Design Thinking: A creative approach to problem solving and creating impact

Instructors

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Overview

The word “design” has traditionally been used to describe the visual aesthetics of objects, including books, websites, products, interiors, architecture, and fashion. But increasingly, the definition of design has broadened to include not just outcomes but a process as well. Design Thinking is an iterative approach that begins with a well-defined problem and employs a variety of design-based methodologies and tools to address virtually any type of organizational or business challenge—including those within public service.

In Design Thinking: A creative approach to problem solving and creating impact, we will examine each step of the design process and the methods and tools that make up a designer’s toolkit. We will learn how to apply this approach to key contemporary public-service issues and find innovative ways to create impact.

Similar to the design environment, this course is comprehensively team-based and extremely collaborative. We’ll alternate lecture style classes with collaborative, team-based work-sessions where teams will receive feedback from instructors, special guests, and importantly, from their peers. Students will leave the course with the foundational skills necessary to approach problem solving flexibly across contexts.

Course Structure and Logistics

Pre-Requisite
Managing Public Service Organizations (MPSO)

Dates / Time / Location

Wednesdays, September 4–December 4, 2013
6:45-8:25 p.m.
Building WAVE — Room 569

Teams

The class will be broken up into interdisciplinary teams of 4-5. Teams will be composed during our first session. The first homework assignment asks students to select a design challenge which they will hone in on with their teams and work on for the remainder of the course.

Design Challenges

The design challenges will address complex issues within the public service sector here in New York City. Examples of past design challenge topics include:

- How might we improve unemployment and provide job services for New Yorkers?
- How might we make New York a healthy city with a focus on the preventative & proactive?
- What might the future of transportation and mobility look like in NYC?
- How might we build community for social entrepreneurship in NYC?
- What might the future of public education look like in NYC?
- How might we foster sustainable living in the communities of NYC?
More specific details around this year’s design challenges will be discussed in the first class.

**Project Blog**

Each team will create a project blog and will be asked to update it weekly. During each class, teams will be asked to present findings or inspiration via comment on other team’s blog posts at every

The project blog will be the central communication vehicle for the team. Each week, teams will be asked to write a blog post about their design challenge, based on where we are in the design process. For example, during the ‘Design Research and Inspiration’ phase, teams may write a post about the things they are seeing in the world that are inspiring for their project. During the ‘Prototyping’ phase, teams may post pictures about their current prototypes and feedback they are receiving in response.

**Final Presentation**

The final presentation will be the key deliverable for this course. Each week, students will learn different tools, processes, and ways of thinking that build toward this final. Although each group’s presentation content and form will be different from one another, the design thinking involved in each presentation will need to be clearly articulated. As we will learn throughout the course, this will include:

- Articulation of the design challenge
- Actionable insights based on the design research conducted
- Key themes and opportunity areas identified from the insights
- Visualized concepts that address the opportunity areas
- A compelling, human-centered narrative that ties all the points above together

**Grades**

Students will be graded on their interim and final presentations as well as their participation in class and on their blog. Grading is based on NYU’s universal criteria:


The breakdown is as follows:

**Grade Breakdown:**
20% Class Participation and Attendance
20% Blog Entries
20% Interim Presentation
40% Final Presentation

**Course Readings (Required)**

Change By Design by Tim Brown is required reading for the class. In addition, each week, a set of short articles and/or videos relevant to each phase of the design process will be assigned.

Weekly articles may include, but are not limited to, the following. We will let you know which articles to read for specific classes during the course:

“Design Thinking” | Tim Brown
“Design Matters” | Richard J. Boland Jr. and Fred Collopy
“Informing Our Intuition” | Jane Fulton Suri
“Prototyping is Shorthand of Design” | Tom Kelley
“Ira Glass on Storytelling” | Ira Glass
Recommended Readings (Optional)

- Made to Stick | Chip and Dan Heath
- Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard | Chip and Dan Heath
- Herd: Change Mass Behavior by Harnessing Our True Nature | Mark Earl
- Drive | Daniel Pink
- Nudge | Richard Thaler & Cass Sunstein
- The Lean Startup | Eric Ries

Weekly Course Breakdown (Subject to change)

Pre-Course Reading:
Change by Design | Tim Brown
Please arrive at first class session prepared to discuss the concepts in these reading.

September 4, 2013
Week 1: Introduction to Design Thinking | Framing the Challenge

September 11, 2013
Week 2: Group work and feedback session

September 18, 2013
Week 3: Design Research + Inspiration
Visiting lecturer — TBD

September 25, 2013
Week 4: Group work and feedback session

October 2, 2013
Week 5: Synthesis + Opportunity Finding
Visiting lecturer — TBD

October 9, 2013
Week 6: Group work and feedback session

October 16, 2013
Week 7: Brainstorming + Prototyping
Visiting lecturer — TBD

October 23, 2013
Week 8: Group work and feedback session

October 30, 2013
Week 9: Storytelling Visiting lecturer — TBD

November 6, 2013
Week 10: Group work and feedback session

November 13, 2013
Week 11: TBD Visiting lecturer — TBD

November 20, 2013 (optional)
Week 12: Group work and feedback session

November 27, 2013
Week 13: Final Presentations

December 4, 2013
Week 14: Final Presentations

December 11, 2013
Week 15: Final Presentations (if necessary)