Design Thinking for Social Innovation

During the course students will (1) look at the role of design and proven practices and frameworks from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to identify “root cause” problems; (2) understand the roles, skills, and methods that are often used to leverage change in existing social, legal, environmental, and technological systems; and (3) experiment with the ways that multidisciplinary teams in a variety of contexts can advance social enhancements through innovation. In the second half of the course, students will build on earlier work and intensify their use of design methodologies to conceptualize a solution to a specific Pittsburgh-based problem with implications on policy creation and/or change.

As a result of this course, students will be able to:

+ Obtain a foundational understanding of social innovation; design-research methods and practices; the role of local economies and ecosystems; and the formation of real world, evidence-based public policy.
+ Gain perspectives on affecting large-scale social impact at the local, regional, national and international levels through a variety of guest lectures, readings and case studies.
+ Learn how to design, prototype, test, and pitch a self-directed concept for an innovative solution to a pressing societal issue.

About this course

In this combined lecture and lab course, students will gain a sense of the history, current state, and future of social innovation with an emphasis on design thinking, and the current role public policy and new economies have in shaping and defining conditions for change. This systems thinking approach, when applied to challenges at a societal scale, recognizes the relationship between local, regional, national, and international concerns. And, the need to inform through verifiable research and evidence the role that crafters of public policy and design can have in promoting social change

While some participants may aspire to directly implement practical solutions to social problems in the “real world”, the course content is applicable to a wide variety of contexts in the public, private, and social sectors. Through a variety of group exercises, directed working sessions, guest lectures by subject matter experts, readings, and case studies, students will be guided through an intensive, four-phased learning process:

Explore the terrain: Applying human centered design thinking and methods—Foundational lectures, discussions, and hands-on workshops—combined with a review and consolidation of precedent research and work supporting the definition and scope of social innovation. During this phase, you will begin developing ideas for a team-based project.

Make sense of the terrain: Understanding the issue deeply by validating the human centered design approach.
Case studies will be presented by several guests, in parallel with discussions and work sessions devoted to the development of your team project, with scheduled reviews and consultations. An interim presentation (“a mid-term check-in”) will be delivered at the end of this phase to provide an opportunity for more detailed feedback on your project.

Propose new ideas at the intersection of design, social innovation and community.
This phase is about learning to develop effective participatory design methods that help you better understand the scope of your problem. It is also about getting out there and testing your ideas and assumptions with stakeholders.
Build ideas: The Impact lab
An intensified focus on solution development, with instructor reviews and consultation, culminating in a presentation and celebration of student work at the end of the semester. The goal is for all students to produce thought-provoking, practical outcomes affecting a particular issue resulting from both individual and collective contributions. There will be ample opportunity for students to distinguish themselves through participation, reflections on assigned readings and experiences, and the completion of various assignments contributing to the final team-based project.

Our collective challenge for the semester
Given the diversity of the class and experimental nature of the course itself, we expect students to be at different stages of “understanding” at the start of the semester. Some will have already taken one or more classes related to social innovation or have experience in the field. Others will be well versed in the intricacies and challenges of design. There may be some with practical policy development and implementation experience.

A few may be largely new to many or all of the concepts covered in the course. No one will be expert in all aspects of the course, reinforcing the need to work collectively and effectively with others, as well as taking an active role in your personal development. We will all need to be patient and supportive of each other regardless of where individuals might be along any of these dimensions. Consider this class to be a “safe haven”, a place where experimentation, and thinking outside of conventional boundaries happens. We have purposefully designed the class so you can learn more about yourself and ways of working, and learn from others outside of your discipline. In short, we hope that this course will arm you with the tools, and confidence necessary to have a significant impact on your future career whatever it may be.

Take care of yourself and others
Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at www.cmu.edu/counseling. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that can help.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal or in danger of self-harm, call someone immediately, day or night:
CaPS: 412-268-2922
Res:olve Crisis Network: 888-796-8226
If the situation is life threatening, call the police
On campus: CMU Police: 412-268-2323
Off campus: 911

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you have a disability and are registered with the Office of Disability Resources, we encourage you to use their online system to notify us of your accommodations and discuss your needs with us as early in the semester as possible. We will
work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, we encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

Required readings
The readings for this course are a compilation of some of the most influential learning artifacts from the various disciplines, faculty and guest lecturers. Please afford yourself enough time during the week to read, question and reflect on the provided materials.

We are on Canvas
You should not rely solely on this source for course information; however, please check it for regular handouts, readings and assignments, particularly if you have missed a class for any reason.

Course requirements and performance
We place a great deal of importance on student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and student-to-guest presenter interaction during this course, and everyone’s contributions are vital to the success of the class. Please feel free asking questions, conducting out-of-class discussions, and helping each other when possible. Collaborating will likely generate more interesting and impactful ideas, and will model the work environments of some of the world’s most innovative organizations.

Assignments and criteria for grading (See calendar for due dates)
The mean grade in the class will likely be around 3.5, a standard for elective courses, although we are more than willing to depart from those guidelines based on extraordinary (or very ordinary) performance from the class. Grades in the “A+” range will be reserved for students who perform exceptionally well in all aspects of the course.

You will complete a phased Impact Lab project in teams, based on a topic of your choosing, in consultation with the instructors and with feedback from the class. Details for each phase of the project will be completed as a separate assignment. There are several key dates related to project submissions:

+ Workbook assignments (turn in as a group with process documentation)
  15% of overall course grade
  Criteria for grading workbook assignments
  Degree that workbook contents are clear, complete and compelling (30%), reflects rigorous research and effort (40%), and displays creativity and distinctiveness (30%).

