



Masters in Design for Social Innovation
School of Visual Arts

Foundations of Design for Social Innovation

Course syllabus

Marc Rettig and Hannah du Plessis
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This syllabus was prepared for the Fall 2018 conduct of the *Foundations of Design for Social Innovation* course in the MFA in Design for Social Innovation Program at the School of Visual Arts in New York. For more about the program, see dsi.sva.edu.

The authors of the syllabus and instructors for the course are Marc Rettig and Hannah du Plessis. In addition to their role at SVA, they are both principals of Fit Associates LLC in Pittsburgh. See www.fitassociates.com to learn more about how the approaches described in this course are applied in organizations and local systems.

Thank you,
Marc & Hannah

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The gift you carry for others is not an attempt to save the world but to fully belong to it. It's not possible to save the world by trying to save it. You need to find what is genuinely yours to offer the world before you can make it a better place. Discovering your unique gift to bring to your community is your greatest opportunity and challenge. The offering of that gift - your true self - is the most you can do to love and serve the world. And it is all the world needs.

Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft*

You cannot predict the outcome of human development; all you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which it will begin to flourish.

Sir Ken Robinson

Learning goals

The course is designed to give students an opportunity to transform the way they see and work in social situations, and to begin practices that can transform their ability to stand in good relationships with themselves and the people and systems they work within. The ideas, short assignments and coaching in this course culminate in an experience in hosting a session of group understanding, dialogue, and co-creation.



Small groups are the front lines of transformation.

All change includes work in small groups. The future is created one room at a time, one gathering at a time, as we learn to make each gathering an example of the future we want to create.

The way we structure our gatherings—who we include, how we collaborate, the process through which we explore our way into something new together—is as critical as the issue or vision that brought us together.

This course invites you to expand your palette of concepts, methods and skills for gatherings that matter: how to make profound invitations, how to set the conditions for open conversation and collaboration.

Good relationships are the building blocks of transformation.

Our relationships mirror the patterns that playing out in the world: who has power, whose voice matters, who needs to listen, who gets to decide, whose needs matter most.

When we relate unconsciously, we run the risk of replicating the world as it is. The work of creating together across difference invites us to build relationships that embody the world we want to live in, a world filled with diversity, dissent, honesty, healing, care, and creativity.

This course introduces skills and practices that will support your group's capacity to build respectful relationships that can stick together over the long haul.

The world's transformation is entangled with our own.

Organizational, community, and societal change is entangled with personal change. Our inner state influences the results of our work. Working for change challenges our personal capacity for good relationship with ourselves and others, and asks for our own creative fire.

As we become good at making space for the difficulty and wonder of being human, we can help others do the same.

This course offers techniques and activities to explore and work through difficulties, and learn practices that can support students' growth and development as a practitioners and leaders of change.

Small acts and explorations can transform systems, communities, organizations.

A big transformation grows from many smaller shifts. We can't control that process directly, but we can learn to serve and support the emergence of intentional change. We can make invitations that matter, to everyone. We can tend the conditions for creative collaborations that loosen the grip of the old stories and bring new stories to life. We can embrace approaches that address the invisible patterns of relationship and behavior that underlie the visible symptoms.

This course introduces the fundamental approaches of long-term systemic change: models of change, real-world approaches, frameworks for management, and useful methods and tools.

Course structure

Sessions will mix lecture, discussion, and activities. Between sessions, students will apply the previous sessions' lessons in practice, while readings and video assignments prepare them for the next session's activities.

Four two-day immersions

This class will meet four times during this semester:

September 14 & 15

October 12 & 13

November 9 & 10

December 7 & 8

Fridays: 9:30am to 5pm.

Saturdays: 9:00am to 3:00pm

This includes good amounts of time for lunch and breaks, and we do our best to mix the pace and intensity to make the days pleasant and profound. The class format is that of a workshop and it matters that you are present and energized.

Typical sessions mix discussion and “lab” activities

Sessions will typically have the following components:

- discussion of readings, assignments and videos
- short lectures to introduce new materials
- activities, during which we apply the material from the readings—experiencing group methods, theater and art-based activities, etc.

Between sessions: readings and reflections

During the weeks between sessions, students can expect to spend about three hours per week on assigned readings, projects, and short reflection papers.

Personal practices and journal work

For the “Transforming self” track of this course, a new topic will be introduced every two weeks. You will receive the new topic description and a short lecture, assigning journal work and a personal practice to cultivate every day. This will require that you make daily time for a ten-minute practice, and a time each week for your journal activity. We suggest you pencil a weekly journal date into your calendar.

Learning journal

This course covers a tremendous number of new ideas and approaches. We find students are better able to internalize and synthesize the material if they capture notes and reflections as they move through the semester, and for that reason require each student to keep a learning journal. You will be asked to make one public post about what you are learning. We'll give details in the first session.

