

# **Project Framework and Goals 2021-2023**

*"The goal is not to force compliance, which art can never do, but to persuade by creating moving experiences that prompt people to question the world as it is, imagine a world as it could be, and join together to make that new world real."*

– Center for Artistic Activism

The Creative Collective for Change is a para-academic initiative at Dawson College that aims to offer a transformative and inclusive student-centered learning experience. Our aim is to engage Dawson students, faculty and staff, as well as artists and curators from the Montreal community, in participatory projects that explore social issues and positive change. These could take the form of workshops, pop-up exhibits, conference appearances, performances and out-of-gallery exhibits that address the intersections of racism, gender-based violence, poverty, ableism, homophobia, armed violence, ecocide, and systems of colonial violence. With many of us - students and staff alike – struggling to make sense of today's multiple crises, as well as the increasing demands for justice from those harmed by historical and ongoing wrongs, there is real need for educational institutions to take the lead in creating inclusive spaces for conversation and action that seek to foster and sustain our resilience, agency and connection. This project is thus timely - illustrated not only by the many calls from inside and outside of higher education to find meaningful ways to address the legacy that systemic forms of injustice has left on our society, but also in the frequency by which workshops on the issues of diversity and inclusion are requested by faculty.

## 1) Introduction and Background

We do not underestimate the complexities of the challenge ahead. Indeed, this project has taken shape over a number of years, beginning in a winter 2016 Learning Communities (LC) course development project and the subsequent semesters, still ongoing, of team-teaching and working on student-led in-person and virtual art exhibits devoted to raising awareness about complex social issues. These experiences led us to seek ECQ funding from 2018-2020 to transform our classroom teaching approach into a transferable, evidence-based Resist Violence pedagogy, that seeks to engage students intellectually, emotionally, and creatively. Working with an interdisciplinary group of teachers in our Resist Violence CoP, we have created innovative tools to help teachers explore divisive social issues in ways that have the potential to break through psychological resistance and build connections. Alongside our CoP members, we have led numerous conferences and workshops to discuss our approach and gain wider feedback. These include presentations at the AQPC (June 2021), SALTISE (June 2021), CiCan (April 2021), the Intercollegiate Ped Days (Jan 2021), and the LCEEQ (March 2020), with three more planned for the next few months in concert with Dawson's Faculty Hub and SALTISE. This work has created the groundwork needed for a successful launch of the Creative Collective for Change, which is currently financed until spring 2023 by an ECQ Grant.

This new para-academic initiative is embedded in the values of excellence, through a commitment to evidence-based and reflective practice, collaboration, innovation, creativity and inclusivity that are emphasized in Dawson's Strategic Plan. The Creative Collective's prioritization of agency, resilience and connection will positively impact our students, likely those who have been historically disadvantaged, but also the many others struggling to find ways to cope with harmful social media, the ongoing pandemic, and other pressing social and environmental problems. The project will offer needed support to the many faculty who are increasingly uncertain, given the current polarized social climate, about how to address such issues as gender, race and class in the classroom. Finally, it will allow Dawson College to further build on its reputation as an innovator in developing constructive educational responses to some of today's most challenging issues.

# MAIN GOALS

1 To develop and support creative student-centered projects that build inclusive spaces for personal reflection, constructive discussion, and creative problem-solving on today's complex social issues

2 To engage faculty and staff in the exploration and development of depolarizing pedagogical strategies that are transferable across a diversity of disciplines and programs.

# Our Guiding Principles

- Connecting course work and co-curriculars

- Cultivating interdisciplinarity

- Finding connections and embracing complexities

- Engaging our reason, emotions and creativity

- Fostering a sense of critical hope



# Our Guiding Principles

## • Connecting course work and co-curriculars

The Creative Collective will create multiple spaces for cross-disciplinary and cross-course collaboration. Some of our integrative activities may allow students to share a course assignment or in-class collective project in a public venue, while others are co-curricular activities that engage the wider Dawson Community in open participatory activities that engage us meaningfully in the work of social change.

## • Cultivating interdisciplinarity

The project is embedded within an evidence-based, interdisciplinary approach that draws from recent work across different disciplines. These include social psychology (including Forscher, et al., 2017; Cohen and Sherman, 2014; Adams, et al., 2008), educational psychology (Immordino-Yang, 2014), educational philosophy (including Boler, 2014; Zembylas, 2020), social work (such as Fast and Richardson, 2018; Wade, 2007; the Centre for Response-Based Practice), artistic practices (such as c4aa, art21.org) and the theory and practice of nonviolence (Tully, 2018; Vinthagen, 2015). This commitment to interdisciplinarity is also visible through the diverse perspectives and voices that characterize our workshops, exhibits, and presentations.

