

Northeastern University

ENTR3212 - Innovation for Social Change

Fall 2016

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Background

Northeastern University is celebrating its designation this year as an Ashoka U Changemaker Campus, one of over thirty universities worldwide recognized for leadership and commitment to social innovation and social entrepreneurship in higher education. This new DMSB/SEI course, *Innovation for Social Change*, was designed with this designation in mind, exposing students to the emerging fields of social entrepreneurship and social innovation by harnessing the knowledge and experience across different disciplines in one business school course, while tapping into NU's social innovation ecosystem. Conventional business structures and institutions are failing to address the dynamic forces behind the world's biggest problems. Increasingly, academics, policymakers, and business people are turning to social innovation. This area of study and work explores the emerging patterns, models, and ideas around interdisciplinary solutions for global sustainable development. The purpose of the course is to lay the groundwork for students to discover and test innovations that combine design thinking, entrepreneurship, innovation, social science research, ethics, and leadership, and develop expertise in leading mission-driven businesses and organizations seeking to bring about social change.

Course description

Drawing from best practices in teaching social innovation from leading universities, the course employs cross-disciplinary, human centered design research, within a collaborative pedagogical approach, to engage student team in the design of social innovations as integrated solutions to global problems. Grounded in the three fundamentals of social innovation - impact measurement, systems thinking, and cross-disciplinary approaches – *Innovation for Social Change* acknowledges a student's preparedness to address social and environmental issues, whether the student ultimately chooses to work in the corporate, nonprofit, government, or philanthropic world. The course signals to future employers the student's commitment to social impact and to purpose-driven work that transcends silos and sectors.

What we will cover

Over the course of the semester we will look at the different principles for affecting change, and explore how innovative approaches to asking big questions has allowed for new ways of framing problems and defining solutions. Not unique to the non-profit sector, social innovations can be driven by politics and government (e.g., new models of

health delivery), markets (e.g., open source software or organic food), movements (for example, fair trade), and academia (e.g., pedagogical models for teaching empathy), as well as by social mission-driven enterprises.

Through case teaching, project-based learning, guest speakers, and hands-on fieldwork, students will be exposed to leading community, scientific, and policy perspectives from across various sectors and regions. The history and context of social innovation is emphasized, and "power shifts" driving the field will be presented. An introduction to human-centered design and solutions prototyping will allow participants to begin testing their own ideas for solving complex social problems. Fundamentals in venture planning and project development, as well as an introduction to both traditional and emerging capitalization strategies such as venture philanthropy, government funding, venture capital, impact investing, and competition prizes will present sustainability options. Students will be equipped with the knowledge on how to design effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks for social impact measurement to anchor their coursework in practical, applied strategies for business and policy implementation.

Course Outline

Part I – Foundations of social innovation and social entrepreneurship

- History and Context of Social Innovation
- Opportunity and Innovation: Turning Problems into Social Models
- Collaboration and Introduction to Contextual Design Thinking & Research

Part II – Drivers of Social Innovation and Human-Centered Design Thinking

- Innovations in the Public, Nonprofit, and the Emerging Third & Fourth Sectors
- Social Entrepreneurs, Social Changemakers, and Product Value
- Contextual Research Methods and Research Planning
- Team consulting and cross team learning

Part III - Solutions and Enablers to Deliver Basic Human Needs

- Policy Innovators in Health, Water, Education, and Sanitation
- Energy Innovations in Organizations and Firms
- Housing Innovations with Business and Society
- Education and Information Systems Innovations
- Innovations in Food and Water Systems

Part IV - Venture Development and Growth

- Innovations in Business Models and Cross-Sector Partnerships
- Organization and Market Readiness
- Synthesis, Evaluation and Prototyping
- Critique and iteration

Part V - Capitalization and Impact Assessment for Social Innovation

- Trends in Capital Innovations

- Sustainability and Accessing Impact Capital
- Measuring Social Value and Reporting on Impact

Part VI - Creating Policies and Ecosystems for Social Innovation

- Rural-Urban, Public-Private Partnerships for Adaptive Efficiency
- Re-appropriating Technology and Public-Private Accountability

Part VII – The future of social innovation and global leadership

- Civic Action, Machine Learning and Human-Centered Design
- Redefining Progress on Environment, Social, and Governance Metrics
- Building Multidisciplinary Teams Across Firms, Public Sector and Social Spaces

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