

ID2801 - Design Behavior: Design Empathy

Design Bloc 5-Week Mini-Mester | Fall 2026: 8/24-9/25

Course Instructors

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Instruction Time

MW

2:00-3:15 pm

Office Location

Design Bloc Space

Woodruff Connector,

890 Curran St

Office Hours (by appt)

Course Description

This course provides an intensive, five-week seminar of a value that is not only integral to meaningful design-thinking, but foundational to the overall practice of human-centered design and artistic endeavor. Whether you're creating a new product, service, entrepreneurial activity, non-profit initiative, or personal piece of art, this course provides the methods / mindsets necessary to understand your audience and understand the perspectives of others. As one of the key design behaviors which support the design process and methodology practiced within Design Bloc, this mini-mester will help students build a more comprehensive understanding of how to effectively engage with others: user-groups, stakeholders, and customers.

Students will spend the course receiving instruction on empathetic theory, strategies, and techniques that will challenge them to assess their current design approach and understanding of others. To drive this assessment and reflection, students will be provided with in-class activities and receive feedback from both instructors and peers applicable to their work. Throughout this mini-mester, students will concurrently practice this knowledge with a self-selected community space where they can weekly demonstrate their understanding of the seminar through real-world application. At the end of the course, students will present the result of this practice and reflect on the personal insight they've uncovered from the practicum aspect of this course.

Co-Requisite Course(s)

The 5-week course exists as a larger series of short-term courses being facilitated by Design Bloc. As a center that supports multi-disciplinary learning and human centered design, students are not required to have prior art or design knowledge to enroll in this course. However, it is encouraged that this course be taken in the same semester as "Design Behavior: Contextual Awareness" which will be offered in Term 2 of the same semester. In addition, students enrolled in Design Bloc's VIP: Community Design course are encouraged to enroll in this course to provide a seminar component to their service-based work across the full semester.

Course Objectives + Learning Outcomes

This class will advance the understanding of participating students through exposure to and application of this Design Bloc-championed design behaviors. Through this course you will learn and develop the ability to:

- understand the importance of assessing positionality and personal bias as the first-step to engaging with others.
- use qualitative and ethnographic design-research techniques to develop a more empathetic approach to need-finding.
- transform your curiosity into meaningful inquiry that centralizes another person's experience as the key source of understanding.
- identify unique details within an individual's day-to-day experience as inspiration for advocacy, visual-storytelling, narratives, and future innovation.
- Understand the components of designing with empathy: cognitive, emotive and empathetic concern.

Course Format and Semester Overview

The nature of this course is designed to provide both instruction in design behaviors and an immediate opportunity to apply this learning through student-selected projects. To support this, classes will consist of student participation in the following:

- Short readings, lecture videos or handouts on relevant topics, methods, techniques, and strategies relevant to the course's design-behavior focus.
- In-class demonstrations, critique, and discussions to provide familiarity and feedback on how to best apply the lecture material to the student's area of study.
- Assignments to be performed outside of class to further reinforce class material through an on-site, real-world area within the student's accessible environment.
- Out-of-class activities to be performed during open studio sessions, outside of class, and/or with a participating community partner.

Please note that the schedule provided below is for general reference on how the topics covered in this course will be presented during instruction times. While these dates are subject to change, please refer to the Canvas site for the most up-to date, specific information.

Week	Dates	Activity or Event
1	Aug 18th Aug 20th	Self-Assessment Course Introduction / Expectations Introduction to Empathy Positionality Exercise Research Focus Assignment
2	Aug 25th Aug 27 th	Inspection Beginner's Mindset Frames of Ten Practice Field Observation AEIOU Framework
3	Sept 1st Sept 3 rd	Inquiry Interviewing Methods Interviewing Guide Narratives in Culture Say-Think-Feel-Do
4	Sept 8th Sept 10th	Analysis Hierarchy of Needs Journey Mapping Affinity Mapping (Themes)
5	Sept 15st Sept 17th	Advocacy Presentation of User Experience Visual Storytelling

Grading

This course seeks to raise a student's ability in perspective taking, positionality and utilize empathetic mindsets in their work. As a result, students will be expected to weekly refine their understanding of this material through practice

in in-class scenarios, engaging with their peers in and outside of class, as well as documenting how their knowledge and proficiency related to these topics develops throughout each week.

Because the priority of this course is dedicated to hands-on learning and personal reflection, the grading process for this course incentivizes consistent engagement with the material in and outside of class. Though each student's progress and contribution to this course will be relative, everyone is assessed for their performance in all three areas below:

Student Logbook / Homework Assignments /Course Documentation (40%)

Notes-Logbook / Reflections on In-Class Material (20%)

Homework / Evidence of Out-of-Class Application (20%)

- Positionality Map (5%)
- Field Observation / AEIOU (5%)
- Interview (5%)
- Mapping: Journey Map / Affinity (5%)

Class Participation / Attendance / in-Class Exercises (40%)

On-Time Attendance to In-Class Lecture (20%)

Enthusiastic engagement with in-class exercises (20%)

5-Week Study / Final Presentation (20%)

Demonstration of consistent, in-depth inquiry (10%)

Final Presentation: study findings, insights, and personal learnings (10%)

Mini-Mester Attendance Policy

Due to the abbreviated nature of this course, students are only allowed two unexcused absences within this 5-week course. Upon the third absence, your final grade will immediately be reduced by one letter. Each late arrival to class will count towards one-third of an unexcused absence. Any student that can provide documentation for their absence via doctor's notice, an official document detailing their travel for Georgia-Tech related business prior to departure, and/or official communication from campus faculty will have their absence excused. In the event of a serious emergency that does not warrant these forms of proof, and relates to the student or the student's immediate family, an excused absence may be granted at the discretion of the instructor.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Georgia Tech offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need a classroom accommodation, please make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services (www.disabilityservices.gatech.edu). If you have an accommodation letter from ODS, please provide your team advisor with a copy of your accommodation letter and discuss with them how your accommodations will be applied. This should be done as early as possible in the semester.