## • Finding connections and embracing complexities

All activities of the Creative Collective for Change are grounded in the recognition that discussions about issues that privilege some at the expense of others can be uncomfortable for many of us; as such, we are always searching for the nuances, complexities and diversity of our experiences. At its essence, our approach is future-oriented – its emphasis is on our shared (though not equal) complicity in systems of injustice and a collective responsibility to work for change.

# Our Guiding Principles

- Engaging our reason, emotions and creativity

Recognizing the difficulties of breaking through our psychological resistance to new ideas and disturbing realities, we seek to create a variety of entry points – through connecting theory and practice, linking learning in the classroom to the reality of our student's lives, and teaching to foster intellectual growth, emotional understanding and creative expression.

- Fostering a sense of critical hope

The Creative Collective for Change builds spaces where students can experience the shared vulnerability that comes while engaging in the creative process and the empowering sense of making a difference when their art addresses the issues that they care about, thereby making contributions to their personal and academic growth. At its core, this project seeks to build a sense of critical hope – a hope that is not simplistic, but instead based on an understanding of the problems we face and the processes by which positive social change occurs.

# How is the Creative Collective for Change different?

The Creative Collective for change shares the concerns of several other College-wide initiatives, including the Peace Centre, Sustainable Dawson and the various certificates, including Women's/Gender Studies, Peace Studies and the Certificate for Decolonization and Indigenization, that seek to promote a more just and peaceful society. These shared interests, though, do not position the Creative Collective for Change as an alternative to these initiatives, but rather as a valuable partner that brings in a distinctive and relevant area of expertise.

The Collective's roots in the Resist Violence pedagogical development project establishes our unique entry point into educational responses to complex social issues. While the Resist Violence website and Creative Collective's activities aim to deepen our understanding of specific topics, what is unique is our central focus on how we can create constructive spaces inside and outside the classroom to tackle the complex and polarizing issues of today. What does it mean to engage in constructive dialogue? How can we bring multiple voices and stories into our classrooms in a way that recognize the dignity of all? What are the complexities and nuances that we need to keep in mind when addressing these topics?

Essentially, we offer a roadmap, brought out more fully in our recent blog posting, "How to Teach about Complicity in a Resist Violence Classroom," that identifies the risks inherent to such conversations and offers suggestions to reduce the potential for harm. A psychologically sensitive orientation shapes all the work of the Creative Collective, including our pedagogical workshops and creative co-curricular activities and projects. This allows participating faculty and students, often unexpectedly, to discover new dimensions to recent classroom discussions and openings where individual and societal change become possible.

Another contribution of the Creative Collective is its promotion of well-being for all. Again, this is a concern shared by many – from individual faculty seeking to support their students, who in growing numbers report their personal struggles with anxiety and depression, to Dawson's overtaxed counselling and AccessAbility services, from initiatives, like Sustainable Happiness, to community-focused academic ones, such as SPACE and Learning Communities. But as a project that meaningfully engages students on the very issues that contribute to the anxiety and cynicism of our age, the Creative Collective for Change makes a different and arguably essential contribution in our effort to foster deeper empathy, sustain our resilience and build a sense of individual and collective agency.



# Program Development Priorities & Goals (2021-2023)

In Fall 2021, we completed the preliminary work to establish the Creative Collective for Change. We have created a framework for a coherent, accessible and flexible para-academic project, began work on a project website and established a workplan for 2021-2023. We have established and met with our Creative Collective for Change Advisory Committee (including representatives from Dawson faculty, students and staff, as well as the external community) and Alumni Committee (composed of current students and recent graduates); the latter set up to ensure that this project is a student-centered endeavor. We have also began identifying and meeting with different groups from across the College and beyond who will participate in the activities of the Creative Collective for Change as project partners; at this point, these include teachers, college stakeholders, and external artists. See Appendix A for more details.

Our work over the next three semesters will be guided by four priorities that we hope will establish the potential of the Creative Collective for Change and its relevance to Dawson College's commitment to providing transformative and inclusive student-centered learning experiences, engaging and empowering students to become active and responsible citizens, and enriching society through a commitment to peace and well-being for all. These priorities, along with the specific goals that must be met to attain them, are identified and discussed below.

