this post you will identify the emerging themes in your topic and identify some of the preliminary findings you are arriving at. Be sure to address the following questions:

- Reflect on your previous post. Was your topic too broad or too narrow? If so, how did you arrive at this decision?
- What research questions have emerged from your research on this topic? Are they the same as you specified before? How is the evidence reshaping the way you are approaching this?
- What gaps can you begin to see in the research?
- From what disciplines (other than education) does your topic pull? Why are these disciplinary lenses important for your topic?

**Week 11. 1 April - 7 April**

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 2 April

**Blog Comments and Replies.** You will comment on 2 other project report blog posts. You will also reply to 1 comment on your groups’ blog post. Each comment or reply must be at least 100 words.

- Comment on one post that you find most interesting
- Comment on the post with the least number of comments at the time you choose to comment. For example, if after commenting on the two posts with which you’re most interested and Group A has 4 comments, Group B has 7 comments, and Group C has 5 comments, you will comment on Group A’s post. If you were one of the commenters on Group A, then you would comment on Group B.
- Reply to one comment to your groups’ blog post.

**Week 12. 8 April - 14 April**

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 9 April

- Poster draft due

**Week 13. 15 April - 21 April**

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 16 April

- Final poster due
Week 14. 22 April - 28 April

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 23 April

- **Project Summary Post.** This post is an exercise to prepare for the Spring Research Exhibition -- and, more generally, should reflect near completion of the project. At this stage, I’d like us to post a draft of our work in this class to solicit feedback from HNRS 230 students about what we’ve been doing.

24 April, 2p-4p in JC/George’s: Spring Research Exhibition

- We will make a poster/posters displaying the work we are doing at the Spring Research Exhibition. I would very much like as many of you as possible to attend.

Week 15. 29 April - 5 May

Due at 11:59p on Monday, 23 April

**Blog Comments and Replies.** You will comment on 2 other project summary blog posts. You will also reply to 1 comment on your groups’ blog post. Each comment or reply must be at least 100 words. Keep in mind that the HNRS 230 students will be in a completely different place than us by this point, so you are just trying to give feedback that will help them deepen their projects, without trying to fit their project into the mold of your project or vice versa

- Comment on **one post** that you find most interesting
- Comment on the post with **the least number** of comments at the time you choose to comment. For example, if after commenting on the two posts with which you’re most interested and Group A has 4 comments, Group B has 7 comments, and Group C has 5 comments, you will comment on Group A’s post. If you were one of the commenters on Group A, then you would comment on Group B.
- **Reply to one** comment to your groups’ blog post.

Week 16. 6 May

Due at 11:59p on Monday

**Final Deliverable.** Whatever the final deliverable is that you are giving to EIP must be done by this date. This will take shape as the semester progresses. We will post it to the blog.

**Reflection essay 2** After completing your final deliverable, you will write a reflective essay that imagines an audience outside of this class to whom you will want to communicate what you have gotten out of this class, for instance a future employer, graduate school admissions committee, or fellowship committee. You will be asked to look through reflection essay 1 before writing this essay. Please make sure to narrate challenges that you encountered and how working to address them has helped you
| develop skills, dispositions, or habits of mind that might be portable to other contexts. Be sure to address how working in a multidisciplinary team has contributed to this development. |