Why is this course a good fit for summer during the pandemic?

Chernik: Open Design+ teaches students how to ideate, create, test, and iterate impactful solutions to real-world, complex problems. The pandemic, of course, is an example of just this kind of problem. We need to be able to think big and act creatively—and above all with empathy—to find solutions that can propel communities forward. That’s what students will be doing this summer.

Why did you want to teach this course?

Chernik: This course combines some of my most strongly held professional and personal interests and passions. It combines student-driven education innovation with the ethics of open source values and design thinking methodologies.

Can you give us an overview of what you’ll be teaching?

Chernik: Students will use design thinking to develop innovative solutions to complex, real-world problems. This summer, the challenge space is how might we use the experience of COVID-19 to transform learning at Duke? Working in small, interdisciplinary teams of undergraduate and graduate students, participants in Open Design+ will gain an understanding of open design, a variation of design thinking that emphasizes the ethical implications of how and what we design. Students will learn qualitative research skills and conduct extensive interviews with stakeholders in the challenge area, including Duke students, faculty, and administrators to ideate solutions for sustained learning innovation at Duke; they will also learn critical skills and mindsets such as: brainstorming ideas and creating prototypes, testing and iterating solutions, communicating across audiences and media, thinking divergently and convergently, and collaborating and problem-solving in uncertain situations.

How important is collaboration?

Chernik: Collaboration is absolutely essential. The open design process requires deep and thoughtful collaboration across myriad learning contexts, such as interviewing stakeholders, brainstorming sessions, testing and evaluating prototypes, defining problems, and communicating results. Very little work is done alone. The challenge for us is to create a virtual environment in which the team can collaborate authentically, meaningfully, and frequently, but we are optimistic that we can do this!

What do you hope students gain from taking this course?

Chernik: Competencies and mindsets that are critical and applicable across all learning disciplines, careers, and even civic life: listening and creating with empathy, robust collaboration, convergent and divergent thinking, compelling communication across media and audiences, resilience in the face of uncertainty and frustration, creative problem-solving, failing forward, and iterative creation.

Why is social science research important?

Chernik: Social science research asks us to reach across disciplines and engage skills ranging from qualitative ethnographic research to quantitative data-driven research. In our increasingly complex world, interdisciplinarity is critical if we are to understand and solve problems that have direct positive social impact.

The deadly COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on U.S. citizens, residents, society, and economy are among the greatest crises the U.S. has ever faced. Duke’s Social Science Research Institute is responding to this crisis in real time by taking steps to initiate and coordinate research and reach out to students to help us navigate through this extraordinarily difficult period.

The Social Science Research Institute is a part of Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke University