

DTX 180: Exercising Empathy (1 credit)

Course Description

This course emphasizes the role that empathy can play in everything we do. Understanding empathy throughout our lives enables us to live a full and intentional life. How do we become compassionate people? When we approach trying to solve problems in our world, how do we ensure that we consider others, their perspectives and their needs?

During this eight-week course, I will introduce you to six core habits, as outlined in our core text, that can provide you with a foundational understanding of empathy and engage you in empathic practices such as observation, interaction, and perspective taking . Each week we focus on one of these values and practices, and bookend the experience with an overview and review.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Define empathy and explain the components that make up empathy.
- Explain the benefits of empathy
- Identify barriers to empathy and strategies to help mitigate those barriers
- Apply empathic practices in everyday situations
- Analyze and evaluate real-world scenarios through an empathic lens

Readings/Required Texts

This course will include a combination of the required text below and other readings and multimedia texts. We will be reading the following book, which I will make accessible digitally to you:

Required texts:

- *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World* (2019) by Jamil Zaki (ISBN: 9780451499240)

A selection of additional readings:

- Brown, B. (2014). Brene Brown on empathy. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewwgu369Jw>
- Segal, E. (2018). *Social Empathy*. Columbia University Press.
- Hess, J. & Fila, N. (2016). The manifestation of empathy within design: findings from a service-learning course. *CoDesign*, 12(1-2), pp. 93-111.
- Krznaric, R. (2015). *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*. Perigee Books.
- Maibom, H. (2022). *The Space Between*. Oxford University Press.

Key Assignments

1. Participation and Engagement: 25%

Regular attendance and active engagement in and outside of the classroom through actively reading course readings, participating in discussion boards and in-class discussions on course readings, engaging in class activities.

2. Empathy Reflective Activities Journal: 25%

You will be responsible for keeping a reflective empathy log over the course of the semester, to help you reflect and develop your empathetic mindsets. Each week, you'll be asked to engage in an empathic exercise and reflect on the experience in the log. This log can be in many forms (e.g., digital, analog, visual or verbal) See the course calendar below for an outline of each week's reflective work.

3. Design Challenge Project and Presentation (Empathy in Design): 25%

Throughout the first weeks of this course, you will engage in human-centered practices to help you better understand the needs/desires of your peers (students here at the University of Illinois). This understanding will be based on researching your community through empathic practices such as observation, interaction, perspective taking that will help you both understand your peers' needs/desires but also help you develop personas that could help you design possible solutions/concepts to address their needs/desires. You'll present your findings (including the personas you identified) in a presentation during week 6. This will be a collaborative project where you partner with a classmate.

4. Empathy Case Study: 25%

In order to analyze how empathy unfolds within our designs, work, school, systems, and lives, you will be asked to identify an "empathy opportunity" and analyze that opportunity. You will identify an existing social context (e.g., an issue or problem) that people are facing (preferably one you are not directly impacted by) and offer an analysis of the empathy opportunity, which will also be shared in class. What is happening that would benefit from an empathic response? Who are the key stakeholders involved? How would you approach the situation to help you (and others) better understand the different stakeholders' perspectives more fully? How would cultural and social factors impact the potential for empathic responses? How might you try to mitigate those factors to help you empathize with people from different sociocultural backgrounds than yourself?

Evaluation

Unless otherwise stated, **attendance at regular in-person or virtual class meetings is required. If you think that you will not be able to attend one or more of our class meetings, please let the instructor know in advance by email.**

Because this course is only once a week, you can only miss one class before you fall behind. After that, your participation grade will be impacted unless you have been given an opportunity to make up the class by the instructor.

That said, If you get ill, have a family emergency, feel emotionally run-down, have

technology problems, lose the internet, whatever, let us know and take the time you need to feel better. Please prioritize your well-being over this class if you need to.

Please keep in mind two things:

- 1) Not attending class and missing deadlines will mean that the work you produce by the end of the semester will be weaker. **Staying on schedule as much as possible will set you up to succeed.**
- 2) The purpose of this course is to help you exercise an empathic mindset. This includes better understanding yourself as it relates to helping you better understand the perspectives and lived experiences of others. By doing this the hope is you'll develop your ability to respond empathetically rather than with judgment or sympathy. **As such, this course requires you to be open-minded, reflective and vulnerable. Not doing this will limit what you get out of this course.**

Participation

You are welcome to participate in this class in whatever way is most useful to you. In "typical" college classrooms, participation looks like active verbal contributions in large group conversation during class meetings, but we understand that this model doesn't fit everyone's personality type, abilities, and cultural norms. If it works better for you to listen attentively and take notes during class, do that. Remember, this class relies heavily on your work in your group and in your reflective practices. Please, do your best to actively participate in group discussions and activities. Unless we contact you with concerns about your participation, you can assume that you are doing fine and earning all the possible participation points.

Classroom conduct

Section 1-201(b) of the UIUC Student Code states that "It is expected that students enrolled in the university will conduct themselves at all times in accordance with accepted principles of responsible citizenship and with due regard for the rights of others." Additionally, our goal is to run an inclusive, safe, and accommodating classroom and to provide a supportive learning environment for all students. We have a zero-tolerance policy for attacks of a personal nature or statements denigrating another on the basis of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, age, linguistic background, ability or disability, physical appearance, or national/regional origin. Those who engage in such behaviors will be asked to leave the classroom and counted absent for the day.

We respect each student's right to respond to the name and pronoun of their choice and the right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect. If you see a way to make the class feel more inclusive, safe, and accommodating, we encourage you to share your ideas.

