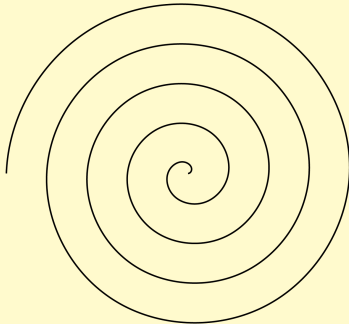


UX Research Methods for Design

Term		Fall 2025
University		Washington University in St. Louis
School		Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Course	Symbol	
	Number	DESIGN5260-02
	Title	UX Research Methods for Design
	Faculty	Laurel Schwulst, laurels@wustl.edu
	Location	Weil Hall, Room 120 (in-person)
	Days	Tuesdays & Thursdays
	Time	1–3:50pm
	Credits	3
	Description	<i>User experience research can make or break a design. This studio course explores the foundations of user research appropriate for both digital and analog products. Through projects, discussions, readings, and exercises students will build an understanding of the role of research in experience design. Students will practice research methods including interviews, surveys, contextual inquiry, peer analysis, and usability testing. Students will create artifacts that contextualize research within the broader UX design process, including personas, journey maps, affinity maps, and low-fidelity prototypes.</i>
	Pre- & co-requisites	<i>Undergraduate: Has completed (DESIGN 3254 or CSE 1301) (C- or better). Graduate: Has program of study (Master of Design in HCI + Emerging Technology).</i>
	Website	2025-fall-washu.veryinteractive.net/ux-research-methods

Learning Objectives

Students who complete this course successfully will:

- Build a foundational understanding of what user experience (UX) research is, why it matters, and its role in design processes.
- Build an understanding of, and practice implementing, UX research methods.
- Make strategic design recommendations and decisions rooted in insights about the goals, needs, desires, and challenges of people impacted by designs (“users”).
- Practice planning and executing methods for primary and secondary UX research and synthesis including surveys, interviews, peer analysis, and mapping, in order to support and inform the design of (digital) prototypes.
- Practice creating UX research deliverables such as personas, empathy maps, journey maps, and affinity maps.
- Develop techniques for communicating research findings and recommendations to stakeholders and through case studies.

Course Structure and Assignments

This is a studio course grounded in developing two holistic UX research projects.

Individual classes will include a combination of:

- **sharing**
(lecture, videos, other examples)
- **in-class exercises and dialogue**
(based on readings and lecture, trying out methods for UX research)
- **working**
(researching, experimenting, prototyping, conversation, etc.)
- **critiquing**
(spending time with others’ work, offering observations, discussion)

The entire course consists of:

- **Two longer projects**
(comprised of cumulative exercises and ending in a final presentation)
- **Weekly assigned readings and responses**
- **Group publication**

Projects

- Project 1. *To be announced*
- Project 2. *To be announced*

More information regarding these projects will be shared as the semester continues.

Course Requirements and Grading

For this course, the grading breakdown is:

60% ... Projects

- 30% ... Project 1
- 30% ... Project 2

30% ... Active participation in weekly peer critiques, in-class activities / exercises / reading discussions

10% ... Group publication participation

Students will receive a rubric, written feedback, and a grade for each project in this course. Late project submissions will receive a one time lateness penalty of a third of a letter grade. Late reading responses will receive half credit.

Grades are determined based on this scale:

A ... 90-100
B ... 80-89
C ... 70-79
D ... 60-69
F ... 59-Below

Group publication

We will collect and publish some of our experiments (sourcing from Projects 1 and 2) into a print publication. To do this, we will split into small teams with specific roles (design, editorial, project management, etc).

Projects are evaluated on:

- Planning, preparation, and process
- Content
- Research and design

Planning, preparation, and process — Design is a cumulative process, and investment in each stage of a project plays a significant role in both your learning and in student assessment. Process is viewed by the quality, depth, and thoroughness of each stage of a project — research, analysis, ideation, concept development, and testing.

Content — Requirements for content that must be included in the project as outlined by the assignment instructions are met. Content is thoughtfully considered and structured, and copywriting is considered.

Research and design — Research and design principles are put to use in project outcomes. Demonstrated, thoughtful reasoning, rooted in user research is articulated for design decisions. The craft for both projects and their presentations, as well as the craft for process deliverables, are polished, annotated, and thoughtfully designed.

In-class exercises are smaller and continuous opportunities to experiment with research methods and ideas. They are assessed based on breadth of exploration, development, and the proper use of class time to progress.

Group publication participation is evaluated based on each student's willingness and contributions to the group publication — individually and collectively.

Participation

Participation is an important part of this course — whether in small groups, project teams, full-class reviews and discussions, or in individual activities and exercises. Your level of participation will be observed each week and will contribute to your overall grade (30%, as noted above). If you are struggling with participation, please reach out to the instructor for guidance.

