



ARTS 549 801 40670 / User-Centered Design Experience
COURSE SYLLABUS: Summer 1 2026

Instructor: Raul Varela

Class Meeting Times: Monday & Wednesday 6:30pm - 10:30pm (6/1/2026 through 7/2/2026)

Class Meeting Location: 8750 N. Central Expressway, 19th Floor • Dallas, TX 75231 • Room TBD

Consultation Hours: Monday – Friday, 9 am-6 pm (by appointment only)

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School Email: raul.varela@tamuc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Design Thinking is a common catchphrase in our society’s quest for social innovation. According to Tim Brown, past President and CEO of IDEO, “Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

This course will explore design thinking and its application to social innovation. Weekly case studies related to human-centered design processes will be read and analyzed. Process is a key part of this 4-week course, as students will be required to tap into their own creative processes and knowledge in a team-based environment. Finding a solution to a “social problem” in the Dallas area that promotes transformative change will be the goal of this class.

Students are expected to use design thinking tools to identify a problem, build empathy for that problem, create user personas, explore and develop ideas, and document the process. A presentation will be given to a panel of individuals who represent the user personas created in the process.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify problems in need of social innovation
2. Assess and evaluate human-centered design case studies
3. Examine how empathy can solve design thinking problems
4. Apply human-centered design processes through a collaborative team-based approach
5. Utilize “virtual” ethnography to assess potential solutions to social problems
6. Gather necessary data and other related information to build effective user personas
7. Implement design-thinking tools and methodologies to solve real social problems
8. Document process while proposing a social innovation solution

COURSE INFORMATION

RESEARCH SOURCES

1. Various sources identified through the student's individual research
2. Academic texts, peer-reviewed articles, scholarly papers, accessed either through brick-and-mortar libraries or online in scholarly databases, such as JSTOR.
3. Other major design university MFA archives (SVA, VCU, Stanford D-school)
4. AIGA archives
5. Publications: *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Strategy*, *Red Herring*, *Fast Company*, *Inc. Magazine*, *Fortune*, *TIME*, etc.
6. Media: Broadcast news channels, credible newspapers, or magazines such as CNBC or Bloomberg
7. Anything, anywhere that is relevant to your topic (recorded interviews, ethnography, etc.)
8. NOT Wikipedia!!!!

PRIMARY DATA SOURCES

<https://www.etamu.edu/library>

This online research guide for your areas of study was put together by our business and marketing specialist. It includes contact info, relevant library databases, and how to access them.

MARKET PRIMARY DATA SOURCES

1. <http://www.marketresearch.com>
2. <http://www.census.gov>
3. <http://www.data.gov>
4. <http://www.gallup.com>
5. <http://www.mintel.com>

ATTENDANCE

- FIRST ABSENCE: The student will receive an email, and a copy will go to Veronica Vaughan
- SECOND ABSENCE: The student will receive an email, and a copy will go to Veronica Vaughan, who will contact the student.
- THIRD ABSENCE: Veronica Vaughan emails the student that they have failed the course.
 - Two tardies of 10 minutes equals one absence.
 - A tardiness of 60 minutes equals one absence.
 - If a student is OVER 10 MINUTES late for the final, a full grade will be deducted from his or her final grade.
 - If a student does not show up for the final, they automatically fail the class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments:

A willingness to participate and collaborate will be a key component in achieving a productive, positive outcome for each student. It is the student's job to follow the schedule and adhere to it weekly. The role of the professor and the class is to respond to the work brought in week by week, comment on it, and direct, expand on, and suggest possible areas for further research.

Students **MUST** keep up with the assignment schedule to pass this class. **PROGRESS THROUGH THIS COURSE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STUDENT.**

No extensions or exceptions will be granted except in cases of extreme hardship or medical necessity. Professional work demands do not constitute extreme hardship exemptions.

SYLLABUS UPDATE POLICY

The syllabus and schedule are a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may necessitate that the instructor modify the syllabus and/or schedule during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus/schedule will be announced in advance.

