

Civic Media Methods CM-622-0

Thursdays 10am - 1:45pm

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Office hours: Thursdays 2-3 pm at the Engagement Lab, or by appointment

Course description

This course introduces concepts, methods, and practices of participatory design. Class is premised upon learning and practicing participatory design methods that draw from a range of disciplines including anthropology, design, sociology, and civic media. Participatory design is an interdisciplinary field of research and intervention that moves traditional design practices to be more inclusive, participatory and democratic by including in the research and design process stakeholders who will be affected by design. Best practices and methods follow a human-centered design mindset that takes into account diversity and designing for the widest possible spectrum of stakeholders. Second, participatory design methods do not assume to know the problem or full scope of an issue ahead of time but rather gradually unfold and define problems to solve in a collaborative manner.

The Fall 2018 version of this course is going to be focused on working with two external partners on a project funded by the Online News Association (ONA). We will be partnering with MuckRock, a non-profit data & news organization that helps journalists and others undertake FOIA requests, as well as the Boston Institute for Nonprofit Journalism (BINJ). Partners at BINJ and MuckRock will help us set the stage for our participatory design projects and act as some of our stakeholders. It will be incumbent upon project teams, along with assistance from your instructor and each other, to identify, map out, and, if possible, communicate with additional stakeholders in the problem spaces we define.

The final projects you present will be shared with BINJ, MuckRock, and the Engagement Lab.

Course outcomes

At the end of this course, students will:

- Articulate and call upon a variety of participatory design methods for defining and solving social problems
- Discuss and account for ethical issues around design including inclusive and universal design
- Participate in and run design workshops, stakeholder meetings, and scoping projects
- Design and deliver appropriate and useful solutions based on participatory design processes

Course Requirements and Structure

This is a practice based studio course, and class time will primarily be spent working on design projects, research, data analysis, method development, and discussion. Students will work in teams of three. Thus your presence and participation is essential.

The course is broken into three phases – Empathize, Ideate, and Prototype – each of which will be further unpacked as we move into them.

At the end of each phase

- Your group will present your process and outcomes to the class
- You will individually write a personal reflection

One of the major deliverables of this class will be contributing to a Participatory Design Process book. Since this class is focused largely on process, you are expected and required to capture your daily and weekly progress. Take pictures, screenshots, sketches, audio notes, etc., of everything your team does and produces. This will make reflecting on your process easier, but also for crafting an understanding of your design process through the semester.

Readings and Course Materials

There are no required textbooks for this course, and all reading materials will be made available in the corresponding week in Canvas. Please note, because participatory design is an organic process, the readings and syllabus/calendar are subject to change depending on project needs. When and if this happens, Professor Gamwell will let the class know ahead of time. As you get to know the participatory design process, you may come to intuit when something needs to change as well.

Suggested Books and Readings for Creativity:

[Graphic Design Thinking \(Links to an external site.\)Links to an external site.](#) by Ellen Lupton

[Design is Storytelling \(Links to an external site.\)Links to an external site.](#) by Ellen Lupton

[dschool bootleg_deck_2018_final_sm.pdf](#)  Stanford d.School Design Bootleg Methods

This list will update through the semester.

Supplies

Since we're located in the Engagement Lab, there are likely a number of supplies we can use on hand. Nonetheless, please make sure to have:

- Sharpies
- Stickies/post-it notes
- Digital camera or smartphone for recording daily and weekly processes
- Binder or folder for handouts
- Emerson email account and Canvas access

Assignments and Assessment

As graduate students working on a professional degree, your active participation and demonstration of engaged learning is more important getting an answer "right." I also subscribe to the philosophy that active engagement with learning is more important than grades. As if often the case with design, there are multiple correct ways of doing something. But some are better than others because they are based on rigorous research, appropriate methodologies, and providing a positive outcome for stakeholders. Our work this semester will be on learning multiple methods and practices for approaching, understanding, and solving civic problems around information access, journalism, and community-based stories. It will be at times frustrating, confusing, and, almost always, messy. Just the way design should be. And this is what this course assesses. In short, assessment in this class is based primarily on demonstrating evidence of engaging course materials, building an inclusive design practice, and producing appropriate deliverables.

Grade breakdown

10% Attendance

20% Phase 1 Team Presentation

5% Phase 1 Individual Reflection

20% Phase 2 Team Presentation

5% Phase 2 Individual Reflection

20% Phase 3 Team Presentation

5% Phase 3 Individual Reflection

15% Process Book Final

= 100%

Most assignments will be graded on a 1-5 point scale based on categories such as demonstrating empathy, clear communication, boldness of ideas, and making appropriate distinctions. These will be delineated as part of each assignment.

Please note that poor attendance or excessive lateness, or late assignments may negatively affect your grade beyond the weighting above.

Course Design Challenge

Now, for the good stuff. In this course you will be engaging with a semester long Participatory Design social innovation project. A social innovation is “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions.” (Stanford Center for Social Innovation). Participatory design draws upon the expertise, knowledge, and perspectives of stakeholders in addition to the designers themselves. In this course we will work with industry partners as participants and stakeholders. Through interaction with them you will define key problem areas, generate empathy, journey maps and personas. With these in hand, you will then develop problem statements and potential solutions, followed by prototypes of the solutions.