Ways to demonstrate full participation include:

- having work-in-progress ready to share for feedback during class sessions
- asking questions or bringing up points of contrast or confusion
- sharing your own thoughts, ideas, or experiences
- providing thoughtful feedback on others' work
- commenting on or building upon what others have shared
- contributing to shared work & decision making

Technology

While this course is tool agnostic (that is, students should use whatever tool best suits the task at hand), we will explore using the most popular tools of the day in the field of UX research.

Required technology and software:

- **Internet Access** — Note that all class materials (schedule, assignments, readings) will appear on the main class “hub” or class website: 2025-fall-washu-ux-research-methods.veryinteractive.net. Please bookmark it! Updates will also be emailed regularly.
- **Figma, [free education version](#)** — For in-class activities and individual/team project work.
- **Any presentation-making tool** — Such as Google Slides, Keynote, Powerpoint, or Figma.
- **Are.na account** — [Are.na](#) is an online social bookmarking and research tool. We'll be using it in this class to collect references and share process material. We will also use [Are.na](#) for submitting written weekly reading responses and eventually co-organizing the group publication. Please sign up for an account if you don't have one yet.

Texts and media

Note there is no required textbook for this course. Individual readings will be assigned on a weekly basis, available on the course website and over email.

Specifically, we will watch “How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built” the BBC television program by Stuart Brand, which is available for free on YouTube. (The book companion of the same name can also be referenced.) We will also read selected chapters of the book *Universal Methods of Design, Expanded and Revised*, by Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington,

whose chapters will be delivered via PDF. It is also available digitally for free through the library’s online catalogue.

Please read and watch actively, marking passages, writing down quotes and reflections, and recording questions as they arise. In class, we'll be discussing the ideas and concepts that resonate with us. All commentary is welcome; the hope is that being in dialogue with each other will help everyone understand the readings better, deeper, and/or differently.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Aug 26 / 28)	Welcome / Living Research Change Over Time / Flow Are.na and Living Research
Week 2 (Sept 2 / 4) <P1>	Start Project 1 / What's a Product? What's a Product? / The Low Road Project 1: Introduction — research plan, peer analysis, surveys, interviews
Week 3 (Sept 9 / 11)	Continue Project 1 / Building for Change Collaborating with the Environment / Built for Change Project 1: Continuation
Week 4 (Sept 16 / 18)	Synthesizing Project 1 / Building in Community Platforms and Cooperatives / Unreal Estate Project 1: Synthesizing — affinity diagrams, survey takeaways, thematic networks
Week 5 (Sept 23 / 25)	Mapping Project 1 / Maintenance Practices Caring for Continuity / Romance of Maintenance Project 1: Mapping — user journeys
Week 6 (Sept 30 / Oct 2)	Sequencing Project 1 / Layers of Change Stories, Practices, Products / Shearing Layers Project 1: Collecting — case studies, scripting presentations
Week 7 (Oct 9) </P1>	Presenting Project 1, Fall Break – no classes Oct 4–7 Project 1: Final Presentations
Week 8 (Oct 14 / 16)	(Intermission) Usability testing exercises
Week 9 (Oct 21 / 23) <P2>	Start Project 2 Project 2: Introduction – starting research, competitor mapping, interviews, etc.

Week 10 (Oct 28 / 30) <Publication>	Continue Project 2 / Our Publication Project 2: Continuation — affinity diagrams, personas, user journeys Group Publication: Kickoff
Week 11 (Nov 4 / 6)	Ideate Project 2 Project 2: Ideation and Design — storyboards, sitemaps, and wireframes
Week 12 (Nov 11 / 13)	Concept Test Project 2 Project 2: Iteration and Concept Testing — artifacts, prototyping, concepts, etc.
Week 13 (Nov 18 / 20)	Prototype Project 2 Project 2: Iteration and Prototypes — crafting prototypes, case studies
Week 14 (Nov 25) </P2>	Present Project 2 , Thanksgiving break — no classes Nov 26-30 Project 2 Final Critique
Week 15 (Dec 2 / 4) </Publication>	Publication Publication Working Sessions and celebration!

Note: The instructor has the right to make changes to this course schedule and entire syllabus throughout the semester. Find the most up-to-date version on the class website.

