



What Got Us Here, Won't Get Us There

15th International Conference of the European Academy of Design

ONLINE and in PERSON in Brazil, Finland, India, Spain and the UK.

16-20 October 2023

Beyond User-Centered Design. Moving Forward with Responsible Practice in and Outside Classroom.

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Abstract: In this paper, the application of user-centered design is discussed on three different levels, including the planning and organization of an undergraduate interior design course in which one faculty and the interior design students, School of Design, World University of Design, Sonipat, took part, secondly, the student projects created during the experiential design course and the reflections on the course. It has been contended that the fundamental practices of the course—principles of user-centered design—can and should be more than just concepts and homework assignments, holding both students and instructors responsible for the effects of their rhetorical decisions. The aim is to provide a template for other teacher-scholars who want to include students in the development of their curriculum and in collaboratively writing about their research.

Keywords: user-centered design, user experience, usability testing, design thinking

1. Introduction

A collaborative approach has been discussed and demonstrated which is aimed towards designing and redesigning for usability not only in the structure of a class, but also in the projects that happen in and beyond that class, including this article. The process begins by defining our local context and the terms drawn upon. Next, the collaborative knowledge is an articulated process for this article, which was itself a participatory usability study of two iterations of a course. The heart of this article is a collection of narratives, one from each student. The research would be concluded by distilling and offering the recommendations for instructors looking to implement participatory, responsible user-centered design

(UCD) principles and practices in their teaching and writing. According to Douglas Eyman(2009), "Curricular design is all too frequently carried out using a systems-design paradigm as opposed to a user-centered one. We are aware of the knowledge and rhetorical tools that we want students to leave our lectures with, but we frequently attribute these goals based on our own perceptions of their usefulness and proper function" (p. 222).

According to Eyman, one of the fundamental tenets that directs the pedagogical design which is examined in this article is that UCD principles can and should be more than just concepts and assignments; they can be essential practices that hold both teachers and students responsible for the effects of their rhetorical decisions. In other words, the course we are looking at was intended to be assessed for usability, both through feedback given during and immediately after the course, and ultimately through the process of collaborative analysis and reflection that are going to be discussed.

1.1. Establishing the context

We look at the two semesters of the academic year 2020-21 of the interior design undergraduate design project course. The course was titled "experiential design" because it focuses on going beyond the human centered design of a space or products and inspired by rhetorical compositions mentioned in Stanford d.school. (2010). The mentioned course is part of a credit based module, and it satisfies a university-required general semester grading and credit based system.

1.2. Course objectives

While the emphasis of the class was on application, readings from the course in the fields of design, technological communication, cultural, and digital rhetoric provided a set of ideas and a common language for our rhetorical processes. While the work progressed towards the following course objectives, the assignments and activities were created to place students with a variety of backgrounds and experiences next to one another as respondents and collaborators.

2. Study writing studies, rhetoric, design, and technological communication principles and tactics.
3. Take advantage of and broaden your communicative, cultural, and technological resources to investigate projects that interest you.
4. Make room for nonlinear compositional processes and failure.
5. Establish realistic yet demanding project goals and hold yourself responsible for achieving them.
6. Participate in a setting with lots of feedback
7. Create contextualized, culturally-aware metrics to evaluate your ongoing work.
8. Work with others in an ethical manner
9. Weekly, low-stakes projects known as "studio activities" were based on the design thinking approach' five steps: empathize, ideate, prototype, test, and refine (Stanford d.school, 2010). The weekly studio consisted of three parts:
10. The exercise itself (conducted outside of class),
11. A small-group discussion of the students' experiences with the activity in class, and

12. A report on the activity and the conversations in which students sought advice and direction from the instructor.

The purpose of the first studio activity prompt, which was open-ended, was to begin students thinking about potential projects by having them experience and analyze how writing relates to design thinking. Students were then directed by prompts to develop empathy for and knowledge of the communities that will benefit from and be affected by their projects. The studio prompted design and testing procedures in the last quarter. Although the weekly activity prompts followed the progression of the design thinking process and UCD, these prompts could be repeated or otherwise customized to encourage students to test out ideas and take chances.

