

I ILLINOIS

DTX 180

Course Information

- **Semester:** Fall 2026
- **Duration:** Full Semester
- **Contact Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, 3:30 – 4:50 PM (two 80-minute sessions per week)
- **Format:** In-person and on-line (lecture/discussion format)
- **Location:** Room 1046, School of Design (SCD), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- **Weekly Hours of Expected Student Work, apart from instruction time:** ~6 hours per week
- **Credit Hours:** 3 Undergraduate Credit Hours

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 sixteen-week course, I will introduce you to strategies and 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

General Education

Social and Behavioral Sciences

Prerequisite

None.

Course Materials

Learning Management System (LMS):

- Canvas: <https://canvas.illinois.edu> – All readings, assignments, discussion boards, and announcements will be posted here.

Course Readings:

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=1Evwgu369Jw>
- 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.

Materials: Laptop for design activities and digital collaboration

Equipment: Students are required to bring a laptop, iPad, or another digital device (excluding phones) to each class session, as these will be necessary for completing in-class assignments and activities.

Software:

- Microsoft Office and/or Google Suite, Miro, and Canvas (accessed via free student accounts or campus lab resources)

Course Requirements and Policies

Grading Breakdown

Instructional Activity	Total Points
Participation and Engagement	25%
Empathy Journal	25%
Empathy Case Study	25%
Design Project and Presentation	25%
Total	100%

Grading Criteria

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 based on 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.

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 prior to the end of the semester.

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?

Late Assignment Policy: 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. **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.**

Class Attendance: 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.** You can only miss two classes 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.**

Absence Policy: Notify the instructor in advance. Excused absences require documentation per university policy.

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.

Final Letter Grades

Percentage Letter Grade

93–100	A+, A
90–92	A-
87–89	B+
83–86	B
80–82	B-
77–79	C+
73–76	C
70–72	C-
67–69	D+

Percentage Letter Grade

63–66	D
60–62	D-
<60	F

Campus Academic Policies & Statements

See University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign policies for Academic Integrity, Students with Disabilities, FERPA, Mental Health, Community of Care, Disruptive Behavior, Emergency Response, Religious Observances, Sexual Misconduct, and Veterans/Military Students. Links provided in original syllabus template.

Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and online assignment help tools, such as Chegg®, cannot be used for course assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. The following actions are prohibited in this course:

- Submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform.
- Incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment;
- Using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials

If you are in doubt as to whether you are using an online learning support platform appropriately in this course, I encourage you to discuss your situation with me.

Any assignment content composed by any resource other than you, regardless of whether that resource is human or digital, must be attributed to the source through proper citation. Unattributed use of online learning support platforms and unauthorized sharing of instructional property are forms of scholastic dishonesty and will be treated as such.

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.

Course Schedule/Outline

Format: Tuesdays – In-Person | Thursdays – Remote

Week-by-week Course Schedule

Week #	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
Week 1	Overview of the class & assignments Student Introductions What is Empathy? An Introduction	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brene Brown on Empathy
Week 2	What is Empathy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Definitions of empathy ● What does empathy look like ● Components of empathy ● What is confused with empathy 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Segal - Chap. 1 What is Empathy? To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 3	What does empathy look like? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathic practices/techniques Why do we need empathy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benefits of empathy 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hess & Fila (2016) ● Segal - Chap 2 Why do we need empathy? To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Journal - How are you

		<p>making sense of empathy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Post based on readings
Week 4	<p>Who can be empathetic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixedism vs. mobilism • Flexing empathy muscles <p>Introducing the Empathy Design Challenge</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki - Intro & Chap. 1 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy journal - How do you empathize • Discussion Post based on readings
Week 5	<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. 2 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy Journal - Know the self • Discussion Post based on readings
Week 6	<p>Empathic Practices: Understanding Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why being empathetic is hard • Cognitive biases • Interpersonal vs. Social Empathy • Understanding the other 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaki - Chap. 3 • Segal - Chap. 3 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy Journal - Exploring the Problem Space • Discussion Post based on readings
Week 7	<p>Empathic Practices: Observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can observation help foster empathy? 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Krznaric - Habit 3

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiential learning ● Strategies for empathic observation 	<p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Journal - Checking Assumptions ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 8	<p>Empathic Practices: Interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can interacting with people help foster empathy? ● Empathy by proxy/interaction ● Strategies for interacting with people 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zaki - Chap. 4 <p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Journal - Empathic Observation ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 9	<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"> ● Empathy Journal - Interacting ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 10	<p>Empathy Practices - Making Insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making sense of our empathic understanding ● Synthesize empathic knowledge ● Creating Personas & Journey Maps 	<p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Journal - Perspective Taking
Week 11	<p>Presentations - Synthesizing Understanding</p> <p>Intro Case Study Assignment</p>	<p>To Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design Challenge Presentations

