THE INNOVATION LAB
BUSI-3800/3

Winter Semester 2026
Room: S135

Instructor: James Magnus-Johnston PhD (ABD), McGill University; MPhil, Cambridge University
Contact: jmagnus-johnston@cmu.ca // c.204.952.7751
Lessons: agoraacademy.io/innovation
Discussions: W/F 10 AM

This is a course in which a transdisciplinary cohort of students will design, propose, and implement solutions to particular problems posed by a business or community organization. Students will work in small teams, select the topic, draft a course of action, and work with faculty member(s) to define appropriate methods and outcomes. The course is applied and competency-based, embracing a "problem-based learning" approach where students will share knowledge, peer support, and feedback on an ongoing basis.

Client Project: Students will work with a retreat centre located near Winnipeg "Light of the Prairies Retreat Centre" that includes a main complex with a number of bedrooms, several cottages, a mall off-site, and other facilities. The centre sits at the nexus of faith-based and secular approaches operations. It seeks fresh, viable approaches in marketing, operations, and other strategic priorities to revitalize and enhance its value proposition. The course will culminate in a colloquium, organized by its participants, highlighting course-related ideas and initiatives to the retreat centre's new board.

Overall objectives:

- Apply human-centered design and service design methodologies to real-world challenges
- Conduct user research, stakeholder interviews, and empathy-building exercises
- Work effectively in transdisciplinary teams with diverse skill sets
- Develop, prototype, and iterate on innovative solutions under real constraints
- Communicate design thinking and project outcomes to diverse audiences
- Navigate ambiguity, adapt to feedback, and demonstrate resilience in problem-solving
- Understand the business model implications of design decisions
- Improve emotional intelligence, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills

This course fulfills the "making" requirement, which involves participation in as well as reflection on creative arts and other design processes.

READING LIST (PROVIDED)
Download at agoraacademy.io/innovation

Core Texts (on website):

Brown, Tim, and Jocelyn Wyatt. *Design Thinking for Social Innovation*. Stanford Innovation Review, 2010.

IDEO. *The Field Guide to Human Centred Design*. IDEO, 2015.

Supplementary Readings:

Etmanski, Al. *Impact: Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation*. 2016.

Knapp, Jake, John Zeratsky, and Braden Kowitz. *Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days*. Simon & Schuster, 2016. (Selected chapters)

Norman, Don. *The Design of Everyday Things*. Basic Books, 2013. (Chapter 1)

Pine, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2011. (Introduction)

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

Grading Structure:

- Team Project Milestones: 40%
- Individual Contributions & Engagement: 30%
- Reflective Practice (Weekly): 20%
- Final Colloquium Presentation: 10%

TEAM PROJECT MILESTONES (40%)

1. Project Scoping & Research Plan (10%) "Proposal Phase"
Due: Week 3
Teams will define the problem space, identify key stakeholders, and create a research plan including methods for user interviews, observation, and data collection.

> **Deliverable:** 2-page project brief + research protocol per team following stakeholder meeting

2. Discovery Phase Prototype (10%) "Discovery Phase"
Due: Week 5
Based on initial user research and stakeholder interviews, teams will create a low-fidelity prototype (journey map, service blueprint, or conceptual mock-up) that visualizes initial insights.

> **Deliverable:** Visual prototype + 2-3 page synthesis of key insights

3. Mid-Point Prototype Redesign (10%) "Revamp Phase"
Due: Week 9
After testing initial concepts with users and stakeholders, teams will iterate and develop a higher-fidelity prototype incorporating feedback.

> **Deliverable:** Revised prototype + documentation of iteration process (what changed and why)

4. Final Prototype & Implementation Plan (10%) "Final Phase"
Due: Week 13
Teams will deliver a final prototype with an implementation roadmap, including resource requirements, timeline, and success metrics. This should be client-ready.

> **Deliverable:** Final prototype + implementation plan (5-8 pages) + whole-class business model canvas

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS & ENGAGEMENT (30%)

This grade reflects your active participation, initiative, and collaborative mindset throughout the course:

- **Workshop Attendance & Participation (10%):** Active contribution to in-class workshops, exercises, and discussions
- **Stakeholder Meeting Engagement (10%):** Quality of participation in client meetings, interviews, and site visits
- **Peer Contribution Rating (10%):** Team members will evaluate each other's contributions at mid-term (Week 7) and end of course (Week 11). You'll fill out a brief form for each teammate rating their reliability, quality of work, initiative, collaboration, and problem-solving. Make a note of this in your calendar.

Engagement. You'll be rewarded for:

- Conducting stakeholder/user interviews
- Sharing relevant case studies or resources
- Giving constructive peer feedback
- Completing optional design challenges
- Documenting process photos/videos

Note on Engagement: While there's no formal point system, I'll be observing your active participation, initiative, and contribution throughout the course. Going above and beyond—conducting extra interviews, sharing resources, documenting your process—will be reflected in your individual engagement grade.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE - WEEKLY (20%)

Every week, you'll complete a brief check-in form (takes ~2 minutes) covering:

- How much progress you made this week (1-5 scale)
- How you're feeling about the project (1-5 scale)
- How well your team is working together (1-5 scale)
- How supported you feel (1-5 scale)
- One specific thing you contributed this week
- Optional: Anything else on your mind (wins, challenges, questions)

These check-ins help me support you better and catch any issues early. They also keep you accountable to weekly progress.