1.4 Presentation, deliverables, and effectiveness metrics for the project's conclusion

The weekly studio tasks were intended to progress towards a final project delivery in a more-or-less linear and/or cumulative manner. This deliverable could be a collection of "failed" prototypes from the studio exercises, a polished low- or mid-fidelity prototype, a high-fidelity prototype, or even a finished product—although no students in either class turned in a finished product. Students created an effectiveness measure to evaluate the prototype in its rhetorical context as part of the deliverable, working with the teacher. Also, before submitting them, students gave a presentation at the conclusion of the quarter about the deliverable that was still in progress and the effective measure.

1.5 Establishing our terms

By placing them in the context of the individual and collective experiences and understandings, localizing and modulating important terms like UCD, usability, and usability testing in the narratives has been done. Yet, the process begins by noting that these concepts have diverse meanings and provide definitions that served as a guide for the course's approaches.

1.6 User centered design:

Generally speaking, the design thinking process, as outlined by the Stanford d.school (2010) in the following steps, informs our approach to UCD: Develop ideas, prototypes, test them, and tweak them (Marback, 2009; Wible, 2016). Usable systems can offer a variety of advantages, such as higher productivity, improved user wellbeing, stress reduction, heightened accessibility, and less risk of damage. (International Organization for Standards', 2010). The UCD practices have been adopted in the course and in the partnership with a rhetorical, culturally-responsive, and participatory focus on users.

While Susan Miller-Cochran and Rochelle Rodrigo (2009) define usability as a process of "anticipating users' needs and expectations, as well as designing texts, documents, systems, platforms, spaces, software—and many other things—with a purpose in mind that is appropriate to and tailored to them,"

Jakob Nielsen's (1993) definition of usability places it as a quality (with five interrelated dimensions: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction) (p. 1). Also, Huatong Sun's (2012) study has been adhered to in understanding the cultural usability model, which places usability at the intersection of local and global contexts as well as immediate and sociocultural contexts. This approach views culture, users, and technology as dynamic, localized entities rather than as static, monolithic entities. Although the typical usability testing techniques like concurrent and retrospective probing and concurrent and retrospective think-aloud have been discussed in the class (Bergstrom, 2013), it has ultimately been viewed that usability testing is an ongoing, adaptable, and empathetic engagement with the audiences and users. In both the class projects and this study, inputs have been considered frequently, listened to, and co-designed with the consumers.

2. Our collective technique for creating information

The research team consisted of the teacher and self-selected students, adhering to traditions of participatory research (Blythe, 2012; Eyman, 2009; Getto, 2014; Grabill, 2013). The data that we used for this study would not be referred to as "collected," but rather referred to as "produced" as a result of the active involvement in the course and in a group analysis and writing process. In line with Rebecca Walton, Maggie Zraly, and Jean Pierre Mugengana (2015), an account is provided of the process of collaborative meaning-making since the processes of data creation, data analysis, and data write-up are considered as overlapping and co-constituting. By saying this, it is implied that the analysis of course experiences as well as the approach followed are both integral to the conclusions drawn. The collaborative analysis and writing were carried out through in-person meetings and asynchronous work in a shared Google Drive folder that comprised meeting notes, pertinent literature, and draught materials once the research team was constituted (after the second semester of the course concluded).

At our first meetings, it was decided that concentration will be on the course's many levels of UCD and usability testing. Also, a participatory method was decided where one would listen to each other's individual and group narratives, analyses, and reflections on the course, and then questions would be asked. In these tales, compositions were created and then shared, the discussion was focused on personal experiences while working on various projects and course components. After reading each other's stories, a shared document was created with the impressions (similar themes, patterns, takeaways, and questions).

The tales were then discussed, expanded upon, and further analyzed in person. Furthermore, a rough format and approach for the draft was chosen, which was described in a shared document. It was also decided to combine the individual voices (from the narratives shared in this paper) and the group voice during that meeting, which was audio recorded and shared in the drive folder (from the face-to-face conversations and syntheses). It was determined that rather than assigning sections to specific people for editing, it was better to make comments, suggestions, tweaks, and additions on a personal level across the entire text because Google Docs supports commenting in addition to automatically monitoring changes.

Afterwards, both asynchronously and in person during co-working meetings with the teacher, this piece composition was started on the shared document itself. The initial structure of the draft was changed since it was found there were thematic groups that would have better served the analysis and discussion than the course's numerous components. First, the concentration was on creating parts that matched those categories, then the construction of the additional sections and attempting to compress the drafts was done. Finally, in a separate Team Agreement form, it was made clear that roles and responsibilities were going to be divided. After receiving editorial and reviewer feedback, the document was revised using the same procedure, starting with a face-to-face team meeting. To better preserve the group's diverse voices and experiences, ultimately it was opted to display the narratives individually rather than merging them under thematic groups. However, in keeping with Pamela Takayoshi et al. (1999), collaborated during the discussion, writing, and editing processes to clearly express, evaluate, and make revisions to both the individual narratives and the other sections of this piece.

