

**Customer Driven Product Optimization (B8506)**

Spring Term A 2023

Monday 8:30-11:45 Geffen 440

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**Course Description**

Customer Driven Product Optimization is for second year MBA students who have a product concept or MVP and have completed Launch Your Startup or Hacking for Humanity and the Planet Venture Incubator. (If you seek an exemption from the course pre-requisites, see [here](#).)

This course will enable you to optimize your product concept or MVP based upon iteratively produced customer input, in-class workshops, and mentoring. You will apply specific tools for workshopping your ventures and conducting consumer or B2B interviews and ethnographies. You will engage with your fellow students in small groups sparked by facilitated ideation and in 1:1 discussions with experts. In addition to course content that involves the full class, class sessions will be customized to meet individual student's product optimization needs. To that end, the Professor will be joined in some class sessions by experts in areas directly relevant to your products.

Over the six-week term, you will answer a wide array of questions that will enhance your marketplace readiness: What is the main problem/challenge facing the launch of your venture? Should the customer need you identified initially for your product be fine-tuned, or more fully redefined? Is your product distinctive and compelling enough to win buyers? How should your product be improved? How do potential customers judge its value? How might your product be positioned effectively in the marketplace? Can you create a better name for your product?

You will emerge from Customer Driven Product Optimization with a better sense of your target customers, a more marketable product, and fresh ways of thinking about how to convince customers to purchase it.

**Course Methodology**

- Brief lectures and workshops will be the primary modes for this course
- Readings include two short books and a few articles
- Assignments and Evaluation (Members of teams share grades except for participation)
  - Project 1: Discovery Interviews/Ethnographies PPT 20%
  - Project 2: Testing Interviews/Ethnographies PPT 20%
  - Project 3: Research Report/Optimized MVP PPT 40%

- Class Participation (Individual) 20%
  - 0-3 points per class plus 2 potential bonus points

## Course Project Overview

The course project deliverable, based upon your start up idea, is a major component of the course in terms of experiential learning, its weight in your course grade (20% each for your discovery and testing reports, and 40% for your final report), and the desired outcome of your product. There will be regular opportunities in class for input from the Professor, expert guests, and fellow students on your progress.

### Steps

- *Defining Your Problem:* In the first class, you will share your preliminary MVP, outline your learning to date about your customers, and discuss problems/challenges that you face in launching your venture. The full class will workshop ways to solve one another's problems/challenges.
- *Research and Reports:* You will execute customer research in discovery and testing phases using techniques you will learn in this course and speak about your progress with the Professor individually and with peers in class. Each class member/team will conduct interviews and, as appropriate, ethnographies and produce two sets of 4-6 PPT slides, one on discovery, another on testing, which will be incorporated in your final report.
- *Workshopping:* In-class collaboration and ideation on your projects with the Professor and guest facilitation will be a regular component of this course.
- *Final Report:* You will produce a report of about 20 PPT slides that will contain your product optimization aims, discovery/testing methods, findings, insights, conclusions, and final MVPs as well as supporting materials, e.g., interview guides, quotations from interviews, photos/videos, and other relevant material. You will present a brief summary of your research project on the final day of the course.

## Columbia Core Culture

Students are expected to be:

- *Present:* On time for every class. Attendance will be tracked and is required for every class except for reasonable absences. Attendance will be reflected in the participation grade.
- *Prepared:* Complete all required reading and other work. Expect cold calling. Display nameplates.
- *Participating:* Students should be prepared to participate in lively class discussions and in-class exercises. An informed point-of-view and active listening to fellow students will enhance the class experience for everyone.

## Readings (all provided)

### Talking to Humans

### Testing with Humans

### Rethinking Design Thinking

How to Ask Good UX Questions

Toward a Pedagogy for Consumer Anthropology: Method, Theory, Marketing (optional)

**Course Roadmap**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading/Assignment</b>
1/23/23	<p><b>Course Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Defining and Addressing Your Problem</b></p> <p>In our first class, you will share your current MVP, outline your learning to date about your customers, and discuss problems/challenges that you face in launching your venture. The class will workshop ways to solve one another's problem(s).</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p><u>Talking to Humans</u></p> <p>Come to the first class with your MVP and be prepared to share your major learning about your customers to date and your major challenge in launching your venture.</p>
1/30/23	<p><b>Interviewing Tools and Ethnography for Customer Discovery</b></p> <p>We will cover qualitative market research tools and engage in small group in-class interviews/workshopping to practice these techniques on your ventures. We will also discuss and execute empathy mapping for your ideas. In addition, this session will explain the role/procedures of consumer ethnography for real-time, in situ product discovery and testing.</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p><u>Rethinking Design Thinking</u></p> <p>Optional: <u>Toward a Pedagogy for Consumer Anthropology: Method, Theory, Marketing.</u></p>
2/6/23	<p><b>Product Optimization via Testing</b></p> <p>With facilitated exercises and peer feedback, we will workshop learning and implications from your customer discovery as reported in Project 1.</p> <p>We will cover how to use customer perceptions, UX, and customer co-creation to improve your ideas based on your discovery. We will also discuss qualitative means of understanding customer perceptions of product value with the goal of enhancing value.</p> <p>Guest expert.</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p><u>Testing with Humans</u></p> <p><u>How to Ask Good UX Questions</u></p> <p><b>Due: Project 1</b> <i>Discovery</i> interviews and/or ethnographies – PPT</p>
2/13/23	<p><b>Product Optimization After Testing</b></p>	<p><b>Due: Project 2</b> <i>Testing</i> interviews and/or ethnographies – PPT</p>

	<p>With facilitated exercises and peer feedback, we will workshop learning from your product testing as reported in Project 2.</p> <p>Guest expert.</p>	
2/20/23	<p><b>Product Positioning and Naming</b></p> <p>We will cover positioning in the context of your products. You will write a customer-facing positioning for your idea in-class, and we will discuss how to assess it.</p> <p>We will look at ways to create a strong brand name.</p>	<p>Come to class prepared to share progress on your MVP and market readiness along with any questions regarding your final report.</p>
2/27/23	<p><b>Student Group Presentations</b></p> <p>This session will focus on your project presentations with input from all students on one another's latest MVPs.</p>	<p><b>Due: Project 3</b></p> <p><i>Final report.</i> Guidelines will be provided for the full final report and shorter class presentation.</p>

1/11/23