

We Took an IDEO Course Together: Design Thinking as Professional Development in Florida International University's Writing Program

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Abstract. In the summer of 2019, six faculty in the writing program at Florida International University took a free, five-week online course on design thinking offered by IDEO.org and +Acumen. By the end of the course, we saw a potential for the ideate, test, fail-fast design thinking mindset to have useful pedagogical and administrative implications. However, we also seriously questioned the elitist underpinnings of many design thinking projects where designers enter new communities to “solve their problems.” Therefore, we sought to use a humbler approach to design thinking that created academic systems alongside users while keeping those systems open for revision. In this article, we trace our experiences in and reactions to the course. Then we turn to how the experience of the course has informed our subsequent research, teaching, and administrative work. Finally, we close with a brief reflection on our work as an incremental approach to design thinking and the value we found in sustained, reflective collaboration.

Keywords: Design Thinking, Professional Development, Collaboration, Curriculum Development, Generative Failure, Hispanic-Serving Institution

Introduction

In Summer 2019—what feels now like a very long time ago—six writing program faculty¹ at Florida International University immersed themselves in a free, five-week online course on design thinking² offered by IDEO.org and +Acumen.

Design thinking is a means for solving complex problems. It has been framed as both a creative mindset and a problem-solving methodology (Tham & Thominet, 2022). Essentially, design thinking asks designers to learn about real problems faced by people, frame design goals according to those people's needs, imagine creative responses to those problems, prototype potential responses, test the prototypes with real people, and employ an iterative process to move toward a final implemented response.

The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University, commonly known as the d.school, developed the most widely known model of design thinking in the early 2000s. David Kelley, a faculty member at the d.school, also co-founded IDEO, a management consulting and design firm that has popularized design thinking. The course we took was developed by IDEO.org, a nonprofit organization created by IDEO to focus on human-centered design for social good. The course was co-developed by Acumen and hosted on the +Acumen platform (which has since been rebranded as Acumen Academy). Acumen is a nonprofit organization that provides capital investment to social entrepreneurs. While the exact definition is contested, social entrepreneurship is generally used to describe for-profit businesses that seek to have a positive impact on their community or the world more broadly (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Acumen funds businesses that seek to provide necessary goods and services to underserved populations, such as businesses that provide water or sanitation services to rural communities in India. Acumen has also developed +Acumen as a learning platform for free online courses that support those seeking to become social entrepreneurs.

The course we took asked participants to work in groups and to collaboratively employ the three phases of IDEO.org's design thinking model—Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation—to pursue a social entrepreneurial design challenge from a list of options. Our group chose the option "How might we enable more young people

¹ Unfortunately, one of the faculty members who participated in the course was not able to contribute to the authorship of this article.

² Technically, the course focused on Human-Centered Design (HCD), but given the significant overlap between HCD and design thinking (IDEO, n.d.), and in order to maintain consistency with this special issue's theme, we will henceforth use the term design thinking.

to become social entrepreneurs?" and we collaboratively researched, ideated, and prototyped a potential new writing course. While we decided not to implement the new course, we collectively appreciated this shared learning experience and saw potential programmatic implications for the ideate, test, and fail-fast mindsets of design thinking. However, we also seriously questioned the elitist underpinnings of many design thinking projects where designers enter new communities to "solve their problems." Therefore, we sought to implement a humbler approach to design thinking that creates systems alongside users while keeping those systems open for revision.

By describing how our experiences in this online course impacted our subsequent teaching, research, and administrative work, our article seeks to contribute to the literature on design thinking as professional development in academia. We could only locate one article discussing a similar topic in a technical-communication-adjacent field: Michael Greer and Heidi Skurat Harris (2018) integrated design practices into the content of a graduate certificate for online writing instruction. For example, teachers created user personas to drive course and assignment design. The topic has been discussed more extensively within the field of Education. Christopher Blundell (2022) identified 22 publications that discussed design thinking in teacher professional development courses as either a topic of interest or a process for creating solutions to common challenges. For example, Danah Anne Henriksen, Carmen Richardson, and Rohit Mehta (2017) argued that design thinking approaches are well-suited to the complex problems of practice that teachers regularly encounter. Moreover, Priscilla Norton and Dawn Hathaway (2015) recommend a teacher training curriculum that centers instruction in design to help teachers drive innovation and transformation. IDEO (2012) even developed a toolkit to help educators apply design thinking practices. Our article extends this discussion to consider the potential benefits and limitations of professional development in design thinking for faculty in technical communication and adjacent fields.