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT RESPONSE

- Appointments will be handled via Zoom. Please email me to schedule an appointment.
- Communication from students will be responded to within a reasonable time during the work week.
- Weekend communication will be handled the next business day, unless noted. Due to the high volume of email that is received, an important message may be missed. If an important email has not been responded to within 2 days, please send again or text me.
- Please use your university email as your primary source of contact. If your email is more than a short paragraph, consider making a Zoom appointment.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your instructor.

GRADING

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

A — 90-100

Work well above the general class level, evidence of participation in related activities outside of the classroom, and thoughtful participation in classroom discussion and critique.

Superlative work: careful attention to craft and presentation. Originality of idea and execution work together. Goes beyond merely solving the problem – one who performs at this level is visibly outstanding.

B — 80-89

Work above the general class level, participation in classroom discussion, and critique.

Fine work: A few minor changes could have been made to bring the piece together. Goes beyond merely solving the problem. Above average: solution to the problem and idea well planned. Execution is well done.

C — 70-79

Average work, minimal requirements met

Average or a bit above: Slipping in levels of originality, craft, and presentation. The piece does not work well as a unified whole or statement, yet an effort was made. You have solved the problem, but in a relatively routine way.

D — 60-69

Work below class average, lack of participation, and/or poor attendance

You have solved the problem, but there is much room to improve your skills and further develop your concepts. You have neglected the basic craftsmanship skills and the breadth and depth of idea development. You were unable to meet mini deadlines. Represents careless and/or incomplete effort. Work is substandard.

F — 0-59

Inferior or unacceptable work and effort, work not turned in, or failure to attend class. In addition to exercises and projects, your final grade will also be based on participation in critique, application, work ethic, and attitude. These specifications are applied with the following percentages:

1. Team effort on social innovation project..... 50.0%
2. Team Presentation..... 25.0%
3. 4 case studies..... 15.0%
4. Attitude and Participation 10.0%

AI POLICY

East Texas A&M acknowledges that there are legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, Chatbots, or other software that have the capacity to generate text and images, or suggest replacements for text and images, as determined by the instructor of the course. Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism). Individual instructors may disallow entirely the use of such software for individual assignments or for the entire course.

Students should be aware of such requirements and follow their instructors' guidelines. If no instructions are provided, the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed.

In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources. If the instructor allows AI to be incorporated into a solution, the student must acknowledge and credit its use and provide the prompt used to create the output.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at East Texas A&M University are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty, see the following procedures:

- Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.03
- Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form
- Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.10
- Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form

HANDBOOK & SAFETY

While the online manual covers specific issues related to the Department of Art, Texas A&M University-Commerce policies must also be followed. All users of the Department of Art (DOA) classrooms and facilities are required to follow the health and safety guidelines outlined in this manual at all times. Report any safety issues IMMEDIATELY to your instructor(s), Teaching Laboratory Specialist, or to the DOA Health and Safety Liaison. Each course instructor will discuss their area's inherent risks, procedures, and policies to provide the student with informed consent. These will be reviewed verbally at the start of each semester. A link to the online Handbook: <http://sites.tamuc.edu/art/resources/healthandsafety/>

Students who meet in face-to-face Department of Art courses must complete the online form for each course they attend. A link to the online form: <http://dms.tamuc.edu/Forms/ArtLabPolicy>

*This must be completed on campus while using the University Wi-Fi or Ethernet connections.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are the technical requirements

LMS Requirements

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

Zoom Video Conferencing Tool

https://inside.tamuc.edu/campuslife/CampusServices/CITESupportCenter/Zoom_Account.aspx?source=universalmenu

Access And Navigation

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@etamu.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all coursework in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs a backup method to address these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

STUDENT CONDUCT

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail online in the

Student Guidebook.

Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette Webpage for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THIS COURSE

CWID and Password

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@etamu.edu.

Technology-Related Issues

Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all coursework in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, an ETAMU campus open computer lab, etc.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPORT

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Students will need reliable computer and internet access for this course. Students must be able to effectively use myLeo email, myLeo Online D2L, and Microsoft Office and the Adobe Creative Suite.

Learning Management System (LMS) – D2L

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are the technical requirements:

- View the Learning Management System Requirements Webpage.
- Learn more on the LMS Browser Support Webpage.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found on the Brightspace Support Webpage.