Strategies for success

Your success is important to us. Quality and growth demand effort and commitment. We suggest the following strategies in not just this class, but in every class you embark on at UIUC:

- Make every effort to engage in the course content.
- When doing collaborative work, schedule time for it.

- Be accountable to yourself and your working group. Design challenges are inherently collaborative. Rely on one another and be there for each other.
- Ask questions (in class and/or via email) whenever you need further insight. We welcome your questions, feedback, and suggestions. Developing a dialogue with your instructors should be a top priority for all students.
- If you are having trouble understanding or completing course material, please consult us ASAP. We can be reached by email or other indicated channels to schedule an appointment.
- Observe, share, discuss, and debate ideas. Please think of your instructor and fellow students as your colleagues.
- Cultivate an open mind, a desire to learn, and a passion for excellence.

Grading criteria and grading scale

The grading scale for this class is based on 100 total possible points. And at the end of the semester, your final grade will be assigned using a standard A, B, C, D, F scale, including pluses and minuses. If you have a question about any grade you receive, please wait a day and then make an appointment. This will give you enough time to calmly consider any comments and come up with specific questions regarding that feedback.

Participation and Engagement	25%
Empathy Journal	25%
Empathy Case Study	25%
Design Project and Presentation	25%
TOTAL	100%

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

Work with grades below 90% may be resubmitted to get up to ½ of the credit points back on the assignment. Redo must be resubmitted within one week of posting the grade on Canvas to be reconsidered and prior to the end of the semester.

Requirements for assignments will be available on Canvas and are expected on the designated date; all reading should be done prior to the class date noted. All composed work will be evaluated on the basis of your engagement in the process

and thoughtfulness and thoroughness of execution. All major presentations will also include a checklist or rubric to help guide your work.

Unless otherwise specified, **you will submit assignments to Canvas (this includes presentations)**. Assignments not turned in on the designated day will receive a lowered grade (2 points per day) unless prior permission for an extension has been requested and approved by the instructor. **In order to get an extension, you must be proactive and contact the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the due date unless there are emergency circumstances that prevent you from doing so earlier.**

Land Acknowledgement Statement

As a land-grant institution, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a responsibility to acknowledge the historical context in which it exists. In order to remind ourselves and our community, we will begin this event with the following statement. We are currently on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. It is necessary for us to acknowledge these Native Nations and for us to work with them as we move forward as an institution. Over the next 150 years, we will be a vibrant community inclusive of all our differences, with Native peoples at the core of our efforts.

Academic Integrity

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(s) if you are ever in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or any other breach of academic integrity.

Disability Statement

Every human being learns, thinks, works, writes, and moves through the world differently. Consequently, I am committed to making this course flexible and accommodating to account for both difference and disability in this classroom, including in instances of physical disability, mental illness, and/or learning disability.

As part of this commitment, I try to present all course materials in multiple modes whenever possible, giving you the opportunity to participate and engage with different materials as you see fit. (And, really, this is one of the things this course is all about!) However, if any class materials, practices, or policies are in any way keeping you from being successful, please let us know by email or in person. I am more than happy to work with you!

Additionally, if you have a disability, I strongly encourage you to work with UIUC's

Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) to document your needs and request accommodations. They are an invaluable resource, and they can help us both better understand commonly helpful types of accommodations. You can contact DRES at 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, (217) 333-1970, or via email at disability@illinois.edu.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts (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. 5

Mandated Reporter Status and Sexual Assault Resources

Please know that, while I care greatly for my students and am happy to lend an ear in support when asked, under Title IX, I (along with your other teachers) am designated as a mandated reporter. This means I am required to disclose reports of sexual misconduct to the University or law enforcement. If you are a victim of sexual violence and are ready to speak to an advisor but unsure of whether you want to file a report, you do have access to confidential advisors and other confidential resources through the university and community. You can find information about those and other related resources at <http://www.wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/>.

Week-by-Week Course Schedule

Week #	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
Week 1 8/29	<p>Overview of the class & assignments</p> <p>Student Introductions</p> <p>What is Empathy? An Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions of empathy • What does empathy look like • Components of empathy • What is confused with empathy <p>Introducing the Empathy Design Challenge & Case Study</p>	<p>In Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown on Empathy • Segal - Chap. 1 What is Empathy?
Week 2 9/5	<p>Who can be empathetic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixedism vs. mobilism • Flexing empathy muscles <p>Choosing Empathy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginner's mindset • Shifting perspectives 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki - Chap. 1 & Chap. 2 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Post based on readings • Empathy Journal - Know the self
Week 3 9/12	<p>Empathic Practices: Observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can observation help foster empathy? • Experiential learning • Strategies for empathic observation 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki Chap. 4 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Post based on readings • Empathy Journal - Observation
Week 4 9/19	<p>Empathic Practices: Interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can interacting with people help foster empathy? • Empathy by proxy/interaction 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki - Chap. 3 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Post based on readings • Empathy Journal - Interacting
Week 5 9/26	<p>Empathy Practices - Perspective Taking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to take perspectives? • Projection/Simulation • Strategies for PT 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Space Between - Chap. 1 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal - Case Study

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sense of our empathic understanding • Synthesize empathic knowledge • Creating Personas & Journey Maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy Journal - Perspective Taking • Discussion Post based on readings
Week 6 10/3	Presentations - Synthesizing Understanding	To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Challenge Presentations
Week 7 10/10	Empathy on a Global Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Empathy • Systems of Kindness 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki - Chap. 6 To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Post based on readings • Outline or draft of Case Study
Week 8 10/17	Sharing Case Studies Course Reflection	To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Study Analysis due