In the next section of this article, we will discuss our local context and our experiences in taking the IDEO.org course. Then we will turn to how the concepts we explored in the course have informed our subsequent research, teaching, and administrative work. Finally, we briefly explore the value of humble applications of design thinking in academic work and of sustained collaborative learning and reflection for faculty.

A History of Our Experiences with the IDEO.org Course

In this section, we offer contextual information about our institution and program, including how this context frames our orientation to design thinking. Then we describe the content of the course in more detail.

Programmatic Context

Florida International University (FIU) is a large, urban, very high research activity (R1), Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with a diverse student population: 65% Latine, 12% Black, 10% White, and 3% Asian (Robertson, 2022, pp. 687-688). Twenty percent of FIU's 56,000 students are first-generation, 57% are Pell Grant recipients, and 94% commute to campus (Florida International University, n.d.; Florida International University student life, n.d.). Douglas Robertson (2022), a former undergraduate dean at FIU, noted the demographic disparities between full-time faculty and students, highlighting them as noteworthy given the need for students to see themselves reflected in the faculty to engender a sense of belonging (p. 687). As five white, tenure- and teaching-track faculty members, we recognize how our privileged positions do not reflect those of the majority of our students. Additionally, not all authors here self-identify as experts in design thinking. Instead, our research areas include translanguaging approaches to writing, community-engaged writing, and user experience in professional and technical writing. Together, these factors drive our interest in a humble approach to design thinking. We do not see our practices as creating "solutions" to "problems." Instead, we seek to design tentative academic systems and structures alongside users (including faculty, students, staff, and other institutional stakeholders) and then to continually revise those systems in conversation with users given our institutional context. The academic systems we discuss in our trajectories below are not permanent or final but prototypes that have been and will continue to be revised and changed over time as we listen to and learn from fellow students, faculty, and administrators.

Experiences in the IDEO.org Course

The course we took was titled, "Design Kit: The Course for Human-Centered Design." The organizers recommended that participants work in groups since many activities encouraged in-person collaboration. So, in March 2019, Luke recruited other faculty members to take the course, and six ended up participating. The course included five weeks of readings and assignments that walked participants through a design thinking project. Our team met for the first time on May 10, 2019, and our final meeting was June 24, 2019.

The first week of the course was an introduction to design thinking. The reading began with an overview of the design thinking process that emphasized cycles of divergence and convergence. Then it explained designerly mindsets, including learning from failure, focusing on making, building empathy with users, and valuing iteration (IDEO.org, 2015, pp. 17-25).³ The reading also included an article reprint where Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt (2010) argued that design thinking could support creative problem solving across organizations. This article introduced key concepts such as collaborating in diverse, interdisciplinary teams to encourage divergent thinking, a process for imagining a wide variety of creative responses to a given context (Acar & Runco, 2019). The reading concluded with a case study of a design thinking project that created a subscription-based, in-home toilet service in Kumasi, Ghana (IDEO.org, 2015, pp. 159-161).

The readings for the subsequent weeks followed a similar structure of direct instruction followed by case studies of applied design thinking projects. The readings in weeks 2-5 focused on individual phases or modes in the design thinking process. Week two looked at the inspiration phase and included short readings on various research methods, including interviews, analogous inspiration, and personal diaries. Week three discussed problem definition through a process of identifying key insights from research and developing How Might We (HMW) questions. Week four covered ideating, prototyping, testing, and iterating. The process included sticky note ideation and affinity diagramming, leading to prototyping via three-dimensional models, paper mock-ups, and role-playing. Week four's reading also detailed testing in realistic contexts and maintaining tester neutrality. The final week focused on implementation and measuring social impact.

As mentioned in the introduction, we pursued a collaborative project throughout the course that focused on supporting social entrepreneurship among FIU students. During the second week, we sought inspiration through various means, including site visits to incubation spaces and interviews with experts on entrepreneurship. However, the most impactful activity involved interviewing students in a first-year writing course one of our team members was then teaching. Three faculty from our team were invited to the class, where they conducted focus groups with students about social entrepreneurship.