Course Policies and Important Resources

Academic Integrity	<p><i>In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others (including generative artificial intelligence) must be appropriately acknowledged and work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original. You should familiarize yourself with the appropriate academic integrity policies of your academic program(s).</i></p> <p>In general, trust the value of your own intellect and skills. Undertake research and design projects honestly and credit others for their work.</p> <p>In this technology-based course in particular, students will become familiar with using pre-existing language, images, and software as raw material while creating entirely new works. While making designs for screens, we will learn which sources could be used as components or otherwise incorporated, and how to properly credit their inclusion.</p> <p>From Academic Integrity at MIT: "Writing Code": "Writing code is similar to academic writing in that when you use or adapt code developed by someone else as part of your project, you must cite your source. However, instead of quoting or paraphrasing a source, you include an inline comment in the code. These comments not only ensure you are giving proper credit, but help with code understanding and debugging. You should not simply re-use code as the solution to an assignment. Like academic writing, your code can incorporate the ideas of others but should reflect your original approach to the problem."</p> <p>In this design course, it's natural to be inspired by others, whether they are figures outside of class or other students. Whether collaborating intentionally or being inspired by or adapting work by others, remember to credit. Crediting others for their contribution to your work promotes ethical practice. For a holistic approach to honoring lineages and crediting in space and time, see "Multidimensional Citation."</p> <p>When using AI, please use discretion. Note that being in college is a special yet limited time in which you are surrounded by world-class experts in their fields, so we recommend you utilize this helpful atmosphere to the best of your ability while you're here, rather than outsourcing to AI for feedback on coursework.</p> <p>While this course will not utilize TurnItIn (a free plagiarism checker) functionality, plagiarism is prohibited.</p>
Technology	<p>While this course is about technology, the policy in this course is simple: Be considerate of your fellow classmates. For example, if someone is presenting their work, don't simultaneously use your multi-purpose device. Put your smartphones and laptops away in order to provide the presenter your active attention.</p>
Attendance — Students	<p>Attendance is essential. Four or more absences will result in a failing grade. Four or more late arrivals (more than 10 minutes late) equals an absence. Regarding any health-related concerns, family commitments, and/or religious holidays, exceptions to this policy can be made with clear communication and commitment to make up any missed work. If you must miss class, email Prof. Schwulst with as much advance notice as possible.</p>
Attendance — Instructor	<p>If for whatever reason the instructor of this course, Laurel Schwulst, cannot be physically present — for a planned or unplanned reason — this will be communicated with students at the earliest possible moment. Absence of Prof. Schwulst will be made up either by</p>

	inviting a guest instructor to meet with students during class time, pre-recording a lecture for students to watch asynchronously coupled with a short assignment, or scheduling a learning activity outside of scheduled class times.
Unauthorized Recording and Distribution of Classroom Activities and Materials	<i>Except as otherwise expressly authorized by the instructor or the university, students may not record, stream, reproduce, display, publish or further distribute any classroom activities or course materials. This includes lectures, class discussions, advising meetings, office hours, assessments, problems, answers, presentations, slides, screenshots or other materials presented as part of the course. If a student with a disability wishes to request the use of assistive technology as a reasonable accommodation, the student must first contact the Office of Disability Resources to seek approval. If recording is permitted, unauthorized use or distribution of recordings is also prohibited.</i>
Disability Resources	<i>WashU supports the right of all enrolled students to an equitable educational opportunity and strives to create an inclusive learning environment. In the event a physical or online environment, learning activity, or learning interaction results in barriers to your inclusion due to a disability, please contact WashU's Disability Resources (DR) to engage in a process for determining and communicating approved accommodations. As soon as possible after receiving an accommodation from DR, send me your WashU Accommodation Letter. Because accommodations are not applied retroactively, initiate your request to DR prior to, or at the beginning of, the academic term to avoid delays in accessing accommodations once classes begin. Students should sign up for proctored exams with DR.</i>
Sexual Harassment and Assault	<i>If you are a victim of sexual discrimination, harassment or violence, we encourage you to speak with someone as soon as possible. Understand that if you choose to speak to me as an instructor, I must report your disclosure to my department chair, dean, or the Gender Equity and Title IX Compliance Officer, which may trigger an investigation into the incident. You may also reach out to the Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP) Center to discuss your rights and your options with individuals who are not mandatory reporters. https://titleix.wustl.edu/students/confidentiality-resources-support</i>
Religious Holidays	<i>To ensure that accommodations may be made for students who miss class, assignments, or exams to observe a religious holiday, you must inform me in writing before the end of the third week of class, or as soon as possible if the holiday occurs during the first three weeks of the semester. For more information, please see the university's Religious Holiday Class Absence Policy.</i> <i>Email Prof. Schwulst in advance if you foresee missing class for a religious holiday.</i>
Resources for Students	<i>WashU provides a wealth of support services that address academic, personal, and professional needs. To start exploring resources that can help you along the way, please visit: Resources for Students.</i>

Acknowledgements

Thanks to current and previous faculty at WashU including Amy Hauft, Jonathan Hanahan, Aggie Tompkins, Bei Hu, Eric Nunez, Aida Lizalde, and Lucas Drummond for guidance. Thanks also to previous colleagues at Princeton, Yale, and Ultralight School,

including David Reinfurt, Meg Miller, Elliott Cost, Jisu Lee, Bryant Wells, Stephen Kwok, Alex Wolfe, Ingrid Burrington, Linked by Air, and many others not explicitly listed who have helped this course come to its current form. — Laurel Schwulst, August 18, 2025