A & M - COMMERCE SUPPORTS STUDENT'S MENTAL HEALTH

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES / ADA STATEMENT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
East Texas A&M University • Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835 • Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@etamu.edu

Website: Office of Student Disability Services

NONDISCRIMINATION NOTICE

East Texas A&M University will comply in the classroom and in online courses with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

CAMPUS CARRY RULE

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031 et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in East Texas A&M University buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and ETAMU Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

For a list of locations, please refer to the Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus document and/or consult your event organizer.

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all East Texas A&M University campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

EAST TEXAS A&M SUPPORTS STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH – COUNSELING SERVICES

The Counseling Center at East Texas A&M University, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connections to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The university aims to provide students with essential knowledge and tools to understand and support mental health. As part of our commitment to your well-being, we offer access to TELUS Health, a service available 24/7/365 via chat, phone, or webinar. Scan the QR code to download the app and explore the resources available to you for guidance and support whenever you need it.

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY

- Scholastic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any class -related activity.
- Scholastic dishonesty includes, but not limited to, the submission of someone else's materials as one's own work
- Scholastic dishonesty may involve one or more of the following acts: cheating, plagiarism, or collusion.

Plagiarism is the use of an author's words or ideas as if they were one's own without giving credit to the source, including, but not limited to, failure to acknowledge a direct quotation. Cite your references.

Cheating is the willful giving or receiving of information in an unauthorized manner during an examination, illicitly obtaining examination questions in advance, copying computer or Internet files, using someone else's work for assignments as if it were one's own, or any other dishonest means of attempting to fulfill the requirements of a course.

Collusion is intentionally aiding or attempting to aid another in an act of scholastic dishonesty, including but not limited to, providing a paper or project to another student, providing an inappropriate level of assistance, communicating answers to a classmate during an examination, removing tests or answer sheets from a test site, and allowing a classmate to copy answers.

Academic dishonesty could result in expulsion from the University

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY

Students, who because of circumstances beyond their control are unable to attend classes during finals week or the preceding three weeks will, upon approval of the instructor, receive a mark of “X” (incomplete) in all courses in which they were maintaining passing grades.

When an “X” is given for a grade in a course, the credit hours and grade point averages are not included until a grade is received which can be up to one year. If the “X” is not removed by that time, the grade becomes an F, and the hours are included in the number of hours attempted.

Recording a grade of “X” requires the filing of a plan for completion. The plan will be submitted with the official grade record sent to the department head who will forward it to the Dean’s office. The plan will include why the grade was given and steps necessary for the student to receive the final grade. If the X plan has not been completed by the next time the course is offered the student will register to take the course again.

REQUIRED READINGS

There are no required textbooks for this class. Instead, you will download 5 Harvard case studies listed below. Your cost will be minimal. A link to download the case studies will be provided by the instructor on the first day of class. These readings will inform your weekly assignments and support your learning outcomes. You are required to read all case studies and discuss their application to your project. All case study analysis and discussion will take place on a course management website called Schoology.

CASE STUDIES

1. Week 1: **Observe First, Design Second: Taming the Traps of Traditional Thinking**
2. Week 2: **Ten Tools for Design Thinking**
3. Week 3: **Re-Framing Opportunities: Design Thinking in Action**
4. Week 4: **Empathy on the Edge: Scaling and Sustaining a Human-Centered Approach to Innovation**

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Field Guide to Human-Centered Design *by IDEO*
- Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation *by Tim Brown*
- Design Thinking for Strategic Innovation: What They Can't Teach You at Business or Design School *by Idris Mootee*
- Solving Problems with Design Thinking: Ten Stories of What Works *by Jeanne Liedtka*

COURSE OUTLINE / WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

This is a schedule of assignments and deadlines. If an adjustment becomes necessary, an announcement will be made during class. It will be your responsibility to adjust. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to check with a classmate or contact the instructor.