During our subsequent team meeting, our discussion focused on the students' confusion and skepticism about social entrepreneurship,

³The readings in our course are not published in a publicly accessible location. However, a significant portion of the content is included in IDEO.org's *Field Guide to Human Centered Design*. Wherever possible, we reference the Field Guide since it is accessible online.

which many did not see as relevant to their professional goals. Several students also indicated that entrepreneurship requires access to capital and social networks they did not possess and, in turn, a propensity for risk-taking they could not afford. Based on these insights, we developed the following HMW questions:

- How might we connect students with partners who can provide capital investment and subject matter expertise?
- How might we encourage non-business majors to see social entrepreneurship as an appealing and viable career path?
- How might we integrate projects with entrepreneurial partners into our program's courses?

During the following week, we rapidly brainstormed potential responses to these design challenges, such as starting an incubator and developing an interdisciplinary social entrepreneurship program at our university. However, the IDEO.org course recommended that we pursue highly feasible options first, so we built prototypes of courses in the Writing and Rhetoric BA. We initially created posters for four potential classes, designing each poster with a template to keep the style and structure consistent. Then we gathered feedback from academic advisors on which course they thought would most appeal to students. Finally, we used that feedback to develop an initial pitch for a course titled, "Writing as Design Thinking."

Officially, the IDEO.org course concluded with each of us submitting brief coursework portfolios. As a result, we each obtained a digital "Statement of Accomplishment" certificate. However, due to student and advisor feedback, we did not seek to add the proposed Writing as Design Thinking course to our undergraduate curriculum.

During our final meeting for the IDEO.org course, we considered our overall takeaways from the experience. It was clear that we had all enjoyed working together and recontextualizing pedagogical methodology through a new lens. While the team had previously engaged in departmental workshops and professional development sessions together, the IDEO.org course provided an extended opportunity to learn together through an outside perspective (i.e., an opportunity free of familiar university language and practices). However, we also spent time reflecting on the elitist underpinnings of design thinking, which has historically been conceptualized and practiced by people from relatively privileged and non-diverse backgrounds (Ambole, 2020; Keshavarz, 2023; Mehta & Henriksen, 2022; Singh Rathore, 2022). Even the reading materials provided by +Acumen and IDEO.org centered self-congratulatory narratives of Western designers (allegedly) transforming lives and communities in the Global South.

In other words, while we appreciated values such as practicing empathy and embracing ambiguity, we realized from taking the course just how extensively local context matters. We thus agree with April Greenwood, Benjamin Lauren, Jessica Knott, and Dánielle Nicole DeVoss (2019) that design thinking, “on its own, cannot account for the dynamics of a group, organization, or institution” (p. 415) and that when people collaborate across lines of ideology, culture, identity, and power, “language and vocabulary matter” (p. 406). Depending on how it is practiced, even design thinking is susceptible to a colonialist mindset that can decenter marginalized voices and elide, rather than engage, difference. It is crucial to us, then, that anyone—especially anyone from a relatively privileged background—seeking to practice design thinking be cognizant of their potential to make biased assumptions and impose ideas on others. Therefore, design thinkers should commit themselves to ongoing practices of intellectual humility and self-questioning. To put this another way, just as design thinking is iterative, so must be our recognition of our capacity for error. Insofar as pursuing design thinking at a Hispanic-Serving Institution with predominantly working-class students was concerned, this humble approach to design meant acknowledging the need for greater thoughtfulness about issues such as students’ socioeconomic anxiety and their often-stigmatized perceptions of failure.

Subsequent Trajectories

After taking the IDEO.org course, our team planned to use design thinking to inform our work as program and curriculum developers. However, there was no feasible opportunity for us to pursue this work together, primarily because by Covid Summer 2020, we were all doing our best just to meet our regular professional and personal obligations. Nevertheless, in the four years since, we have developed new courses, conducted research studies, directed a Mellon Foundation-funded program, and founded an undergraduate research journal. And we found, time and again, various concepts from the design thinking course informing our approaches to these projects, including generative approaches toward failure, intentional problem framing, divergent thinking, and a focus on prototyping, testing, and iteration.

In the subsections below, we offer narratives of how we used design thinking to inform our work. While each trajectory is written from the point of view of one of our authors, we want to emphasize that these projects continually informed each other, and multiple team members participated in multiple trajectories. Furthermore, these trajectories included collaborations with numerous other faculty in the

writing program and the broader university, which allowed for even further diffusion of design thinking approaches across our institution.