## Priority 1:

### To gain student and faculty engagement with the Creative Collective for Change through multiple entry points.

The Creative Collective for Change will provide multiple entry points for students and teachers at the College. These include workshops – including those with an art creation and/or critical thinking focus, pop-up exhibits, out-of-gallery performances, talks and conferences. The Collective will offer unique co-curricular opportunities that allow teachers to incorporate a creative component in their course work and engage with the larger Dawson Community in meaningful ways. Students, faculty and staff at the college will also find opportunities to participate as individuals in conceptualizing, developing and attending art for social change exhibits.

A main entry point will be an Annual Open Call where we invite faculty, students and staff to submit a proposal for a major art project that aims to reach our hearts and minds. The chosen project or projects will guide the Creative Collective for Change's activities in the next academic year and must include:

- opportunities for cross-disciplinary and ideally cross-course collaboration
- strategies for engaging the wider Dawson Community
- an application of the principles of nonviolence theory through incorporating components of disruption and construction
- an emphasis on creating inclusive spaces that pulls out interconnections and a shared purpose
- a specification of the materials needed to implement the project (we will prioritize impactful projects requiring limited resources)



# Program Development Priorities & Goals (2021-2023)

## Open Call (continued)

Through this call and other openings created through our various activities and events, faculty will also be invited to propose smaller course-based projects that would benefit from the support of the Creative Collective to allow students to share their work in a public venue at the College or in the larger community.

### Specific Goals:

1. To develop and implement a strategy to recruit students and faculty from across the college
2. To hold different Creative Collective events in W22 to spread awareness about the project
3. To launch an open call for proposals in April 2022
4. To identify the main creative project(s), along with key partners for 2022-23 activities

## Priority 2:

To develop and support creative student-led projects that build inclusive and transformative spaces where quiet reflection, constructive discussion, and creative problem-solving are possible

The Creative Collective for Change will provide Dawson students and faculty with inclusive spaces where they can constructively and creatively engage on pressing social problems. At its essence it engages members of the Dawson Community in the work of social change. But while aiming to foster agency and resilience for those of us often overwhelmed by today's worsening crises, we do not underestimate the challenges ahead. With this in mind, we will expect that all participants have some foundational knowledge in the academic work that grounds our vision.

The Collective will provide a variety of ways in which this foundational knowledge can be gained, including participating in a workshop, attending a talk or conference, or interacting in a pop-up discussion/reading group. All participating will need to understand the concept of nonviolence and its perspective on the dynamics of social change, while involved faculty should also have familiarity with the Resist Violence pedagogy, specifically its approach to breaking through psychological resistance and framing divisive social issues in the classroom in ways that allow for open, respectful discussion.

As noted, our commitment is to create a student-centered para-academic project. Students, who have taken courses taught by faculty in the Resist Violence CoP or have participated in Creative Collective art for social change projects in a previous semester, will find additional opportunities in their final semesters (or as recent graduates) to involve themselves more deeply and master skills in problem-solving, communication, collaboration, leadership and social responsibility -- key attributes of the College's graduate profile. These might include sitting on our advisory committee, joining our alumni group, or leading a group of artistic activists in the Creative Collective for Change's yearly activities.

### Specific Goals:

1. To host the selected major creative project(s) for 2022-23
2. To support a cohort of students who are working in curricular and co-curricular projects with the Creative Collective for Change
3. To gain feedback and maintain an archive of the year's projects

# Program Development Priorities & Goals (2021-2023)

## Priority 3

### To create a diversity of spaces where inclusive and depolarizing teaching strategies can be explored

As noted, this para-academic project is rooted in the Resist Violence pedagogy, an evidence-based educational approach that begins from the assumption that teachers seeking to explore divisive social issues will necessarily face resistance from some students. Psychological resistance comes in many forms, including student disengagement and denial, silent dissent, and angry outbursts. The classroom is not necessarily a safe space for everyone, and the risks of harm increases when teachers bring up polarizing issues, particularly those that position people in different relationships of privilege and disadvantage.

The Resist Violence Community of Practice remains an active component of the Creative Collective for Change, continuing to find innovative ways to provide support to teachers seeking effective ways to address such issues as gender, race and class in the classroom. Through Faculty Hub workshops, conference presentations, pop-up exhibits and events, and the Resist Violence website and blog, teachers will have many opportunities to explore this interdisciplinary pedagogical approach. The activities of the Creative Collective will also be a space where cross-disciplinary collaboration can flourish, allowing teachers in more research-based fields to work with those in more creative ones, and vice versa; thus, the Collective will contribute to Dawson's promotion of interdisciplinary and cross-program learning communities.

