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## Courageously Fearless

Eric F. Spina  
*University of Dayton*, [efspina@udayton.edu](mailto:efspina@udayton.edu)

Brian LaDuca  
*University of Dayton*, [bladuca1@udayton.edu](mailto:bladuca1@udayton.edu)

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## President's Blog: From the Heart

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- [Blogs at UD](#)
- [President's Blog: From the Heart](#)
- [Courageously Fearless](#)

Thursday May 31, 2018

By Eric F. Spina and Brian LaDuca

(This piece originally appeared on [LinkedIn](#).)

### **We Educate Students to Embrace Failure — Here's Why They'll Change the World**

By Brian LaDuca, Executive Director of the Institute of Applied Creativity for Transformation,  
and  
Eric F. Spina, President of the University of Dayton

The philosophy of Steve Jobs, one of the most creative thinkers and doers in American history, holds a special place at the University of Dayton, which offers the nation's first undergraduate certificate in Applied Creativity for Transformation.

When students and faculty look up at the ceiling in the Institute of Applied Creativity for Transformation, they glimpse these prophetic words from the founder of Apple:

*"Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently — they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do."*

We think that this is a fitting mantra for those of us willing to take a radical approach to teaching and learning in the important quest to prepare the next generation of state-of-the-art thinkers. We begin with this premise: How can we disrupt education for the good?

In what we call a White Box Lab, students from majors across the University of Dayton are channeling the most creative version of themselves on projects that benefit the common good in areas like social justice, health and wellness, economic development, and education. Every time they walk into this room, they're risking failure. In fact, they're not afraid to fail because they are beginning to realize that's often the seed for the most effective innovation.

Our students pursuing the certificate in applied creativity for transformation are researching urban farming techniques in an effort to improve food security and prevent oral diseases. They're finding ways to help doctors combat compassion fatigue as they work with people with addiction. In response to the growing number of people with autism, they're exploring how airports can assist these travelers in a more compassionate way.

We believe that every student should take at least one course in innovation, humanity-centered applied creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking. This new certificate program is an important step in testing that vision.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are not unusual programs on college campuses, but applied creativity gives educators pause. Can it even be taught?

We believe so. It's a mindset. To be successful in today's fast-paced, ever-changing world, college graduates need to cultivate their ability to be creative and imaginative — and even playful. Here are six ways to do just that:

- Embrace ambiguity — To raise your hand because you have the answer is common. To raise your hand because you have more questions is confidence.
- Seek empathy — When we question others, we seek additional insights into their personal experiences that can corroborate our understanding of their truth.
- Learn through the lens of failure — To learn from the imperfect moments of the human experience catalyzes the learning in unexpected ways.
- Celebrate little wins in anticipation of bigger wins down the road — Learning in the face of failure is additive, demanding the unexpected knowledge be confidently reapplied to create deeper, sustainable impact.
- Realize this is a marathon, not a sprint — Unlike brainstorming, sustained creativity requires a mindset that realizes authentic change takes time and discipline — an approach that combats innovation fatigue.
- Be courageously fearless — The collective actions that make us human are messy and ever-changing. We must educate by empowering the unknown and create value around people and their purposes.

In the University of Dayton's Institute of Applied Creativity for Transformation, we're not teaching students to just think outside the box. Faculty from multiple disciplines are working with students from all majors to develop the creative confidence to believe they can change the world — for the better.