Several levels of usability within and outside of the classroom were the focus of the conversations and group analyses. It was discovered that the course itself did not live up to students' expectations; it did not resemble a regular design or rhetoric course. Students may be creative and explore subjects that interest them in the environment the class provides. So eventually it ended up in combined definitions of rhetoric from various sources, including the classical tradition (Crowley & Hawhee, 2012), traditions of visual and three-dimensional rhetoric (Sheridan, 2010), and indigenous, postcolonial rhetorical traditions (Haas, 2007; Powell, 2012), before further localizing those definitions for the individual narratives and design projects, which were based on responsiveness to communities.

In fact, it was discovered that communities determined the interpretations and designs of a project and that people frequently collaborated with the communities or audiences they are designing for. Instead of writing for a large, generic audience, prototyping emphasized solving more particular or community-based design concerns. Prototyping involved making mistakes and running into obstacles, which made the course flexible and allowed the focus to shift from week to week. Also, projects developed a life of their own outside of the classroom; rather than concentrating just on how it would be presented in the setting of class, it was unanimously thought about how this could be done outside the classroom. Difficulties were also experienced, especially in the classroom. As a group of people with wildly divergent areas of expertise found that when all were speaking to each other (rather than the intended users or communities of individual projects), what was more easily understood and what interested students was not the technical detail as much as the project's purpose, the creator's intention, and how it solved a problem or helped a community—in other words, the UCD process.

In the end, it was discovered that the course design's advantages and disadvantages both offered chances for growth and reflection, and these chances helped in formulating the individual suggestions for continued interaction with the users, communities, and coworkers both within and outside of the classroom.

3. Thoughts and criticism on our stories

What follows is a narrative from each of the students and teachers involved in this project that reflects on how all individuals approached and experienced UCD.

1st student's (second year interior design student) narrative: I believe in Empowerment through enquiry and compassion in reflection.

Pre-school was where I first became interested in education, but there was a system of corporal punishment both at home and in school. Time out and detention provided an introspective setting where I could consider what went wrong when I first experienced the Indian educational system in the 1990s, but they also carried the shame of failure and public humiliation. Although our first Studio activity's openness intimidated me, it taught me to trust my decisions.

I chose a project that involved my particular experiential design method (model of a café with reading zone for youngsters), which was a routine aspect of my life that frequently went unnoticed. I made a digital movie of my design-making process and put it on Instagram. Google classroom housed the documentation. I produced three things: an idea through 3D rendering, a narrative reflection and visible documentation, and a visual documentation (an instructional video). By this process of reflection, I came to understand the drive to reduce costs as the driving force for my interest. Below are the digital rendering produced by me during the process of ideations





Figure 1. Digital renderings of the proposed café designed for college students designed during the studio project about user experience design.

Knowing the driving force behind an action, whether it be to teach or learn, fosters empathy for a group of people who share a common interest—in my instance, a desire for economic survival or the ability to acquire new skills quickly. So when meeting someone for the first time, one would enquire about their hometown in order to build rapport. I gave something back to the internet community where I first learnt by putting my film reel on Instagram. Documentation is a science and an art that balances usability with interesting ways for the audience to consume the information. As the program progressed to evaluating community needs for design and usability, I saw that the Studio project established a pattern for how to comprehend and empathize with communities.

My audience during this period transitioned from myself to a much broader design community who simply consumes design and knows how to comprehend its beauty. I needed to take stock of what failure and humiliation really mean in order to free myself of their stigma and be able to relate to the larger groups in a meaningful way. Using multimodal communication, I could then extend inclusivity and forge new relationships.

2nd student's (second year interior design student) Narrative: I feel that the key to learning is realization of long-term objectives.

For my project, I made the decision to concentrate on advancing my work on a workable exhibition design concept, a long-term objective and undertaking. The deliverable and the effectiveness measure components of my final project proposal were combined into a timetable and synopsis of how I intended to continue my project and how I aimed to eventually include usability and user-centered design into it. I was able to determine how I could make progress towards a goal that would take much longer than a quarter thanks to this technique. In the meantime, I was able to reshape my goals and identify which ones were the most useful to have

at the time thanks to the effectiveness measure I articulated for my project. As a result, I understood that I required structure to help me achieve my goals while also allowing me to grow and adapt as my goals changed.