For more information on the Resist Violence pedagogy, we invite you to consult our website and blog at <http://resist-violence.com>.

#### Specific Goals:

1. To lead, in collaboration with Dawson's Faculty Hub, workshops that support teachers seeking to tackle polarizing social issues in their classrooms
2. To create new curricular and co-curricular opportunities for teachers to integrate the work of nonviolent social change in their classes
3. To create spaces where collaboration between the knowledge-based disciplines and creative ones can flourish
4. To collect and disseminate innovative resources and strategies



# Program Development Priorities & Goals (2021-2023)

## Priority 4

To model an innovative, impactful and sustainable para-academic activity that addresses the challenges faced by higher educational institutions today

Higher educational institutions are facing new demands both from inside and outside their communities to visibly address the deeply rooted ideas and systems that have privileged some at the expense of others. It is also clear that the ongoing pandemic, in addition to today's complex societal and environmental problems and often toxic media culture, are taking a toll on the mental health of us all. Given this, a new para-academic project that offers a sense of "critical hope" is timely. Dawson has long been at the forefront of innovation, and this project has the capacity to build on this tradition.

As well, it should be emphasized that the Creative Collective for Change shares the vision of the College's Strategic Plan and explicitly supports most of the graduate profile outcomes. The Collective offers an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to learning, connecting curricular and co-curricular activities, theory and practice, and intellectual growth, emotional understanding and creative expression, while thoroughly connecting learning in the classroom to the reality of students' lives. Thus, the Creative Collective for Change is embedded with the values of excellence, collaboration, innovation, creativity and inclusivity.

To end, we repeat a recent call made by the Association of American Colleges and Universities for higher educational institutions to develop new "radical pedagogy" that finds ways to invite people into difficult conversations, into processes which are purposeful, and that leave them with agency, an appreciation of our interconnections and a commitment to a shared purpose. Building on Dawson's reputation for the high quality of its arts-based programs and its commitment to peace and sustainability, this project emphasizes both; it is an example of the "radical pedagogy" sought by leading voices in higher education, and as such, its vision of safer spaces where interdisciplinary learning, art creation and social change are combined has value for all colleges and universities, as well as the larger community.

### Specific Goals:

1. To develop and maintain partnerships with external partners in higher education and the larger community
2. To demonstrate the impact of the Creative Collective for Change and ensure its sustainability beyond 2022-2023



# Concluding Comments

This initiative is the result of a collaboration between project leads, Kim Simard and Pat Romano, that began in 2016 with a Learning Communities course development project, but it has been nourished by feedback from our students, as well as the numerous exchanges with colleagues in our Resist Violence Community of Practice and at the workshops and conferences we have given in recent semesters. We conclude with a sampling of their comments.

...I came into the class angry about things that had happened to me, the way in which I was being treated as a survivor of sexual assault, and this class helped me understand where those reactions came from, and helped me find a way to express that anger in a constructive way - Student, Fall 2017

...Thank you for helping me heal. Now I understand how violence works and it helped me be less ashamed as a result of my experience with it. I think the course also taught me how to bring change to the world, and I am happy to know that some teachers are committed to helping students deconstruct harmful ideas. - Student, Winter 2018

As a teacher, I have had many students come to me and say, "OK, I get it, I've learned about these histories of injustice; but now what can I do about it?" Resist Violence asks students this very same question as a part of the curriculum; it is built into the pedagogy. It is difficult to imagine a more valuable and important pedagogical intervention in a student's cegep career, at a time when students are learning about who they are and how they want to be. - CoP Faculty Member, W 2020

Extremely valuable - life changing – Participant at 2020 LCEEQ Conference

You NEED to bring this to more students so they can benefit the same way students in your classes do! – Julia Lijerón, OAD

## APPENDIX A

### Organizational Structures

#### 1. Creative Collective Advisory Committee

In addition to the Creative Collective Leads, Kim Simard and Pat Romano, the advisory committee will include 8-10 other members, including representatives from the following groups:

- faculty members from different disciplines
- current students/alumni who have experience with the Resist Violence pedagogy
- members of the Administration and support staff
- external members who have relevant experience as researchers, curators, and artistic activists

