PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS OF TOPICS FOR WSP 216:  
THE ART OF PERSEVERANCE

The course is designed to help participants devise and practice strategies in areas of professional performance or personal development where initial motivation gives way to lack of follow-through and sustained effort. Do you have trouble maintaining enthusiasm and steady progress through the middle stages of reaching a goal? Do you start projects but fail to finish them? In either case, you can learn new behaviors and increase your ability to persist past obstacles.

The course has three objectives:

- To identify the dynamics of resistance and show how to counteract them
- To strengthen self-regulation and positivity using research from neuroscience, psychology, and creativity studies
- To customize and practice strategies that yield self-respect and goal achievement

First Saturday Content

The day will be divided into 5 periods with an hour for lunch and short breaks. In each period, I’ll do some talking on an aspect of our topic, I’ll give out a handout for reflection and writing, and we'll debrief in small groups or the whole group. The first Saturday’s topics are:

- Enthusiasm builds a fire, but perseverance keeps it going. We will look at why intrinsic motivation and autonomy over how you achieve your goal are vital to success. Research on the human drive to experiment and learn suggests ways to close the gap between ignition and completion.
- Ancient arts such as aikido and emerging brain research describe rules of mastery and deep practice. We will identify habits that support and strengthen expertise and resilience.
- Learning to persevere requires understanding the hows and whys of resistance, which writer Steven Pressfield calls “the most toxic force on the planet.” We will examine and put in practice the many ways resistance can be countered and left behind.
- We all have what Julie Morgenstern calls “habit treasures,” counterproductive but cherished behaviors. We also all have destructive mental habits of self-criticism. We will look at how making your mind your friend strengthens perseverance.
- Mark Twain wrote, “A habit cannot be tossed out the window. It must be coaxed down the stairs a step at a time.” We will design small-step changes to practice for a week.

The second Saturday will be custom-designed for the particular needs of the group, using the results of a brief survey I’ll hand out right before the end of class on the first Saturday.