Hints on Proposing a Psychedelics Course in Higher Education

Dear XYZ,

I thought I had a copy of my chapter "You Teach What? Where?" to attach, but I can't find it on my computer. It's about my psychedelics course at Northern Illinois Univ. and is in *The Psychedelic Future of the Mind*.

My suggestions on proposing a course are (in pretty random fashion):

Professors like provocative questions. So a good tactic would be to mention some of the main research now being done and ask, "What are the implications of (name of department discipline) for psychedelic study?"  Or, "What insights does (discipline) offer to this field?"  Or, mention some leaders in the discipline of the department you're approaching and/or several ideas that are central to the field.

Conversely, you may want to cite a provocative finding and ask, "Are there implications of this for \_\_\_\_\_?"

I'm assuming that you'll be proposing a course in one or another academic department, so you'll want to present your proposal from its perspective.

Of, if you are proposing an interdisciplinary course, say in the Honors Program, where I taught mine, you'll want to show how truly interdisciplinary psychedelic studies. The chapter I send earlier as an attachment has lots of information along interdisciplinary lines. Chapter 1 in *The Psychedelic Policy Quagmire*.

My syllabus, which I guess you've seen, exemplifies this: <https://www.academia.edu/4043231/syllabus_2013_Foundations_of_Psychedelic_Studies>

This course was for honors students from many departments, so it was general and introductory. As you know, almost every academic field has its psychedelic strands, so every department might easily have its several syllabuses.

Although professor and administrators like to think they are at the leading edge of a new field, one of the first questions they'll ask is, "Is anybody else teaching this topic?" What they are looking for is a way to protect their asses. A good way to look legitimate is to cite some of the institutions where research is going on. The implied answer is, "If they are doing it, so can we."

Of course, Johns Hopkins, NYU Langone Med. School and so forth are looking at medical topics, but you can ask, "What, if anything, are the implications of their findings for \_\_\_\_\_?"

Another justifying background is to point out all the current interest in the general press, especially publicly respected periodicals. There are plenty of these. "With the public recognizing these current advances, can the academic world contribute to this public forum?"

As you know from the Hopkins studies, meaningfulness, spirituality, and open-mindedness are topics that reach far beyond medicine.

My course started, as many do, as a one-shot topical class. Once established that way, I offered it that way for about 2 decades until my Ass’t. Chair asked me to submit it as a cataloged course. It took a couple tries to get through our College Curriculum Committee, but persistence is not hard when one is dedicated.

I was happy to leave it as a special topics course for so long, but curricular things are moving much faster now and, I assume, for that topic.

If/when you receive questions about the appropriateness of a class on psychedelics, I suggest seeing it as an opportunity to educate the questioner.  At first, I felt hostile and got on my high horse, but these are well-meaning questions from concerned people who are still from the Just Say Know generation.

In trying to convince/answer possible objections, I suggest giving the person only one article, then one at a time more if necessary. I would start with the article by Griffiths and Grob in *Scientific American* in Dec. 2010. See [www.csp.org/psilocybin](http://www.csp.org/psilocybin) for details and to make a copy and to find other supporting articles.

Handing a pack of article, chapters, etc. makes them more likely to be “put away till later.”

Again, your questioner may want to have an answer ready if he/she is criticized. Again, a protect-your-ass move by administrators. The *SciAm* is a justifying shield for them.

A good tactic may be to talk to a faculty member to get his/her ideas on your draft proposal, get help in making edits, and that way possibly recruit him/her as an ally.

Your university or department probably has a standard proposal format for one-time topical study courses, and/or for establishing a course permanently.

It is common for a new topic to have a tryout period as a one-off special topics course.  Then after it has shown its worth, move to a cataloged course.

I hope these ideas help.  That's it for now.

Good luck,

Tom Roberts