#### Responsibilities

- To develop an annual strategy and workplan to promote and implement the activities of the Creative Collective for Change within Dawson College
- To participate in the selection, conceptualization, critique and progression of each year's proposed major artistic activities.
- To identify emergent issue areas for CCC activities.
- To support outreach efforts and the development of partnerships both within and outside the College, supporting.
- To establish, when relevant, issue-specific working groups

#### Members for 2021-22

Dipti Gupta (Cin-Com faculty member, Dawson College; activist, filmmaker)

Sue Elmslie (English faculty member, Dawson College; Resist Violence CoP; published poet)

Julia Lijeron (Pedagogical Counsellor, Office of Academic Development, Faculty Hub Coordinator, Dawson College)

Michelle Smith (Cin-Com faculty and Journeys Founder, Dawson College; filmmaker)

Geoff Kloos (Coordinator, Student Services, Dawson College)

Alanna Thain (English faculty member, McGill University; Feminist Media Studio)

Téa Castrataro (alumni, Resist Violence Project; artist)

Anthony Bourgeois (alumni, Resist Violence Project; student Dawson College)

Florencia Vallejo (alumni, Resist Violence Project, student and activist, Concordia University)

#### 2. Alumni Group

Our goal is to build a student-driven collective, and with that in mind, an important structure within the Creative Collective for Change is the alumni group, composed of both current students and recent graduates, who have experience with the Resist Violence pedagogy. This group will also provide additional opportunities for Dawson students to master key skills in the College's graduate profile, most particularly, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, leadership and social responsibility.

The alumni group will play a pivotal role in:

- conceptualizing creative projects
- mentoring students in the co-curricular activities of the Collective
- participating in Resist Violence and Creative Collective initiatives

#### 3. Creative Collective for Change Partners

When appropriate, our partners will support, promote and/or participate in the Creative Collective's various student-driven art projects. They include participating teachers, college stakeholders, external artists and curators.

Here is a partial list:

Rhonda Meier, Warren Flowers Gallery

Diana Rice, Dawson Peace Centre

Sustainable Dawson

Alice Havel, Student AccessAbility Centre

Universal Design for Learning CoP

Dawson Certificates

Learning Communities

## APPENDIX B

### Recent and Upcoming Workshops

Dawson College Peace Week – September 15, 2021: Bringing the Theory and Practice of Social Change into the Classroom

Somewhere in a classroom where challenging topics are being addressed, there is a teacher navigating through the cynicism, resistance, and trauma with their students. How can we properly address sexism, racism, and/or painful histories/realities – covering the complexities and encouraging critical thought- without causing harm? This is the thorny garden the Resist Violence community of practice has been growing in. Through a presentation using a "performance art" style, research, and personal experiences, we hope to shed light on our pedagogical approach, the resources we have compiled and created, and engage in a conversation with all in attendance about the ways we can breakthrough silences, anger and denial using interdisciplinary approaches.

Kim Simard, Pat Romano, Sue Elmslie, Anick Legault and Myriam Guirguis

Winter 2022 Faculty Hub Workshop Series – March 4 & March 11: Difficult Conversations: Is there room for making a mistake in the age of "cancel culture"?

"We have to think with nuance, and unfortunately public discourse rarely allows for nuance. And see where that has gotten us."

Roxanne Gay; from an interview with Aida Edemariam, The Guardian, 27 Dec. 2018

Unjust power structures can be challenged or reproduced in the classroom. Harms can be done, traumas triggered, mistakes made, shame inflicted and apologies given. The goal of this workshop is to work through the complexities present when an educator stumbles into the polarizing social issues of today. By exploring some cases of "cancel culture" in institutions of higher education and beyond, we are prompted to ask: are there distinctions to be made between giving offense and doing harm? Do good intentions matter? Can a defense grounded in the right to academic freedom seem dismissive? Is there room for mistakes and forgiveness?

Students and teachers, Creative Collective for Change

SALTISE Webinar – April 1, 2022: Teaching about Complicity: Reflecting on Creativity, Critical Thinking and Social Change

Classroom discussions about privilege and disadvantage are difficult. Harms can be done, traumas triggered, and mistakes made that can leave an impression - valid or not - that unjust power structures are being reproduced in the classroom. The goal of this webinar is to work through the complexities present when an educator stumbles into the polarizing social issues of today. Do intentions matter? How can creativity, critical thinking and social change be integrated into the classroom to minimize the potential for harm, while deepening the learning taking place? And when mistakes are made, what can we learn from nonviolent and reparative approaches to righting wrongs?



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