

TE 598 AIO: From Idea to AI Enterprise

Technology Entrepreneur Center GRAINGER ENGINEERING



Fall 2025

- 2 credit hours
- Wednesday
- 10 – 11:50am
- 1038 CIF

Instructor

Professor John Thode

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Office Hours

Please see Canvas

Course Purpose

This class explores and practices the fundamental themes of technology entrepreneurship and the process of building a successful ai enabled digital startup. These themes can be summarized as follows: discovering who your customer is, what can you do for that customer, how your customer acquires your product, how you make money off your product, how you design and build your product, how do you scale your business.

This class combines lectures, discussion, and in-depth case studies, and culminates in a hands-on group project. The class is intended for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students of all majors interested in technology entrepreneurship.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will have been:

- Introduced to core technology business topics.
- Expected to explore and learn detailed theoretical components via assigned reading and videos.
- Applying and practicing principals learned by analyzing business scenarios, making decisions, and defending their judgments in both written and oral presentations.
- Introduced to real startups via discussion with entrepreneurs actively commercializing technology that originated at the University.
- Forming teams and collaborate on idea generation. Projects will last the majority of the course and will constitute a significant portion of the final grade.
- Expected to engage with potential customers to validate their business ideas.
- Presenting final written and oral deliverables during the last week of class.
- Expected to scrutinize and provide constructive feedback of peer presentations.

Resources

Various instructor-generated & online resources can be found in the Course Resources folder on the course Canvas site.

The Art of AI Product Development: Delivering business value by Dr. Janna Lipenkova (Author)

Topical Outline

Identifying Problems Worth Solving (weeks 1-2)

- Introduction to Technology Entrepreneurship & Key Framework
- Creativity & Innovation

Lean Startups & Product-Market Fit (weeks 3-7)

- Team Formation
- Mapping the Value Proposition and Stakeholder Ecosystem
- Planning Customer Discovery

Midterm Team Presentations:(week 8)

Venture Formation (weeks 8-13)

- Types of Startups
- Understanding the Competitive Space
- Market Segment Sizing & Validation
- Team Building & Compensation
- Intellectual Property Fundamentals
- Entity Formation
- Venture Finance

Final Team Presentations: Product-Market Fit (weeks 14-15)

Grading Policy

As entrepreneurship is primarily a team endeavor, most of the course grade will be tied to team participation and work product. Teams will be working in breakouts and making presentations weekly in class so **individual attendance and participation during class** will have significant impact on individual course grades. **Students who miss class sessions will be required to obtain an Excused Absence Letter from the university to avoid significant grading penalties. Overall team member engagement and contributions will be assessed by the instructor and by teammate at the time of the midterm and final presentations and will impact individual team members' midterm and final grades. All students will be required to participate in a minimum of 8 stakeholder interviews during the semester.**

Grading

Assignments 20%

Midterm 25%

Final 35%

Attendance & Class Participation 20%

Patent/Design Project (Graduate Projects)

Grading Scale

A+	97-100%	A	93-96%	A-	90-92%	
B+	87-89%	B	83-86%	B-	80-82%	
C+	77-79%	C	73-76%	C-	70-72%	
D+	67-69%	D	63-66%	D-	60-62%	F < 60

Graduate Projects

1. **Patent Project:** Read and analyze a technology patent of student's choice, identifying prior art, priority date, assignee, specification, figures, and claims, including identification of POSITA. For a fictitious idea of their own, create a patent draft including the same elements.
2. **Sprint Design Project:** Teams of graduate students engage in a design sprint spread across the semester completing each of the elements of the sprint process while reading *Sprint*, by Knapp, et al., of Google Ventures.

Emergency Response Recommendations

Emergency response recommendations can be found at the following website:

<http://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/>. I encourage you to review this website and the campus building floor plans website within the first 10 days of class.

<http://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/building-emergency-action-plans/>.

Sexual Misconduct Reporting Obligation

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. Faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX Office will provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here: wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential. Other information about resources and reporting is available here: wecare.illinois.edu.

Academic Integrity

You are expected uphold the highest ethical standards, to be honest, and to practice academic integrity.

This includes doing original work and citing sources, including the work of other students. Please give special care to prepare high-quality submissions with proper grammar and spelling. If an idea is your own, that is original work. If you used assistance to generate an idea or are quoting or stating the idea of another, please cite your source.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Student Code should also be considered as a part of this syllabus. Students should pay particular attention to Article 1, Part 4: Academic Integrity. Read the Code at the following URL: <http://studentcode.illinois.edu/>. Academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade.

Every student is expected to review and abide by the Academic Integrity Policy:

<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/>. Ignorance is not an excuse for any academic dishonesty. It is your responsibility to read this policy to avoid any misunderstanding. Do not hesitate to ask the instructor if you are ever in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or any other breach of academic integrity.

Religious Observances

Illinois law requires the University to reasonably accommodate its students' religious beliefs, observances, and practices in regard to admissions, class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and work requirements. You should examine this syllabus at the beginning of the semester for potential conflicts between course deadlines and any of your religious observances. If a conflict exists, you should notify your instructor of the conflict and follow the procedure at <https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/resources/students/religious-observances/> to request appropriate accommodations. This should be done in the first two weeks of classes.

Disability-Related Accommodations

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the course instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 333-4603, email disability@illinois.edu or go to <https://www.disability.illinois.edu>. If you are concerned you have a disability-related condition that is impacting your academic progress, there are academic screening appointments available that can help diagnosis a previously undiagnosed disability. You may access these by visiting the DRES website and selecting “Request an Academic Screening” at the bottom of the page.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Any student who has suppressed their directory information pursuant to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) should self-identify to the instructor to ensure protection of the privacy of their attendance in this course. See <https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/> for more information on FERPA.

Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Statement

The Grainger College of Engineering is committed to the creation of an anti-racist, inclusive community that welcomes diversity along a number of dimensions, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, disability status, class, age, or religious beliefs. The College recognizes that we are learning together in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, that Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous voices and contributions have largely either been excluded from, or not recognized in, science and engineering, and that both overt racism and micro-aggressions threaten the well-being of our students and our university community.

The effectiveness of this course is dependent upon each of us to create a safe and encouraging learning environment that allows for the open exchange of ideas while also ensuring equitable opportunities and respect for all of us. Everyone is expected to help establish and maintain an environment where students, staff, and faculty can contribute without fear of personal ridicule, or intolerant or offensive language. If you witness or experience racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, or other offensive behavior, you are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the course director if you feel comfortable. You can also report these behaviors to the Bias Assessment and Response Team (BART) (<https://bart.illinois.edu/>). Based on your report, BART members will follow up and reach out to students to make sure they have the support they need to be healthy and safe. If the reported behavior also violates university policy, staff in the Office for Student Conflict Resolution may respond as well and will take appropriate action.