Generative Failure in Faculty Development – Paul Feigenbaum

In an academic age defined by neoliberal accountability measures (Schell, 2016; Scott & Welch, 2016), it can be challenging for faculty to take pedagogical risks and pursue innovative practices in their courses (Feigenbaum 2021b). Implementing such innovations will likely prove messy, and these innovations could be poorly received by students, at least initially, with potential ramifications for teachers' course evaluations. Yet, failure is fundamental to processes of innovation. Indeed, as one of our early course readings stressed:

Failure is an incredibly powerful tool for learning. Designing experiments, prototypes, and interactions and testing them is at the heart of human-centered design. So is an understanding that not all of them are going to work. As we seek to solve big problems, we're bound to fail. But if we adopt the right mindset, we'll inevitably learn something from that failure. (IDEO.org, 2015, p. 21)

During the time our team took the IDEO.org course, I was thinking a lot about both the importance of, and the corresponding challenges with, helping faculty become more comfortable with failure. I had recently started directing Project THINC (Teaching Humanities in the New Context), a three-year project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to promote curricular innovation and teaching-focused scholarship for faculty across the humanities at FIU.

My orientation to program development drew on insights from our shared course experience in various ways. Perhaps of primary importance, I hoped Project THINC would help faculty participants model generative approaches to failure for their students and intervene against the stigmatized orientation to failure many students themselves bring to college (Feigenbaum 2021a). Toward this end, Project THINC was well-afforded to offer low-stakes opportunities for faculty to take creative risks in their approaches to curriculum design. First, faculty applied to and received stipends for participating in this program, which validated their overall effectiveness as teachers. And as the director of an interdisciplinary faculty development program based in the university's teaching and learning center, I presented myself as a facilitator and coach rather than an authority figure tied to faculty members' home departments. Basically, Project THINC was all carrots and no sticks.

Operating from this premise, I encouraged Project THINC faculty to adopt an experimentalist approach to pedagogy within a community where they could share ideas, practices, and experiences, absent the specter of administrative surveillance. I also scaffolded this approach from a strengths-based framework in which faculty, first individually and then collectively, considered what effective practices they were already implementing in their courses. The closest analog of this practice to the IDEO.org course would be positive deviance, which was introduced to us in the first reading. Positive deviance involves designers observing individuals or families who, amid broader socioeconomic, public health, or other challenges, are thriving relative to their neighbors (Durá, Perez, & Chaparro, 2019). However, I was concerned that positive deviance could frame the rest of the community in deficit-based terms. Therefore, I was more directly inspired by design justice, which offers a holistically strengths-based approach to understanding what already works well in a community (Costanza-Chock, 2020). For example, I began workshops by asking participants to reflect on their existing courses—looking at factors such as atmosphere, assignments, activities, and methods of assessment—and considering the following questions:

- What are the most effective aspects of the course?
- When are students most excited to participate?
- When do they produce what you consider their best work?
- What factors seem to contribute to these positive outcomes?

I then asked faculty to share answers with the larger group, a process via which cohort members discovered many pedagogical connections across their disciplines. We complemented this storytelling by exploring the high-impact practices, or HIPs, that the American Association of Colleges & Universities connects to enhanced student engagement and persistence in college (Kuh, 2008). These include writing-intensive courses, learning communities, internships, and capstone experiences. From exploring these stories and HIPs, we identified experiences and practices that appeared repeatedly.

Another feature of Project THINC that was conducive to innovation was its interdisciplinary cohorts. Project THINC cohorts included faculty from across the humanities disciplines at FIU. This diversity of backgrounds is an affordance for the early stages of ideation, where, among design thinkers, the goal is to produce many ideas rather than to settle on one particular idea (Sano-Franchini, 2022). Thus, after building our repository of effective practices, faculty formed interdis-

ciplinary teams of three and sketched out prototypes of courses that incorporated each of their specialties. For one cohort, common themes that emerged from these prototypes included:

- A heavy emphasis on collaboration
- The creation of public-facing texts
- Community engagement (field trips, guest speakers, partnerships with nonprofits)
- Artifacts that require non-traditional, experiential, or open-ended forms of assessment

By seeing these themes repeatedly, faculty could consider how they might experiment with adopting similar practices for their individual course redesigns.