CLASS CALENDAR

THE PROCESS – WEEK 1

CLASS 1: Deep diving

Deep dive into social issues that you are passionate about in Dallas or the surrounding areas. The problems are all around us. Discover opportunities by doing the following:

1. Do some research on local non-profits to help you identify the problems
2. Browse local media to understand some of the problems we are facing in our community
3. Talk to people you know who are involved with social issues on a local level
4. Go to <http://www.volnow.org> or <https://toprated.greatnonprofits.org> to help you identify organizations instigating change. Could you collaborate with a local non-profit and apply design thinking to their efforts?

ASSIGNMENT

1. Get inspired! Watch ALL the videos and click all the links in the assignment sheet.
2. Download your case studies: <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1417023>

ASSIGNMENT: Read Case Study 1

Observe First, Design Second: Taming the Traps of Traditional Thinking

Provide a one- page analysis by the end of the week and post in the discussion board: What did you learn from this case study? Share relevant insight. How can you apply what you learned into your human-centered design process?

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CLASS 2: Planning your approach

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 31 to 37) in class to do the following:

1. Frame your design challenge (Page 31-33)
2. Create a project plan (Page 34)
3. Designate team roles (Page 35)
4. Think about subject matter experts you will need to talk to (Page 36)
5. Identify secondary research to gain knowledge (Page 37)

ASSIGNMENT

Polish your work plan and read the research over the weekend

THE PROCESS – WEEK 2

CLASS 3: Interview questions and strategy

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 39 to 72) in class to do the following:

1. Develop the interview questions (Pages 39-41)
2. Discuss, define and setup your knowledge groups (Pages 42-44)
3. Define interview strategies for knowledge groups (Page 45-72)

ASSIGNMENT: Read Case Study 2

Ten Tools for Design Thinking

Provide a one- page analysis by the end of the week and post in discussion board: What did you learn from this case study? Share any relevant insight. How can you apply what you learned into your human centered design process.

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CLASS 4: Ethnography and interviews

We will use the ETHNOGRAPHY PRIMER in class to do the following:

1. Conduct field study and observe (Ethnography)
2. Q&A knowledge groups during class or outside of class.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Continue ethnography. Continue Q&A with knowledge groups.
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THE PROCESS – WEEK 3

CLASS 5: Downloading knowledge

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 77 to 80) in class to do the following:

1. Download your learnings (Page 77)
2. Share inspiring stories. (Page 78)
3. Discuss ideas (Page 79)
4. Find themes (Page 80)

ASSIGNMENT: Read Case Study 3

Re-Framing Opportunities: Design Thinking in Action

Provide a one- page analysis by the end of the week and post in discussion board: What did you learn from this case study? Share any relevant insight. How can you apply what you learned into your human centered design process.

CLASS 6: Creating the framework

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 81 to 87) in class to do the following:

- 1. Create insight statements (Page 81-83)
- 2. Explore your hunch (Page 84)
- 3. Discuss opportunities (Pages 85-87)

ASSIGNMENT

- 1. Get together with your team over the weekend to began creating a framework (Page 89-90)

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THE PROCESS – WEEK 4

CLASS 7: The solution

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 97 to 102) in class to do the following:

- 1. Bundle ideas (Page 97-98)
- 2. Get visual (Page 101-102)
- 3. Mash-ups (Page 104)
- 4. Develop design principles (Page 105-106)
- 5. Create user personas

ASSIGNMENT: Read Case Study 4

Empathy on the Edge: Scaling and Sustaining a Human-Centered Approach to Innovation

Provide a one- page analysis by the end of the week and post in discussion board: What did you learn from this case study? Share any relevant insight. How can you apply what you learned into your human centered design process.

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CLASS 8: Concepting and prototyping

We will use the FIELD GUIDE (Pages 108 to 121) in class to do the following:

- 1. Decide on the big idea (Page 108)
- 2. Determine rapid prototype (Page 111-121)

ASSIGNMENT

- 1. Get together with your team over the weekend and invite SMEs so you can present your solution to them and receive their feedback.

THE PROCESS – WEEK 5

CLASS 9: Work during class time

Continue work on prototype

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CLASS 10: Solicit feedback

You will present your ideas or prototype to the knowledge expert. Informal is the key. This is not your final pitch.

Consider this your 1st iteration to solicit feedback

1. Get feedback (Page 126)