Week 12	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"> ● Proposal - Case Study ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 13	Additional Constraints to Empathy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Overload ● Empathy & Technology ● Empathy & External Factors 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zaki - Chap. 5 & 7 To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy Journal - Mapping the Case ● Discussion Post based on readings
Week 14		Fall Break
Week 15	Case Study Work Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual conferences with students ● Collaborative work time/peer support 	To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bring in draft/outline/notes on case study
Week 16	Sharing Case Studies Course Reflection	To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Case Study Analysis due

Academic Integrity

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign [Student Code](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/) (https://studentcode.illinois.edu/) should also be considered as a part of this syllabus. Students should pay particular attention to Article 1, Part 4: Academic Integrity.

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/) (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.

Students with Disabilities

The University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, is committed to ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, do not experience barriers to learning and participating fully in class. Students who have a letter of accommodation from DRES are advised to share that with instructors as soon as possible to ensure accommodation needs can be discussed and met.

To obtain disability-related academic accommodations, disabled students must contact Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, please visit 1207 S. Oak Street, Champaign, call (217) 333-1970, email disability@illinois.edu, or visit the [DRES website](https://dres.illinois.edu/) (https://dres.illinois.edu/).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

See [FERPA – Office of the Registrar](https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/) (https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/) for more information on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Mental Health

Significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, substance/alcohol misuse or interferences in eating or sleep can have an impact on academic performance, social development, and emotional wellbeing. The University of Illinois offers a variety of confidential services including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and specialized screenings which are covered through the Health Service Fee. If you or someone you know experiences any of the above mental health concerns, it is strongly encouraged to contact or visit any of the University's resources provided below. Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do for yourself and for those who care about you.

- Counseling Center (217) 333-3704
- McKinley Health Center (217) 333-2700
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255
- Rosecrance Crisis Line (815) 720-4953 (available 24/7, 365 days a year)

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

This statement is approved by the University of Illinois Counseling Center

Community of Care

As members of the Illinois community, we each have a responsibility to express care and concern for one another. If you come across a classmate whose behavior concerns you, whether in regard to their well-being or yours, we encourage you to refer this behavior to the Connie Frank CARE Center (formerly the Student Assistance Center) in the Office of the Dean of Students. You may do so by calling (217) 333-0050 or by submitting an [online referral](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral>). Based on your report, staff in the Connie Frank CARE Center will reach out to offer support and assistance.

Further, as a Community of Care, we want to support you in your overall wellness. We know that students sometimes face challenges that can impact academic performance (examples include mental health concerns, food insecurity, homelessness, personal emergencies). Should you find that you are managing such a challenge and that it is interfering with your coursework, you are encouraged to contact the [Connie Frank CARE Center](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/CAREcenter) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/CAREcenter>) (formerly the Student Assistance Center) in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources.

Disruptive Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the [Office for Student Conflict Resolution](https://go.illinois.edu/ReportMisconduct) (<https://go.illinois.edu/ReportMisconduct>), conflictresolution@illinois.edu, or (217) 333-3680 for disciplinary action.

Emergency Response Recommendations

Emergency response recommendations and campus building floor plans can be found at [Public Safety's Run, Hide, Fight website](https://police.illinois.edu/em/run-hide-fight/) (<https://police.illinois.edu/em/run-hide-fight/>). I encourage you to review this website within the first 10 days of class.

Religious Observances

It is the policy of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to reasonably accommodate its students' religious beliefs, observances, and practices that conflict with a student's class attendance or participation in a scheduled examination or work requirement, consistent with state and federal law. Students must make requests for accommodation in advance of the conflict to allow time for both consideration of the request and alternate procedures to be prepared. Requests should be directed to the instructor. An optional resource to assist students in making such requests can be found on The Office of the Dean of Students' [Religious Observances website](https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/students/religious-observances) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/students/religious-observances>).

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 supportive measures, resources, 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 on [We Care Student Resources](https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential) (<https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>).

Other information about resources and reporting is available on [At Illinois We Care](https://wecare.illinois.edu) (<https://wecare.illinois.edu>).

Veterans and Military Students

As a military-friendly institution, and per federal regulations and Illinois statutes, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has established policies and procedures to accommodate military-connected students. In addition to the support available at the [Chez Veterans Center](https://chezveteranscenter.ahs.illinois.edu/) (<https://chezveteranscenter.ahs.illinois.edu/>), members of the National Guard or Reserves and active-duty military personnel with military obligations (e.g., deployments, training, drills) are encouraged to communicate these, in advance whenever possible, to the instructor. For policy details, see the Student Code on [Excused Absences and Departure from the University for U.S. Military or other U.S. National Defense Services](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part3/3-313) (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part3/3-313>).