Designing the
Future Together

03.03.2025 – 10.04.2025 (Project Timeline)

A Case Study in
Industry–Academia Collaboration between
Salesforce & Woxsen University

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INTRODUCTION

In an era where artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming daily life, the partnership between Salesforce and Woxsen University's School of Arts & Design (SOAD) stands as a benchmark for impactful industry–academia collaboration.

The journey began when the Salesforce leadership team from the USA visited Woxsen University. Impressed by the creativity and capability of the design students, along with the university's world-class infrastructure, they saw an opportunity to co-create a project that could push the boundaries of human–AI interaction.

This visit became the catalyst for "Beyond Conversations: Advancing AI Interfaces for Natural Interaction", a joint initiative that brought together design and MBA Business Analytics students in an ambitious, interdisciplinary challenge.

The project invited students to re-imagine human–AI interaction beyond conventional, linear, text-based models, envisioning more fluid, empathetic, and multimodal experiences. This was more than a classroom exercise — it was a real-world innovation lab where students, academic mentors, and industry experts worked together to deliver practical, human-centered AI solutions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF
THE COLLABORATION

The project offered mutual value to all stakeholders:

- For Students: Immersive exposure to real corporate workflows, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and iterative feedback from seasoned Salesforce mentors.

- For Salesforce: Access to fresh, diverse perspectives and speculative design thinking to fuel innovation pipelines.

- For Woxsen University: Strengthened positioning as a hub for industry-relevant, global-standard design education.

By addressing both societal challenges (inclusion, accessibility, well-being) and commercial opportunities (retail AI assistants, gaming, career simulation), this collaboration demonstrated how academia can contribute directly to future-ready innovations.

PROJECT JOURNEY: HIGHS & LOWS

High Points:

Cross-disciplinary synergy: Design and business students brought complementary strengths once collaboration took root.

Dual-level mentorship: Industry guidance from Salesforce combined with academic nurturing from SOAD faculty.

Breakthrough concepts: Prototypes ranged from healthcare AI assistants for the Deaf to emotionally evolving game characters.

Professional validation: Final presentations to the Salesforce leadership team, with top teams receiving ₹10,000 vouchers and all participants earning certificates.

Challenges Overcome:

Brief clarity issues: The speculative brief initially caused uncertainty for both mentors and students.

Coordination gaps: Different work styles between corporate mentors and students required alignment.

Team integration hurdles: Early siloed work between design and business students.

Timeline pressures: Semester schedules and mandatory summer internships limited extended collaboration.

These challenges were addressed through structured review meetings, transparent communication, and adaptive project planning.

COLLABORATION MODEL

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

Multimodal AI approach
Moving beyond text to incorporate gesture, voice, emotion detection, and spatial interactions.

Societal impact
Many concepts directly addressed underserved communities.

Deployment-ready thinking
Each prototype included a business model and scaling strategy.

True interdisciplinary execution
Creative ideation paired with analytical validation.

Mentor Pairing
Each group received both a design mentor (SOAD) and a business mentor (School of Business).

Integrated Milestones
Research, ideation, prototyping, testing — with joint sign-offs at each stage.

The project's success was underpinned by a dual-layered collaboration model: Industry–Academia and Interdisciplinary Student Teams.

Industry–Academia Collaboration Framework:

1. Shared Vision: Agreement on project objectives, scope, and desired outcomes.

2. Dual Mentorship: Industry mentors for real-world expertise; academic mentors for pedagogy and skill-building.

3. Integrated Communication: Regular review sessions, feedback loops, and progress tracking on a shared platform.

4. Resource Sharing: Salesforce provided domain expertise, trends, and toolkits; Woxsen provided facilities, labs, and student talent.

5. Evaluation & Recognition: Joint evaluation panel; industry-style pitching sessions; recognition through awards and certificates.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration Between Design & Business Students:

Shared Workspaces
Co-located sessions in the David Dunne Design Thinking Lab.

Role Definition
Designers led concept generation and user experience; business students led data modeling, analytics, and market validation.

Collaboration > Outcome Pathway:

Step 1: Problem Definition – jointly reframing the speculative brief into actionable problem statements.