Project THINC also offered a midsemester process, where my administrative assistant visited classes to obtain anonymous feedback from students on how each course was going. Subsequently, the administrative assistant and I prepared a report summarizing key ideas and suggestions from students, and then the two of us met with instructors to discuss the reports and brainstorm possible adaptations for the second half of the semester. This was another low-stakes assessment process, an opportunity to provide feedback on course prototypes that did not involve departmental supervision. For instance, it was up to each faculty member to decide whether to include this report in their annual department evaluations. As with the IDEO team's social entrepreneurship course prototype, less important than the specific outcomes of the curriculum redesign process or the specific feedback provided by students—though, in most cases, students seemed engaged with the courses—was the opportunity for communal inspiration, ideation, and implementation. In this way, I believe that design thinking can help program developers foster pedagogical networks that magnify the impacts of a generative approach to failure for both teachers and students.

Researching Teachers as Designers – Luke Thominet

From my earliest pedagogical training, I was encouraged to think through Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's (2005) system of backward design, which asks faculty to connect every assignment to one or more clearly defined course goals. Notably, backward design is justified, in part, by likening teaching to user-centered design in other fields (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 13). From this start, I continually saw opportunities to inform my research and teaching through design frameworks.

For example, I previously used an analogous inspiration approach, where designers seek new ideas by exploring parallel contexts or situations (IDEO.org, 2015, pp. 53-54) to redesign a technical writing service course (Thominet, 2020), and I facilitated collaborative ideation workshops to build a participatory definition for our programmatic student learning outcomes (Thominet, 2022).

However, most composition and technical communication literature has framed design thinking as an intervention to change students' practices rather than our own. For example, James Purdy (2014) compared design thinking to the writing process as it is taught in many composition courses. Similarly, Scott Wible (2020) explored how design thinking could support students through messy problem exploration. And Laquana Cooke, Lisa Dusenberry, and Joy Robinson (2020) described how design thinking might help students learn to work iteratively on unfamiliar or ill-structured tasks. While each of these articles made valuable contributions to the field, there also seemed to be room to reflexively investigate our own practices through the lens of design thinking.

So, when Paul's Project THINC initiative made a call for a teaching-focused scholarship group in 2021, I started designing a study. Like several of my co-authors, I was inspired by the recent literature in composition and technical communication that has sought more equitable ways to evaluate students in writing courses, including Asao Inoue's (2019) work on labor-based grading contracts and various authors' turn toward ungrading (Blum, 2020; Feigenbaum, 2021b). In this literature, there was sometimes also an implied or explicit iterative, design orientation (Lafren & Sims, 2021; Tinoco, Gage, Bliss, Baruca, Barron, & Meyer, 2020). These discussions made me curious about the design practices that faculty already used when creating their grading systems.

Several concepts from the IDEO.org course inspired my research design. First, I refined the study in conversation with the faculty in Project THINC, reflecting the design thinking emphasis on interdisciplinary teams (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 34). In particular, a member of the visual design program interrogated my applications of design and design thinking and helped me clarify my argument. Through these conversations, I also revised my interview questions to explore connections between frameworks from design literature and research participants' existing processes for creating grading systems. In doing so, the project emphasized the need to trust in interviewees' expertise. As our design thinking course materials argued: "Experts are everywhere—and you don't need a degree to be one. Treat your interviewee as an

expert. You're interviewing them about their life, and in that, they are the expert. Be curious and always give them the respect they deserve" (IDEO.org, personal communication, May 10, 2019). Of course, this need to respect participants' expertise was compounded in my study, where the research participants had advanced degrees, pedagogical training, and an average of nearly 15 years of teaching experience. This orientation toward interviewees' expertise reinforced my decision to adopt the more constrained goals of reflecting on instructors' existing design processes and exploring possible avenues for customizable local practice rather than offering a universal system for "fixing" grading systems.

Ultimately, my study found that faculty used a range of design-based practices to create their grading systems. For example, they designed their systems around intentional goals, such as fostering intrinsic motivation or improving student understanding of learning outcomes. And faculty described actively observing student activity and using this information to iterate on the design of their grading systems over time. However, they also described risk-averse approaches of adapting existing solutions rather than engaging with student needs as creative user-centered designers. Therefore, I recommended several design practices that could help faculty explore the design space, including journaling to support reflexive considerations of how their positionality affected their design processes and products, and prototyping activities where they could test potential grading systems before implementing them. The full results of this study are forthcoming in *Pedagogy* (Thominet, in press).