I focused and documented my interaction with various musician and their needs while performing & selecting music instruments. The user experience design was about the entire experience of looking for right space for the particular segment which is this case is the music lovers. This research was quite insightful for the completion of this project.



Figure 2 digital rendering of a proposed exhibition design concept designed for musicians.

In this instance, reflection was the most significant output I could provide at this stage of my project. In this way, my experience exemplifies how we all understand that articulating

effectiveness measures for students' projects encourages them to focus on how they learned to make and measure progress as well as how to apply design and usability principles to future projects rather than simply measuring progress through the completion of the assignment.

3rd student's (second year interior design student) narrative: I have been intrigued with user experience design & in this project I have got a chance to pursue this concept in practice. I have come up with a public library concept to be introduced at the airports of India designed within an 800 sq ft area.

The focus of this approach was the user. The interactions with frequent travelers was fruitful not just for the project but helped in creating a project beyond the scope of just a studio activity & the project resulted in creating proposed concept of a space providing with an opportunity of Healthy entertainment in the form of books, the space provides the experience with visuals, its organic forms and curvatures.



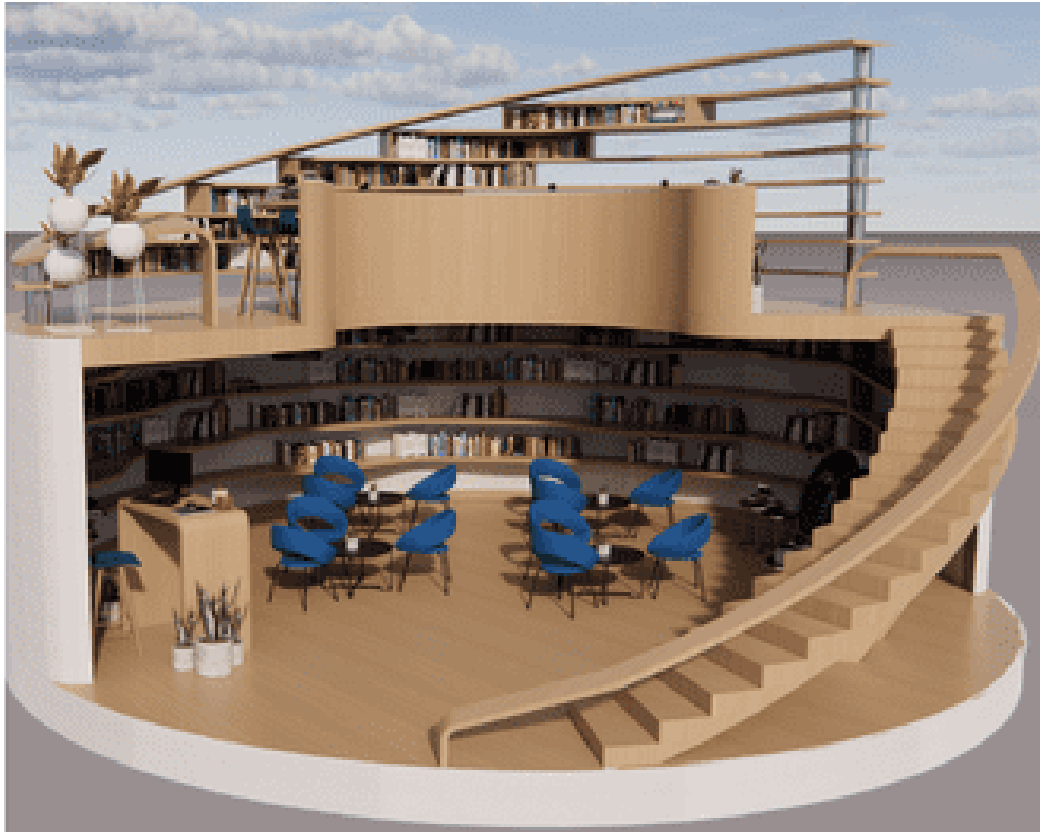


Figure 3 digital rendering of experiential book store inside an airport.