+ Mid-term checkpoint
  25% of overall course grade
  Criteria for grading midterm checkpoint and team project brief:
  Submission is clear, complete and compelling (30%), reflects rigorous research (40%), and displays creativity and distinctiveness (30%).

+ Round robin review presentation (5% of overall course grade)
  5% of overall course grade
  Each team will create a presentation and support materials that reflect the current state of their work. Please be prepared to describe the content, design decisions, goals, and any other relevant aspects of the project. Teams can use this “dry run” to shape their work for the rest of the semester and final deliverables. Teams should be prepared to address, for example, need for partners, speed of implementation, inclusivity, capacity and readiness, and degree of innovation for proposed solutions.
**Final review of The Impact Lab**

35% of overall course grade

Time to convince key stakeholders (e.g., policy makers, community leaders, funders and investors, the media, corporate bigwigs) that a change to a complex system affecting social well being is required now, and your unique insights into the problem put your team in a position to propose a solution. Teams will present their impact projects at a public session currently scheduled for final exam week. All final deliverables (see Cumulus 2020 Entry) should be posted to Canvas final grading.

Criteria for grading The Impact Lab

Team submission is clear, complete and compelling (25%), connected to course concepts and readings (15%), reflects rigorous research (40%), is creative and distinctive (20%).

**Class participation and personal professionalism**

20% of overall course grade

Your attitude—attendance, meeting deadlines, contributions to class discussions, dealing constructively with criticism, exhibiting a full sense of commitment to this class and your work—will be a key element in your evaluation.

Your participation—does not entail simply answering when spoken to. Informed discussions are critical to the learning process and will make this class much more interesting and fun for all of us. Each student is expected to volunteer substantive comments freely.

Your quality (versus quantity) of work—will be determined by an assessment of your contributions.

Absences of any kind are strongly discouraged as your learning and work will be adversely affected by the information and activities you miss. Be punctual, arriving just before the class start time so we can begin sessions promptly, and stay for the duration of each class. If you are perpetually late or always leave class early for no apparent reason, your class participation grade will be significantly affected. Three absences will cause your final grade to drop a letter. Six absences will likely result in a failing grade for the course.

Please attempt to schedule doctor’s appointments, interviews, etc. for times other than class sessions. In the event that you encounter a health or life issue that requires you to miss class (such as a physician providing you with instructions that necessitate your quarantine) please notify us as soon as possible to provide an idea of the severity of your illness/issue and the length of time needed for recovery. Keep in mind, you are responsible for information you miss through absences or lateness. (Note: If your illness/issue requires recovery time that exceeds the absence policy for a passing grade, a leave of absence may need to be considered. If this becomes the case consultation with university resources on how best to support you may be necessary.)

Lastly, a review is scheduled for this course during finals week. Failure to attend and participate in this session, without prior approval, will cause your final grade to drop a letter. Please bring academic timing conflicts to our attention as soon as possible and do not make travel plans before verifying the date of the event with us.

Criteria for grading participation and personal professionalism (applied in each class session)

Absent from class = –10; after missing three classes, your grade drops by a letter grade with further penalties for additional absences

In attendance, but makes no contribution = +5

In attendance and participates in the class discussion = +7

In attendance and makes substantial contributions to the class discussion = +10
We will make every attempt to involve every student in this process, but it is possible that we may consistently overlook a potential contributor. Please bring this to our attention. This process may be considered somewhat subjective but, through our collective efforts, we can ensure that it is fair.

**Some criteria for effective class participation are:**
- Is there a willingness to participate and is the participant also a good listener?
- Are the points made relevant to the discussion and linked to the comments of others?
- Are comments well thought out, show evidence of rigorous analysis?
- Do the comments clarify, highlight, and synthesize important aspects of earlier comments and lead to a clearer statement of the concepts being covered or to new knowledge/insights?
- Do the comments identify overlooked points and points that turn out to be influential in further discussion?

Cell phones should be turned off. If there is a situation where you need to be able to receive a call during class, you should use the “silent” mode on your phone and quietly leave the room when a call comes in. Laptop computers are permitted to be open during class but note that it’s relatively easy to identify when students are using devices for non-class-related activities. We reserve the right to ask that laptops be closed at any time and to call on any student using a laptop in class.

We greatly appreciate students arriving on time for class. Please let us know beforehand if you must leave class early. Be respectful of others and generally treat your conduct in this class the same way you would in any other professional situation.

No student may record or tape any classroom activity without our express written consent. If a student believes that he/she is disabled and needs to record or tape classroom activities, he/she should contact the Office of Disability Resources to request an appropriate accommodation. Thanks in advance for your efforts to create a class environment that works for everyone.

**Cheating and plagiarism**
No grade is worth sacrificing your personal integrity. Students bear responsibility for being familiar with generally accepted practices governing bibliographic research and citations of resource materials (including web resources) in all written and presented assignments. Cases of cheating, plagiarism, and unauthorized collaboration will be handled in accordance with the University's policy on academic integrity.

CMU Policy on Academic Integrity at: [http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents academic integrity.htm](http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents academic integrity.htm)

Professor(s) and/or Program Director(s)
Intercultural Communications Center (Warner Hall 418)