

VIRGINIA TECH HONORS COLLEGE

SUPERSTUDIO

WHAT'S SUPERSTUDIO?

In Spring 2020, the Virginia Tech Honors College, in collaboration with the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) and University Studies, was able to launch SuperStudio. For the next few semesters, topics courses in environmental policy, healthcare, emerging technologies, the future of higher education, and the future of employment will all meet together to examine the possibilities and implications of a Green New Deal, an emerging framework for understanding and addressing interconnected crises in climate change and economic equality.

HOW SUPERSTUDIO WORKS

Solutions to complex social and environmental problems require the synthesis and integration of multiple disciplines, perspectives, and ideologies. This SuperStudio brings together students from a range of academic backgrounds and interests to identify and explore connections and contours within complex problems, and propose innovative policy and design solutions. **The SuperStudio is a project-based transdisciplinary experience** that consists of a 1-credit integrative module (UH 4514) and a 3-credit specialized topics section (UH 4504 or UAP 4914). The topic sections represent



interrelated themes within the **Green New Deal**, which must be understood as parts of complex historical, social, and cultural contexts. Through development of their chosen interest-based team project, **students will gain practical experience in critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, collaboration, and communication**, skills that are gaining importance in an increasingly transdisciplinary professional world.



THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment of SuperStudio is designed to be **highly energized, engaging, and collaborative**. Faculty and students rotate among the topics courses, which meet simultaneously in the same studio space, and all come together once a week to consider issues and processes that apply to all transdisciplinary work, such as ethics, equity, policy, problem framing, and innovation. This encourages students to work across topics sections to explore connections among their subjects and approaches, consider the challenges to such broadly collaborative efforts, and pursue the possibility of coordinated problem-solving.

By allowing different sections to work together and meet across topics for common activities, SuperStudio provides plenty of opportunities for students to develop critical skills and knowledge. **“I really enjoyed the experience of being in a big room with all the sections and being able to meet each day of the week in different sections,”** said Thomas Miller in the Future of Higher Education section. “We would team up with other sections and kind of combine the ideas that allowed for everyone to experiment with what they were thinking about. So, you would be pushed to think about your own ideas about your topic in different ways. It’s a way to meld ideas together to have a cool discussion.”

Students are encouraged to frame problems, synthesize and integrate issues within a complex problem space, and effectively communicate their ideas. The course’s interest-based team project provides an opportunity to more deeply explore a problem in an intentionally structured process that includes peer and mentored-feedback during the second half of the semester. SuperStudio’s visiting speaker series allows students to interact with experts in topics related to the Green New Deal. **In Spring 2020, SuperStudio had the pleasure of speaking with British Economics and Politics Commentator Grace Blakeley, author of “Stolen: How to Save the World from Financialization.”** Readings for the week included a chapter of Blakeley’s book, allowing for a grounded discussion, framed by student questions which covering topics that ranged from how to “hack” financialization to advice on where to study heterodox economics.