Step 2: Ideation – design students generating interaction concepts; business students evaluating market viability.

Step 3: Prototyping – co-creating low- and high-fidelity prototypes integrating both UX and business logic.

**Step 4:** Validation – user testing for design flow; business model stress-testing.

Step 5: Industry Feedback – Salesforce mentors critiquing for innovation, usability, and scalability.

Outcome Highlights:

5 functional prototypes across domains — all with clear social or commercial application.

Enhanced student competencies – strengthened collaboration, communication, business acumen in design, and design-driven problem-solving in business.

Sustainable innovation pipeline – paving the way for future-ready projects and continued collaboration between Salesforce and Woxsen.
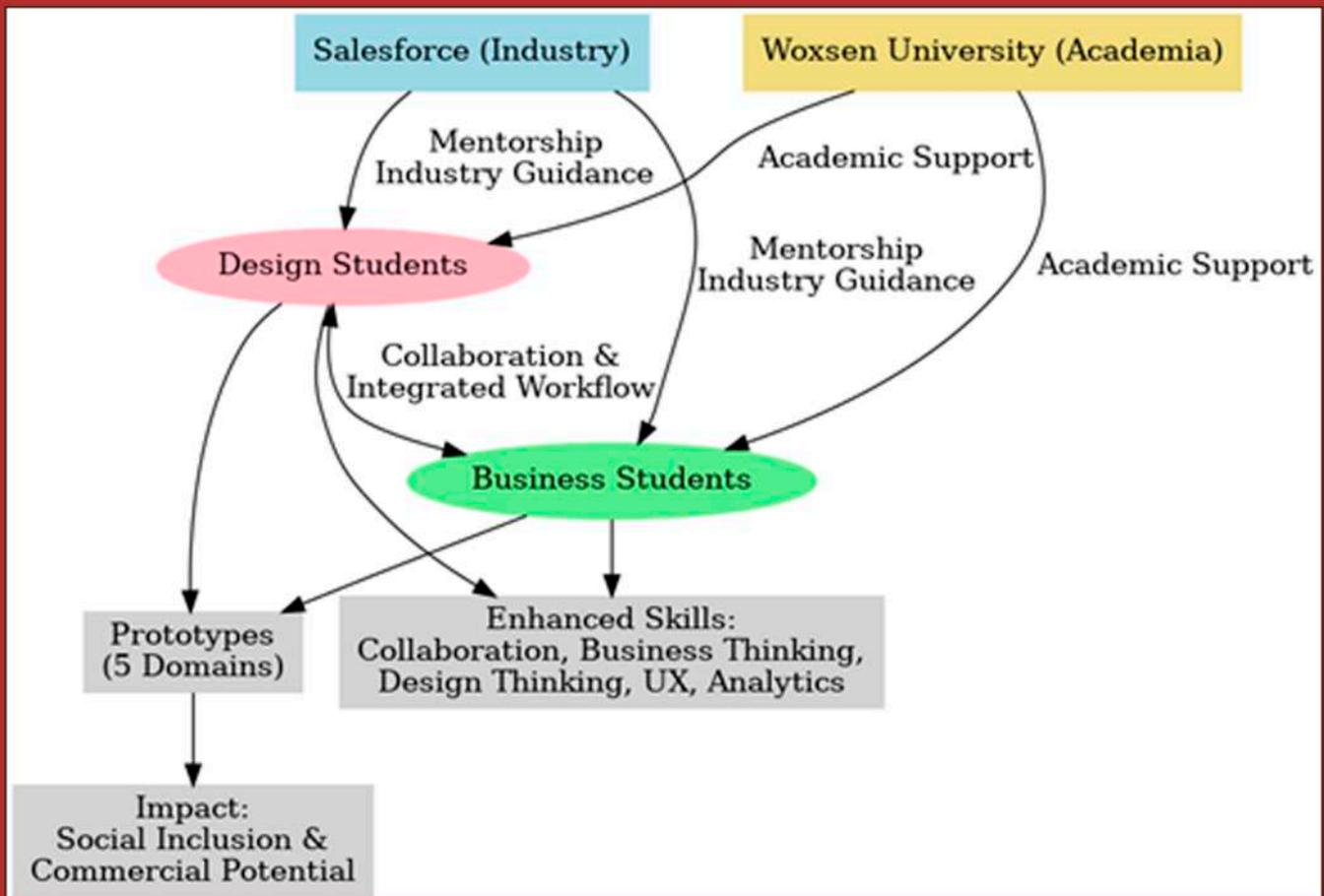
GROUP SHOWCASE: INNOVATION IN ACTION

Each group's contribution is presented with their project summary, Salesforce mentors, student participants, and space for a photo.