Participatory design is best taught through doing and practice. Thus while the course will have some readings each week, we will treat the class like a studio in which we converse, work through ideas together and build out participatory design projects. This semester we are partnering with the Boston Institute for Nonprofit Journalism (BINJ) and MuckRock.

Check out:

- <http://www.binjonline.org/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.
- <https://medium.com/binj-reports> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.
- <https://www.muckrock.com/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

Your task will be to design a new experience or service that enhances stakeholders' lives on a day to day basis. To accomplish this, we will move through many of the methods of Participatory Design to understand how to craft solvable research problems by learning from real people in meaningful ways. In other words, your design projects will be crafted in consultation with real people who will help you define the parameters of who you are designing for and whether your service or experience is likely to be appropriate.

Participatory Design is built on a Human Centered mindset, meaning the experience and wellbeing of people, sometimes called 'users' or 'stakeholders' is paramount to problem definition and solution finding. The design challenges in this class will draw from values like Inclusive and Universal Design, which we will define in class. You will also orient your design challenges towards a group of people that is different from you and your peers (i.e. different generations, class, abilities, language speakers). The purpose of this is to have students understand how to apply Participatory Design and research in unfamiliar scenarios. This will challenge often unconscious assumptions and biases, and as such the

classroom will be run as a safe space where we can explore differences with patience, respect, and open minds.

Class Project Schedule

Below is a description of each phase, along with a rough schedule to guide you through our 14 weeks together.

Phase 1 - Empathy (5 weeks)

Phase one is about conducting research and making sense of data. Your goal, as a team, is to get to know a group of people and problems that were previously unfamiliar to you. At the end of this phase, your team is expected to demonstrate empathy for people and insights around problems individuals face, as it relates to your chosen project area. Your phase one presentation is tentatively scheduled for Thursday October 4th. In this presentation, your team will share 2-3 user personas that are a reflection of your research and data analysis.

Week 1: September 6th

- Introduction to Participatory Design, Thinking & Research, Design Sprints, Methods

Week 2: September 13th - Partner Visit #1

- Intro to Partner Orgs, Problems they work on; ID areas of overlap for projects
- Secondary Research, Identify patterns, Affinity Clusters
- Michael Morisy (MuckRock) and Chris Farone (BINJ) coming in at 11 am

Week 3: September 20th - Problem Framing

- Observational Research + Interviewing, Empathy Development, Stakeholder Mapping, Persona Generation

Week 4: September 27th - Problem Framing 2

- Data analysis, Empathy Development, Stakeholder Mapping, Persona Generation, contd.

Week 5: October 4th - Phase 1 Presentations

- Teams present their research findings and problem statements, demonstrating their ability to connect with their people group and identify a core set of values, behaviors and goals as presented through User Personas.
Phase 1 Design Reflection is due.

Phase 2 - Ideation (4 weeks)

Phase two is about framing the problem space and brainstorming a broad set of solutions. At the end of this phase your group is expected to narrow in on a single concept that you'll prototype in Phase 3. Grading will be based on the quantity as well as the quality of ideas explored and your ability to articulate both what your new product concept is and why it's the "right" solution for your user group. Phase 2 presentations are set for November 1st.

Week 6: October 11th

- Generating Problem Statements/How Might We

Week 7: October 18th (Possible Partner Visit or Fieldwork in Community)

- Use divergent and convergent thinking to alternative between generating and organizing ideas; Thumbnail and Gallery Sketches
- Generating possible solutions with stakeholders

Week 8: October 25th

- Further develop sketches, Process Review: share progress with other teams, get feedback, revise
- Develop Thumbnail Sketches of top ideas

Week 9: November 1st - Phase 2 Presentations

- Teams present their top 3 concepts, clearly articulating how the proposed solutions address the problem statements and personas from Phase 1.

Phase 3 - Prototype and Validate (4 weeks)

Phase 3 is about envisioning future possibilities through a process of rapid prototyping, validating, and iterating. Students should demonstrate a bias towards action as they attempt to solve problems, ask for feedback, and quickly move to the next iteration. At the end of this phase, students should have a polished presentation of their proposed solution, which includes images of your prototype and demonstrates how the proposed solution would be used. Phase 3 presentations are set for December 6th. Final Process Book deliverables are due December 17th.

Week 10: November 8th

- Phase 2 Design Reflection is due.
- Storyboarding, Role Playing solutions

Week 11: November 15th

- Prototyping

Week 12: November 22nd (No Class Thanksgiving Holiday)

Week 13: November 29th

- Prototyping

Week 14: December 6th (Last day of Class) - Phase 3 Presentations (Possible Partner visit, other Emerson CMAP faculty)

- Present your final product concept, demonstrate how it would be used, and articulate why it's the ideal solution. Phase 3 Design Reflection is due.

Process Book Write up Due 12/17