Encouraging Student Growth Through Empathy and Recursive Iteration – Vytautas Malesh

In Spring 2022, I developed a course named, "Writing for the Web." It was offered first as a "special topics" course and then as a regularly scheduled elective. The ideals and practices of the IDEO.org course informed the curriculum of Writing for the Web and its methods and practices.

While designing Writing for the Web, I realized I was failure-averse and unwilling to risk what I perceived as tried-and-true pedagogical methodologies. The IDEO.org course encouraged me to try new concepts in evaluation, most notably a labor-based grading model which removed preconceived notions of quality from the grading equation.

Similarly, I felt less pressure to get things exactly right the first time. I mimicked the practice of learning from the community as described in the IDEO materials and placed additional emphasis on student

feedback (IDEO.org, 2015, p. 127). Regular check-ins with students and an iterative mindset meant that failure was fundamentally impossible since I met every poorly received assignment brief not with defensiveness or crisis-thinking but with an opportunity and growth mindset. If students struggled with any particular assignment, we discussed why that was so, edited and clarified the assignment brief, and moved on. Because points and grades were not based on perfection ideology, student work did not suffer.

This course was part of our professional and technical writing curriculum, but it departed significantly from other offerings, which often revolved around workplace genres such as memos, letters, and resumes. This course would allow students freedom in content, delivery, media, and many other aspects of composition. As such, evaluation would require generosity to help students define and reach their goals. Therefore, my Writing for the Web course employed labor-based grading, which Asao Inoue (2019) describes as a practice that encourages diversity and inclusion. For my purposes, it also created a space where students were free to try, fail, and try again. Students would submit their initial drafts, receive comments, and resubmit their work if desired (for further refinement) or if needed (to meet baseline competencies).

The course has been successful due to the empathy-and-iteration model inherited from design thinking. Additionally, the course has provided a means by which we can help students understand design thinking modalities free from the pressure of more conventional A-F graded course work.

In fact, the entire course process was open, clear, and comfortable. It led to overall high-quality student work and to the design of other courses more aligned with this successful new offering. Because students were free to explore digital communication on their own terms—because I, the course designer, felt free to explore a new-to-me grading methodology and course structure—they produced honest, impactful, high-quality projects.

Supporting Student Writers and Editors – Michael Sohan

After the IDEO.org course, Vytautas and I laid out a basic syllabus for a new course named, “Professional Editing.” We quickly focused on one technical editing textbook and possible resulting student projects to fast-track this course through the university and state’s curriculum committees. The resulting course was dry and product-oriented. The core projects taught decontextualized genres based on standard definitions of professional editing. For example, in one project, students

were tasked with fact-checking an extensively erroneous article, tracking all changes, and providing a 3-5 source annotated bibliography.

After receiving approval for the course in the spring of 2020, I returned to the proposal to develop it for implementation. Reading back over the textbook-inspired assignment sequence, I found the course reduced professional editing practice, at least on the surface, to material outcomes, bereft of imagination or meaningful agency. Through this observation, I was reminded of our IDEO cohort's experiences with problem framing. Essentially, design thinking argues that problems and solutions are defined together during the design process rather than before it (Weedon, 2019). For my class, this meant defining professional editing through the potential experiences of my students. These students might start their editing careers through freelance work, writing as supplementary components of other (sometimes unstable) employment, or volunteer work, so I sought ways to humanize my approach to teaching this course. I assessed the course activities against the IDEO method of creating HMW statements to generate avenues to strengthen student engagement and learning. This process illuminated the previously mentioned problem framing for designing this course, and my focus turned from "What textbook can students use to practice editing?" to "What tasks could students perform that use their bilingual/cultural knowledge to promote their skills in their communities?"

As I redesigned the course, I supplemented the technical editing textbook's product-based assignments with readings about real-world editing skills of interpersonal communications, such as Carol Fisher Saller's *The Subversive Copyeditor* (2016). I also scheduled interviews with practicing editors from various fields. As the fall semester of the first Covid year approached, my hope that we would meet face-to-face with these experts was dashed. We quickly transitioned into remote teaching, and the separation from students led to more online discussion board conversations than I had anticipated. However, we were able to interview these experts through Zoom, which had the benefit of supporting students who felt free to ask questions in the chat function.

