

Leading with Innovation

(PPHA 33620)

The Harris School of Public Policy

Spring 2025 | Syllabus | Will Gossin

Monday, 3:00 - 5:50pm CT

Office Hours: Weekly Availability and On Request

Prerequisites: None

Course Intent & Goals

This course will train students in how to initiate strategic innovation within large organizations (especially nonprofits and government). It is intended for students who want to build a career in organizational strategy and innovation in any sector, but specifically within an existing organization (not as founder of a new one).

This course will teach a skillset, mindset, and team-based model for evolving and deploying innovation approaches within large or networked social-sector organizations. Having learned this approach, students will address a real challenge in Chicago in a fast-paced, rotating team structure for a selected client organization. Demands for out of class work will be high both as individuals and as a team. These demands will require close coordination and proactive communication with your team.

In addition to gaining momentum on a specific challenge, students will engage in conversations on strategic themes surrounding innovation including: the implications of data and AI systems, public-private partnerships, complex stakeholder arrangements, and disruptive service contexts (healthcare, education, security, etc). We'll discuss (and students will experience) how conditions like these require adapting the deployment of innovation methods to achieve results.

Course Context: The skills and perspectives of entrepreneurship and human-centered design were formalized to address uncertainty in the world and thereby create more effective and sustainable solutions. Typically, the teaching of these skills focuses on the creation of new organizations that serve new markets or new communities.

However, existing organizations across the public and social sectors face urgent operational uncertainties as well and may benefit from these approaches. Those uncertainties are driven by pressure to adapt their missions to changing constituency preferences, technology trends, social norms, and complex regulations.

How This Class Will Work

The expectations for out of class work are significant and rewarding. Success in this class (both in terms of learning and a grade) will require students to adopt new skills and collaborate in new ways with significant time dedicated out of class to each. Students will likely need to travel throughout Chicago during different periods of the course to conduct research and meet frequently face-to-face with their teammates during each week.

In the first 4 weeks, students will learn a methodological toolkit for addressing problems of strategic and operational uncertainty. In the subsequent 6 weeks, students will work in teams to execute 2-3 “research and design sprints”. Through these sprints, the class collectively will discover new approaches for how to improve defined outcomes across the social sector. Those outcomes will be selected by the class collectively--simulating decision making in a large or networked organization.

Students will learn and apply the fundamental tools of entrepreneurship and innovation including: evaluating business models, conducting primary research with users (customers, stakeholders, or constituents), applying human-centered design, pitching ideas, and prototyping potential solutions. All of these will be used to build real momentum on an urgent challenge within Chicago.

Ultimately in their projects, students will experience a scalable framework for utilizing the tools of innovation to advance previously intractable challenges. The approach can be deployed with a team as small as 4 in an NGO or startup, to dozens of people in a large government agency, or across disparate organizations with diverse interests. The approach is inclusive to diverse stakeholders, builds momentum and clarity, enables claims for additional resources, and can initiate cultural change. Students will gain experience in all these dimensions through this course.

Course Requirements

Grading:

55% In-Class Team Presentations (2-3 total depending on client problem)
In Finals Week you'll give a final team presentation

15% Personal Playbook (self created study guide based on course concepts)

15% Class Participation (discussions, workshops)

15% Weekly In-Class Attendance quizzes

All assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignment may incur an adjustment.

Peer Evaluation (adjustment to final grade): At the end of each group assignment, students are required to evaluate the relative performance of all team members. If an individual is rated negatively by 2 or more team members, their grade for the assignment may be adjusted downward up to 2 full letter grades. If an individual is rated very positively by 2 or more team members, their grade may be adjusted upward.

Academic Materials + Instructor Info

Required Texts:

- Sprint, Jake Knapp
- Mismatch, Kat Holmes
- + See Canvas Weekly

Recommended Texts:

- The Startup Way, Eric Ries
- Understanding Variation, Wheeler
- Business Model Generation, Osterwalder
- Slideology, Nancy Duarte
- Measure What Matters, John Doerr

Instructor

Will Gossin | gossintw@uchicago.edu

Lecturer on Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Harris School of Public Policy

Adjunct Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship, Chicago Booth School of Business

Teaching Assistant | TBD

Attendance, Laptops, and Participation

Attendance is Required: Effectively learning in this course requires consistent attendance and feedback with active participation. I understand that absences are sometimes unavoidable (excused absences include work travel, illness, etc), however more than 1 unexcused absence will impact your grade. Let me know prior to class if you must be absent due to an unavoidable circumstance. More than 2 absences for any reason will substantially impact your grade as the work and learning of the course requires everyone to be engaged. Each class will begin with a 3min quiz based on the readings/content for that week. Each quiz will be worth 10 points (5 for completing it and 5 for correct answers).

Technology Use: Laptops and cell phone use is not permitted in this class-with exceptions for students with a documented Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation. During team breakouts, technology can be used to complete the task, collaborate, or draft deliverables.

Class Participation and Peer Feedback: Class sessions will be interactive with workshops, seminar discussions, and presentations. Active engagement is essential for getting the most out of the class and diverse participation is necessary to make the class work well. The quality of the experience depends on your critical and creative contributions as well as your feedback to your peers. We'll spend part of our first session establishing an inclusive course culture using a method that I've found to speed up the trust of groups and the quality of their work. We'll also create opportunities to leverage our shared network to accelerate your projects.

Accommodation Policy: If you require any accommodations for this course, as soon as possible please provide the instructor with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that you may discuss with him/her how your accommodations may be implemented in this course. The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773 702 6000/TTY 773 795 1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

A Note on Sexual Misconduct and Harassment: The University of Chicago is a community of scholars dedicated to research, academic excellence, and the pursuit and cultivation of learning. Members of the University community cannot thrive unless each is accepted as an autonomous individual and is treated without regard to characteristics irrelevant to participation in the life of the University. Our university is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking — is also prohibited at our university.

Our university encourages anyone experiencing sexual misconduct to talk to someone about what happened, so they can get the support they need and our university can respond appropriately. If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, want more information about filing a report, or have questions about school policies and procedures, please contact Bridget Collier (Associate Provost for Equal Opportunity Programs and Title IX Coordinator for the University) at bcollier@uchicago.edu or 773.834.6367.

Our university is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, and therefore it cannot guarantee the confidentiality of a report, but it will consider a request for confidentiality and respect it to the extent possible. As an instructor, I am also required by our school to report incidents of sexual misconduct and thus cannot

guarantee confidentiality. I must provide our Title IX coordinator with relevant details such as the names of those involved in the incident.

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

- [Harris School Policies](#)
- [University General Policies](#)
- [University Academic Policies](#)
- Policies on audio and video [recordings](#) and [deletion](#).

General Resources Available to Students

- [Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook](#)
- [Student Wellness](#)
- [University Learning Resources](#)