Group hosting project

One series of assignments builds throughout the semester, to culminate in hosting a conversation with a group of people outside DSI. In past years student teams have worked with immigrants, LGBTQ community members, a retirement home, a school, a company, and many other slices of life. We'll take this project step-by-step, and support your team in planning, preparing, conducting, and documenting the experience in a final document and video.

Schedule of topics

We may adjust the timing and emphasis of specific topics, in response to the natural unfolding of the class and our conversation.

	Session 1 14-15 SEPTEMBER		Session 2 12-13 OCTOBER		Session 3 9-10 NOVEMBER		Session 4 7-8 DECEMBER	
System transformation	The nature of social systems: complexity, oppression and human depth Framing “design for social innovation”	Models for systems change The Cynefin Framework Listening to a system together	Thought as a system, experience and dialogue as tools for change	Project stories and an overview of approaches	Working with emergence: creating in the complexity of social patterns	Strategies of participation and co-creation	Design for transformation: needs, social scales, social practices, and imagining futures	Structures for long-term transformation, and the road to mastery
Hosting & Group transformation	First experience in group methods	Fundamentals of dialogue, and the conversational nature of groups and systems Levels of dialogue Fundamentals of listening	Expanding our conversational kit: establishing containers for conversation and creativity.	Expanding our conversational toolkit: more group methods Planning the arc of a gathering	Co-creation and the deep creative process	Creating together: processes and methods; the facilitator’s role	Facilitation project presentations	Review and looking forward: how to keep learning
Relational transformation	Defining “Success”; Co-creating our group norms	Power, privilege, and equitable relationships	Blame, judgement and Nonviolent communication	Conflict and power: conflict styles, how to move beyond our defaults			Building trust: behaviors that help trust grow and the skills required	
Personal transformation	Conditions for transformation: change in the world is tied to change in ourselves. Incremental vs. transformational change	Self-awareness, self-compassion, and unconditional acceptance	Seeing and questioning our beliefs;	Emotions: what they are, why they matter, and how to work with them	Past Pain: understanding, mapping, and healing as a creative act	Getting still: inner compass and cultural scripts, remembering what truth feels like; practicing stillness	Nourishing your creative fire: Conditions for creative response to life, and dealing with your inner critic	Continual engagement in cultivating a resilient self

Expectations and grading

This is your first semester in the program, and it's the fundamentals class. We're asking you to throw yourself into it with energy, an open mind, and an open heart.

Be a good citizen of the course

- **Do come to class.** We're only meeting seven times, so missing a day is a big deal. Please communicate with us if you can't make a class.
- **We expect you to be kind & honest to yourself and each other**
- **Co-create this with us** – how you show up shapes the day. We invite you to mindfully bring your self into the space and help others do the same.
- **Communicate** – if you're confused or lost, if you need help, if what we ask of you is not in line with your religious beliefs, if something isn't working out, if our culture is clashing with your culture,... whatever it is, if you don't tell us we have no way of knowing.

Engage with openness and honesty

This course will ask you to learn some unfamiliar approaches. Some of those approaches may contradict your previous training. Some of the ideas may seem abstract or impractical at first. And some of the assignments may require you to try things that make you feel uncomfortable.

So we're looking for this... not this...

Be open to learning	Already know it all
Dare to try	Limited by timidity
Hard work	Half-hearted effort
Honest engagement	Polite observation
Pay attention, listen, and explore the material	Careless egotism, do your own thing

Grading

Some aspects of student progress in this course can be evaluated objectively, and wherever possible we will apply objective measures to student performance. But some of the measures are necessarily subjective: individual contribution to group work, openness and engagement, and progress from each student's different starting point. What we're really looking for is growth in understanding, point of view, and ability, as evidenced by discussion, project work, and assignments.

Student grades will be based on:

Attendance, citizenship, and participation in class	20%
Create a public blog post	10%
Reflection papers and learning summaries	40%
Group Hosting Session	30%

What you'll need

- **A journal** (no smaller than A4 or Letter size) with blank pages into which you can draw and write
- **Comfortable clothes and shoes** as you will be on your feet and move around during class if you are able

Course materials

Each session we will assign readings from books, web sites, magazines and journals, as well as videos of talks and presentations. A full index of these required readings as well as a list of additional suggested texts will be posted on Canvas. No books are required to purchase, or to read entirely, but there are several that we recommend as useful additions to a student's collection.

If you'd like to see a list of books from which the instructors are drawing material, and can't wait for the whole list to grow in the course web site, see the collection of course-related books on GoodReads:

www.goodreads.com/review/list/18901077-fit-associates?shelf=sva-dsi-fundamentals-course

Recommended books

Collaborating with the enemy, Adam Kahane

Community: the Structure of Belonging, Peter Block.