The first discussion post of the course asked, "What do editors do?" The responses were almost entirely in three categories, which I later jokingly suspected arose from watching Clark Kent's and Peter Parker's newspaper editors in the movies: they assign writers to cover subjects/events, read books/articles to see if they are any good, and check punctuation. While not incorrect, these initial assumptions were challenged throughout the course. Students conducted a life design

interview and engaged in networking in a supportive environment, two critical activities for prototyping one's career described by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans (2016). Students also learned how careers in editing are essentially careers in interpersonal engagement; explored the field's stresses, situational details, and demands; and considered methods for using networking, social media, and professional clubs and societies to develop skills and improve work prospects.

Through informal polls, reflections, and course evaluations, students reported that the human-centered work at the heart of editing was among the most valuable components of the course. They valued doing "real editing," not just in spelling and punctuation, but in editor-to-author communication, time management, and reflection on their own feelings of doubt and credibility as editors. Concurrent with the implementation of this course, design discussions also included the need for students to prototype editing through real interpersonal communications with writers and coworkers. In other words, the course offered a new trajectory in the need to test students' abilities to implement these skills in iterative, practical contexts. This incremental idea would eventually lead to a collaboration with the *FIU Undergraduate Research Journal (FIU URJ)* students and faculty editing team, which is discussed in the next section.

Co-founding an Undergraduate Research Journal – Vanessa Kraemer Sohan

During the IDEO course, our team tried to answer the generative HMW question, "How might we help students connect with partners who can provide capital investment and subject matter expertise?" In our conversations, students voiced their hesitancy to take significant risks, and our work in the course reinforced our on-the-ground experience teaching at FIU: Students need spaces and places to more safely explore less-familiar and seemingly more "risky" or ill-defined careers, such as professional writing or editing. One such space within the program was via the interviewing and prototyping occurring in the Professional Editing course discussed by Michael. Nevertheless, I knew that our undergraduate Writing & Rhetoric majors also needed spaces and support outside of our ENC courses to develop the incremental ideas they were exploring in our courses into full-fledged undergraduate research publications. I also viewed supporting undergraduate research as risky, in part because I knew from my limited experience publishing with a former student that such work required the investment of time, energy, and expertise beyond what I could sustain as an individual given the lack of resources or recognition for undergraduate

research by the institution. For this reason, after the course, I began to reframe our initial HMW from the IDEO course to consider “How might we develop the institutional resources, peer support, and community necessary for collaborative undergraduate research work?”

I began to seriously consider this question in Fall 2022, when I was assigned via our Center to Advance Women, Equity, and Diversity, as a mentor to a colleague, Dr. Xuan Jiang, faculty administrator in the Center for Excellence in Writing. From the start, she and I shared a belief that FIU students needed to publish their rich, varied, and complex experiences and research for public audiences. Our mentorship quickly became a partnership, and we began to invest serious time, energy, and resources into prototyping what became the inaugural *FIU Undergraduate Research Journal* (n.d.). By breaking down undergraduate research experience and creating models for support, we could design a more humble approach to undergraduate research: developing an empathetic, participatory, and collaborative undergraduate research publication experience alongside student writers and editors.

As co-editors, Dr. Jiang and I engaged in the principles of design thinking throughout the development of the journal infrastructure to develop tentative structures and enable continuous revision of those structures in collaboration with student users (student writers, designers, and editors). In our initial conversations, we came together around what I now recognize as the “stage of empathy” with our users, undergraduate researchers, while also learning about one another’s experiences as mentors of undergraduate researchers (Wible, 2022, p. 115). In our discussions, we shared our desire to generate a human-centered design for undergraduate research. Because we were starting from the ground up, we sought to learn from the experiences of other undergraduate journals while also listening to and working with students to tailor our journal’s mission to FIU’s unique context. Our goal was to engage students in participatory design by involving student editors in the complete process of establishing and running the journal (p. 115). Moreover, we sought to identify collaborative and financial partnerships across the university, which engaged the social entrepreneurship models discussed by +Acumen. For our first issue, we pooled together resources: teaching assistants were paid through grants procured from numerous academic units; websites were built by students with library and research office support; print copies were funded by co-sponsoring units, including the Writing Center and Liberal Studies Program; and the final journal issue was designed by students with the help of the Digital Writing Studio. By participating in the pilot project, students gained academic and professional experience as editors, writers, and

reviewers, which will benefit them as graduate students and in future careers.