Group 1 – Retail & Commerce
Project: AI-Powered Smart Kitchen Assistant

Summary: Integrated into home appliances, these assistant plans meals, tracks groceries, and provides personalized shopping suggestions—reducing waste and enhancing the home retail experience.

Salesforce Mentors:
Prachi Kulkarni, Himanshu Hazarika, Rohit Sinha

Students:

- - Aariz Mahmood
- - Akhil Menon
- - Pranay Theerdhala
- - Balla Bala Bhargava Tejaswani
- - Vanaparthi Nitisha (MBA student)

Group 2 – Assistive & Inclusivity

Project: Saanjh – AI-powered real-time ISL communication app

Summary: Enables deaf/mute individuals and hearing people to communicate seamlessly through ISL translation, gesture recognition, and adaptive learning.

Salesforce Mentors:
Tapan Soni, Vinay Attheli, Jahnavi

Students:

- – Jovita Thomas Lanka
- – Sri Smruthi
- – Arul
- – Anthati Shivani

Group 3 – Entertainment & Media

Project: EvolveNPC – Intelligent, emotionally evolving game characters

Summary: NPCs that remember interactions, adapt behavior, and evolve across game titles, enhancing immersion for players.

Salesforce Mentors:
Arunabh, Pavan, Bhagath

Students:

- – Priyanshu Dutta
- – Donthula Nithisha
- – Kumalika Gayathri Lingala
- – Sremanth M

Group 4 – Health & Well-being

Project: ASHA – AI-powered healthcare assistant for the Deaf

Summary: Provides real-time patient data, emotional tone detection, and communication support for patients with hearing impairments in healthcare settings.

Salesforce Mentors:
Nandini Suthar, Komal Agarwal, Ujjwal Dubey

Students:

- – Anjli Sreekumar
- – P.V. Bhanu Prasad
- – Rahul Vinod Kumar
- – Birru Bhavitha Reddy

Group 5 – Education & Learning

Project: Interna – Interactive career simulation platform

Summary: Immersive, story-driven simulations that allow students to explore creative careers before committing, reducing anxiety and mismatch.

Salesforce Mentors:
Rahul Gautam, Tanya Chawla, Rishabh Kataria

Students:

- – Pendyala Chaitanya
- – Shikha Yadav
- – Hamdi Roshan
- – Konala Nikhil

WOXSEN UNIVERSITY MENTORS FOR ALL GROUPS:

Munwar Khan

Mrudul Chilmulwar

Athira Balakrishnan

Navdeep Sindhu

LEARNING IMPACT

Students emerged with:

Technical Skills: Proficiency in multimodal AI, adaptive UX, and prototyping tools.

Professional Competencies: Project management, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement.

Ethical Mindset: Inclusive, user-first design principles.

CONCLUSION

The Salesforce × Woxsen University partnership demonstrates the transformative potential of sustained, well-structured industry–academia collaboration.

By blending speculative design, rigorous research, and practical business thinking, the initiative not only produced market-ready concepts but also shaped a generation of future-ready innovators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collaboration was made possible by the commitment and vision of:

From Salesforce:
- Parag Trivedi – Sr. Director, User Experience, for initiating and championing the collaboration
- Malhar Gupta, VP Product Design, Salesforce
- Salesforce Mentors: Prachi Kulkarni, Shweta Patil, Himanshu Hazarika, Hrishikesh, Tapan Soni, Vinay Attheli, Jahnavi, Arunabh, Pavan, Bhagath, Nandini Suthar, Komal Agarwal, Ujjwal Dubey, Rahul Gautam, Tanya Chawla, Rishabh Kataria

From Woxsen University:
- Dr. Raul Rodriguez – Vice President
- Dr. Hemachandran – Vice Dean, School of Business
- Munwar Khan – Director, David Dunne Design Thinking Lab
- Mrudul Shyam Chilmulwar – Co-Director
- Core mentors: Navdeep Sindhu, Athira Balakrishnan

Shikha Yadav

concept that can demonstrate the potential of AI to improve the learning process, increase access to it, and make a valuable contribution to the sphere of education.