Format: Form submission
Grading: Completion-based; must submit 10 of 12 weeks to receive full marks. As long as you're showing up and being honest, you'll get full credit.

FINAL COLLOQUIUM PRESENTATION (10%)

In lieu of a final exam, you will present your project in a student-organized online colloquium using the **Pecha Kucha format** (20 slides × 20 seconds each = 6 min 40 sec).

Your presentation should:

- Tell the story of your design process
- Highlight key insights from user research
- Showcase your prototype iterations
- Present your final recommendation with implementation plan
- Reflect on lessons learned

Audience: CMU community + retreat centre stakeholders + external guests

POLICIES

Final grades: Grades submitted by instructors become final only after they are vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

Academic integrity: *Academic Integrity—All* material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU's [website](#) and in the CMU Calendar. If you still have questions about appropriate referencing and what plagiarism is, a useful tutorial can be found [here](#). For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see CMU's *Academic Calendar*.

Accessibility: CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at sloeppky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300 x.340. In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.

Academic support services: Student studying, tutoring, and the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program are offered to CMU students free of charge in the Marpeck Mezzanine.

Counselling*:* University students face many challenges and at times may benefit from having a trained professional to talk to. There are qualified counsellors at CMU who volunteer their services free of charge to students on the CMU campus. Students wishing to book an appointment with a counsellor are asked to contact the North Side Receptionist at 204.487.3300 or info@cmu.ca. Confidentiality is maintained at all times. The counselling office is located at C365 (north side) and is free for CMU students.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Wednesdays & Fridays, 10:00 AM

Week	Wed	Fri	Topics & Activities	Readings	Due
1	Jan 7	Jan 9	**W:** Course intro, team formation, overview of retreat centre project **F:** Design thinking foundations, empathy mapping	Stickdorn Ch. 1-2 Brown & Wyatt	
2	Jan 14	Jan 16	**W:** Research methods & interview techniques **F:** Preparing for stakeholder meeting, research protocol workshop	IDEO Field Guide Norman Ch. 1 Stickdorn Ch. 3-4	Reflect #1
3	Jan 21	Jan 23	**W: CLIENT STAKEHOLDER VISIT** Retreat centre presents, Q&A session **Possible site visit (TBD)** **F:** Journey mapping & synthesis tools	IDEO: Mapping Journeys Stickdorn ref. 2-3	**Research Plan due Jan 21** Reflect #2
4	Jan 28	Jan 30	**W:** Synthesizing stakeholder insights, creating personas **F:** Planning field research (if site visit not yet completed)	Pine & Gilmore (intro)	Reflect #3
5	Feb 4	Feb 6	**W: CLIENT CHECK-IN** Share observations & initial concepts **Possible site visit (TBD)** **F:** Ideation workshop, concept generation	Knapp et al. (Sprint)	**Discovery Prototype due Feb 4** Reflect #4
-	Feb 17-21		**READING WEEK** - No classes		
6	Feb 25	Feb 27	**W:** Post-site visit synthesis & prototyping workshop **F:** Business model canvas introduction	Osterwalder & Pigneur	Reflect #5

7	Mar 4	Mar 6	**W:** Testing & feedback methods	Ries (Lean Startup)	Reflect #6	
			F: Mid-point reviews & iteration planning		**Peer Eval #1**	
8	Mar 11	Mar 13	**W: REDESIGN SPRINT** - major iteration session	Stickdorn Ch. 9	**Prototype Redesign due Mar 11**	
			F: Prototype refinement continues		Reflect #7	
9	Mar 18	Mar 20	**W:** Implementation planning workshop		Reflect #8	
			F: Viability & resource mapping			
10	Mar 25	Mar 27	**W:** Client-ready refinement session	Etmanski	**Final Prototype due Mar 25**	
			F: Pecha Kucha workshop & practice		Reflect #9	
11	Apr 1	Apr 6	**W:** Presentation discussion / review and peer feedback		Reflect #10	
			M: FINAL COLLOQUIUM		**Peer Eval #2**	

KEY DATES SUMMARY

Regular Classes: Wednesdays & Fridays, 10:00 AM

Client Sessions (during regular class time):

- **January 21 (Wed)** - Initial stakeholder presentation
- **February 4 (Wed)** - Mid-project check-in

Site Visit: TBD - will occur on either January 21 or February 4 (or potentially the Friday following)

Major Deliverables:

- Jan 21 - Research Plan
- Feb 4 - Discovery Prototype
- Mar 11 - Redesigned Prototype
- Mar 25 - Final Prototype & Implementation Plan

TEAM EXPECTATIONS

Weekly Team Standup: Each team will hold a brief (15 min) weekly standup meeting where each member shares:

1. What I did last week
2. What I'm doing this week
3. Any blockers or help needed

Roles: Teams should rotate roles weekly (facilitator, note-taker, timekeeper, presenter)

Conflict Resolution: Teams should establish a working agreement in Week 1 covering communication norms, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution strategies. The instructor is available to mediate if needed.

SUCCESS TIPS

✓ **Start user research early - Don't wait to talk to real people**
✓ **Embrace "productive failure" - Your first ideas won't be your best**
✓ **Document everything - Photos, notes, sketches matter for your final presentation**
✓ **Communicate proactively - With your team, with me, with the client**
✓ **Make it real - Prototypes should be tangible enough to get real feedback**
✓ **Think implementation - Beautiful ideas that can't be executed aren't useful**