Daring Greatly, Brené Brown.

Emergent Strategy, adrienne maree brown

Power and Love, Adam Kahane.

More Time to Think, Nancy Kline

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, Marshall Rosenberg.

Facilitating Participatory Decision-Making, Sam Kaner

The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America, David Whyte

Your professors



Marc Rettig

Marc Rettig's work is defined by a question: "How can we advance the practice of creating resilient health in social systems?" He is pursuing answers to that question in three ways: consulting, teaching, and writing.

As a principal of Fit Associates, Marc helps change-leading people and organizations develop capacity to create in and with social complexity. Fit has done this work with large corporations, local food systems, through business futures explorations, and in the trenches of organizational politics and processes.

Teaching both in the MFA in Design for Social Innovation program at The School of Visual Arts in New York and the Carnegie Mellon University School of Design provides a proving ground for Marc's work in progress - a practical synthesis of design, facilitation, management, and systems approaches.

After a first career in software systems, Marc spent over twenty years as a designer of projects, interactions, products, services, experiences, and transformations. He has worked with corporations across a broad range of sectors, including Philips, Nissan, Microsoft, Comcast, Whirlpool, KitchenAid, Seagate, SAP, and numerous startup companies.



Hannah du Plessis

Hannah's work blends business, design, community and the arts. This blend developed through eight years experience in community leadership in South Africa, ten years of design leadership (including partnership in an architecture firm), and consulting experience in the U.S., Europe and Africa.

Hannah's first career as interior architect spanned a decade and three continents, and includes 18 built projects. Her love for the creative process has taken her drawings into publications and art galleries and herself onto stage as presenter, actor, improviser and dancer.

She has taught internationally in the field of design and innovation at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, at Cedim in Mexico and at the University of Pretoria. She holds a Masters in Design Methodology from IIT, a degree in interior design from the University of Pretoria and a diploma in fine arts.

Hannah's belief in human potential, tempered by the raw reality of growing up in violent, segregated South Africa, fuels her desire to further the field of social innovation.

[The] future is not just about firefighting and tinkering with the surface of structural change. It's not just about replacing one mindset that no longer serves us with another. It's a future that requires us to tap into a deeper level of our humanity, of who we really are and who we want to be as a society. It is a future that we can sense, feel, and actualize by shifting the inner place from which we operate. It is a future that in those moments of disruption begins to presence itself through us. **This inner shift, from fighting the old to sensing and presencing an emerging future possibility, is at the core of all deep leadership work today.** It's a shift that requires us to expand our thinking from the head to the heart. It is a shift from an ego-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself.

Otto Scharmer

Healing begins where the wound was made

Alice Walker

Connection is why we're here. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. This is what it's all about. It doesn't matter whether you talk to people who work in social justice and mental health and abuse and neglect, what we know is that connection, the ability to feel connected, is - neurobiologically that's how we're wired - it's why we're here.

Brené Brown

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free — he has set himself free — for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

James Baldwin

In order to create a world that works for more people, for more life, we have to collaborate on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world. ...**The more people who co-create the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed from the foundational level in this world.**

adrienne maree brown

...In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unattended in the world. Do not focus on that. Do not make yourself ill with overwhelm. There is a tendency too to fall into being weakened by perseverating on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails. We are needed, that is all we can know.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes

The alchemists maintained that we can create only in our own image.

That is, everything takes form according to the consciousness that shaped it. If our self-image is small and restricted, or cold and inert, then what we produce will most probably be stillborn, like its maker. It is essential, then, to know what is vital and alive inside us and shape our lives in its image. With a leaden appreciation of ourselves, everything we make takes on that dull weight. To create the golden moment, we must know where the gold lies in ourselves, but we must not have narrow, tidy images of what makes up our “gold.” Without the fiery embrace of everything from which we demand immunity, including depression and failure, the personality continues to seek power over life rather than power through the experience of life. We throw the precious metal of our own experience away, exchanging it for the fool’s gold of a superimposed image, an image of what our experience should be rather than what it actually is, the final element in the act of creation.

David Whyte

**Not everything that is faced can be changed;
but nothing can be changed until it is faced**

James Baldwin

Always we hope
Someone else has the answer.
Some other place will be better,
Some other time it will all turn out...

At the center of your being
You have the answer,
You know who you are
And you know what you want.

There is no need
To run outside
For better seeing.

Nor to peer from a window.

Rather abide at the center of your being;
For the more you leave it, the less you learn.

Search your heart
And see
The way to do
Is to be.

Lao Tzu

Hello, babies. Welcome to Earth. It's
hot in the summer and cold in the
winter. It's round and wet and crowded.
At the outside, babies, you've got
about a hundred years here.

There's only one rule I know of, babies:
God damn it, you've got to be kind.

Kurt Vonnegut