From the start, student writers and editors benefited from a high-touch environment that encouraged them to develop creative confidence and learn from failure: All student submissions were accepted and coached throughout the year-long publication process. Student writers worked alongside faculty mentors to submit an abstract and then develop a full manuscript in consultation with a team of student editors led by a faculty advisory board member. They benefited from a supportive but rigorous double-blind peer review by interdisciplinary FIU faculty. Student editors helped writers process and apply faculty reviewers' feedback and then collaborated on copy-editing manuscripts in partnership with Michael's professional editing students. Students ran a cover art contest; designed the print and digital FIU issues; and promoted and maintained the website, digital commons, and social media presence in collaboration with institutional partners. Students' experiences providing administrative support and gaining project management skills enabled them to develop expertise in leadership, writing, editing, and design. With the successful publication of the first issue (*Florida International University Undergraduate Research Journal*, 2023), our team has begun work on the journal's second issue with the dual goals of building sustainable revenue and moving to a more self-sustaining (and even more student-driven) model.

In retrospect, I realize that we reworked that initial HMW question to better fit our students and their undergraduate research needs: "Given the institutional context of FIU and the positionality of FIU students, how might we help student writers and editors connect with partners who can provide subject matter expertise?" This reframing gets at the heart of the project of the *FIU URJ*: to provide undergraduates and alums (and their faculty mentors) with a supportive experience in publication, peer review, editing, and digital creation. The answer to that HMW question resulted in interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty, administrators, and students and the production of a high-quality digital and print undergraduate research journal. Throughout, student writers and editors have been empowered to maintain agency and ownership over their writing and the entire editorial and design process, enabling them to develop technological, creative, and culturally agile mindsets. As we embark on our second issue, we continue the work of iteration: ideating, modeling, testing, and revising the systems in place to improve the working of the journal alongside our students (Rose and Reimer, 2022, p. 45).

Conclusion

The IDEO.org course's final unit presented projects as potentially achieving incremental, evolutionary, or revolutionary outcomes (IDEO.org, 2015, pp. 141-143). The readings strongly implied that revolutionary outcomes were ideal for design thinking projects. However, through writing this piece, we realized that the projects described in our trajectories came out of a more incremental approach that helped us listen to students and fellow faculty members while building collaborative networks that can be sustained over time. Our efforts may not reflect the disruptive ideals of design thinking, but we suggest that working within higher education institutions often requires incremental and evolutionary work. A revolutionary approach may not work for all students and faculty, partly due to their (and our own) anxieties about the material and institutional risks of failure.

So, we advocate for a humbler application of design thinking in academia. For Luke, this has meant listening deeply to faculty, recognizing their expertise, and helping them reframe, reflect, and revise existing processes rather than seeking to revolutionize them. For Vytautas, this has meant embracing a more fearless approach to course design that frames failure as a necessary part of an iterative process. For Michael, this has meant trusting process over product, human-centered soft skills over data-driven outcomes, and faculty cooperation in the successful implementation of quality, student-centered education. For Vanessa, this has meant reaffirming her belief in the resources students bring to the classroom and the value of design thinking in building institutional collaborations that will help students make the most of those resources. For Paul, this has meant developing generative networks of mutual pedagogical inquiry where teachers can ideate about, experiment with, and gather feedback from their courses together. Our outcomes were necessarily varied because of our differing expertise and goals for our projects. But collectively, we saw a humbler approach to design thinking in academic institutions as an opportunity to decenter the designer and turn toward interdependence and incremental change that responds more fully to local, student, faculty, and institutional realities.

However, we have seen one potentially revolutionary outcome in our work together. The academy often discourages long-term or recursive collaboration, but this opportunity to co-author an article about our collaborative learning experience has enabled us to do this kind of rare, albeit important, co-construction of knowledge. Through our extended experience of working together, from the IDEO.org course, through our various trajectories, and in co-authoring this article, we

have reaffirmed the need for collaborations such as ours not to be left behind, but to be built upon, transformed, and sustained over time.

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