Throughout the project, I worked with my team members and was thankful to receive valuable mentorship from the Salesforce team. Their directions made me realize how to deal with innovation strategically and match ideas to real-world demands. We collaboratively engaged in in-depth research on the current issues in the education sector including personalization, student engagement, and access to quality resources.

The experience was very beneficial to my knowledge of AI in education as well as my ability to work in a team, conduct research, and solve problems. The project was really rewarding since it was learned directly with Salesforce mentors.

My Experience Working with Salesforce on AI in Learning

I managed to work on a Salesforce project aimed at the exploration of the ways in which Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to design the future of the education and learning industry. The goal was to produce an original

Arul

absolutely love about UX design: the beautiful mess of not knowing becomes your compass. You keep digging, testing, failing, trusting the process... until suddenly, something clicks and starts making perfect sense.

This project was like a master-class in everything I didn't know I needed to learn. Getting to explore AI while keeping humans at the heart of it all? That's the sweet spot I've been craving to dive into.

The messy brainstorming sessions, the "wait, let's pivot everything" moments, the heated discussions that somehow led to breakthroughs, every chaotic bit of it taught me something new. We didn't just build a solution; we grew as designers, as collaborators, as problem-solvers.

How do you solve a problem when you don't even know what the final solution looks like?

That's exactly where this wild journey with the Salesforce team began, staring at an open brief with nothing but uncertainty and a whole lot of excitement. But honestly? That's what I

TESTIMONIALS

Jovita Lanka

The faculty played a significant role in shaping our journey. They encouraged us to brainstorm openly, to view challenges from multiple perspectives, and to conduct thorough research before moving into execution. At the same time, they gave us autonomy in decision-making, which allowed us to think more independently and develop out-of-the-box ideas.

We were also fortunate to be guided by the Salesforce team throughout the process. Their feedback and corrections at different stages of development pushed us to refine our ideas and improve the product.

Overall, the experience was a wonderful blend of creativity, technical application, mentorship, and industry guidance—something that will remain memorable and impactful for us.

Working on this project was a truly enriching experience, especially because it involved collaboration with Design students. While our focus was largely on the technical aspects, they brought in a creative point of view that added tremendous value to the process. We learned a lot from them, particularly about how to design a product with the end user in mind.

Srimanth

Unlike traditional NPCs that follow repetitive scripts, EvolveNPC proposed characters with memory, emotion, and the ability to influence each other, creating evolving societies within games.

A key highlight was the cross disciplinary collaboration between design and MBA students. Their strategic inputs added depth to our creative ideas, teaching us how to balance innovation with real world feasibility. Mentorship was also a huge part of our journey. We received guidance from Salesforce mentors Parag Trivedi, Hrishikesh Deshmukh, Malhar Gupta, Rushab Kataria, Rohit Sinha, Vinay Dixit, and Bhagath Pagadala, along with our faculty mentors Mrudul Chilmulwar, Munwar Khan, Navdeep Sindhu, and Athi...

The project concluded with a prototype and final pitch, where EvolveNPC was recognized as one of the top projects. Beyond recognition, it was the teamwork, mentorship, and learning that made this journey so valuable.

Experience Report – EvolveNPC

EvolveNPC, or Advancing AI Interfaces for Natural Interaction, was a project developed during the Salesforce Design Thinking Sprint at Woxsen University. The goal was to reimagine Non Playable Characters in games by making them adaptive, responsive, and capable of learning from players.

**To learn more about Woxsen University
and the School of Arts and Design**

https://woxsen.edu.in/

School of Arts & Design Blog:

https://woxsendesign.art

**Digital Archival Platform to access the best
projects:**

https://portfolio.soad.co.in/