4th student's (second year interior design student) narrative: When visiting pottery stores I found an opportunity which hadn't been explored before which could be converted to be more user focused such as a pottery workshop. Careful analysis of the space, products & customer insights gave me significant inputs about how space could be useful yet commercial. I have learnt beyond the classroom activity by speaking to the users about their concerns & building concepts which revolve around user needs.



Figure 4 digital rendering of user experience design concept of a pottery store.

Teacher's narrative: It is essential to improve usability through design and redesign

Being a faculty in the School of Design, taught the two rounds of this course. I made an effort to promote an attitude of openness to trying new things and being prepared to let go or move on when I designed the course (and, conversely, knowing when to commit resources to revision and development). I also worked to promote an attitude that mistakes or dead ends could be an

opportunity to grow and rethink objectives. I aimed to promote this openness both in the classroom environment and in my personal approach to the course's design and development. The design of our weekly studios proved to be a topic of persistent usability concerns for students, as numerous of my students' accounts make it obvious. The weekly assignments served as benchmarks for success even if the direction of development could be backward or sideways as much as forward because my purpose was to localize the evaluation of student work as much as possible within the specific rhetorical settings and goals of their projects. Since, in many cases, my own disciplinary expertise did not connect with the subject matter of students' projects, I encouraged them to seek out feedback both within and outside of the classroom that was specific to the context, goals, and intended users of the project.

My aims were in contrast with how students interacted with the studio sessions and what they sought out of them, I discovered from our joint research of the usability of the studio format. Therefore, in later iterations of this and other courses, I changed the way studios were structured to make a more distinct distinction between user feedback from project communities (most of whom were outside our class) and in-class studio discussions, which function best as a chance to discuss project progress using the shared vocabulary of the class and hold each other accountable for goals and UCD principles.

The UCD notion of gathering input early and frequently has proven crucial to my redesign approach. The majority of the feedback and analysis of the course design in the early incarnations of this course, including those that are addressed below, took place after the course had completed. I established opportunities for students to suggest and vote on alternative forms because I was concerned that doing so may make them scared to provide feedback that might risk their grade. But, I did not explicitly ask for feedback from students in the classroom.

The majority of the time, outside of class, one-on-one discussions resulted in informal comments on the course design. Since then, I've made a commitment to regularly and early ask students for feedback during the course, including quick, anonymous "usability check-in" questionnaires (through Google Forms), in addition to encouraging open discussion in and outside of the classroom. Instead of waiting until the following term, I may address and resolve problems now thanks to this usability feedback mechanism.

4. Our suggestions for applying user-centered design in design education

We acknowledge that even though our efforts to localize the course's design and projects were fruitful and instructive for us, we are only one research team looking at two iterations of the same course at one institution. As a result, our particular experiences and observations might not be applicable to other iterations of the same course, and we do not even claim to represent all of the experiences in the two iterations of this course.

We can envision future course iterations and studies that create more space for feedback early and often during the course while also creating a safe space for students to provide constructive feedback to their instructor. Also, much of the usability testing of the pedagogical design of the User experience design course in the interior design department took place in our collaborative study (after the two iterations of the course), we can imagine future course iterations and studies. In other words, although the project was intended to be a participatory study, it was not as such in actuality, both in terms of when students' feedback was requested and in terms of students' ownership of the study's design.

Our approach to UCD in a composition course aims to incorporate UCD not just as course concepts and tactics for student projects, but also as a guideline for developing and revising pedagogy of interior design courses. Nonetheless, what we seek to provide is a beginning point. In other words, we hope that not only the assignments and activities we describe, but also our collaborative process of analyzing our experiences and (re)designing the course to be more practical and valuable, may and will be adopted and improved by others.

Lastly, we provide a list of particular ways teachers could gain knowledge from our experiences in the spirit of UCD and its emphasis on practical implications and applications for users:

Students should be urged to think about long-term objectives from the perspective of the user and to not undervalue the process of reflection during the planning and execution of any project. Also, students should be encouraged to learn as much as they can about the diverse range of communities that will be interacting with their projects by attempting to comprehend the full needs and intentions of the various users.

They will gain more clarity and focus for the project's creative direction as well as advance awareness of any potential issues by engaging audiences or groups that would all be interacting with their final product in the future.

The teachers or instructors who want to enhance the usability of their pedagogical designs to conduct quick, regular, low-stakes usability check-ins, especially if they are asking students to commit to UCD and usability testing in their own projects.

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