Are you a budding entrepreneur trying to create something new that people will love? Are you an environmentalist trying to change the less than sustainable behavior of the American public? Are you curious about pursuing a career in the user research domain? Or are you just looking to elevate your empathy and synthesis skills?

As the starting place for all user-centered design and innovation, Needfinding (also known as empathy and synthesis or user research) is easy to get started with, and deceptively hard to master. The only way to get better at it is to do it, and the best way to do it is in the wild.

For this class we will explore the Needfinding process with a particular focus on ethnographic interviewing, framing and re-framing. It is important to recognize how qualitative research (customer information gathered through ethnography) informs the innovation process. We will thoroughly cover the details of interviewing, recruiting and field guide development in the context of a design challenge. Every question implies a frame and by asking questions that reveal unexpected answers we reframe our problem and open up an opportunity space for innovation.

We create successful innovations by satisfying a system of human needs and discovering those needs requires hard work, practiced skills and a really good toolset. For this class we will put you in the wild, conducting fieldwork in public and private settings to resolve a needs-centered design challenge. Emphasis is on developing the flexible thinking skills that enable the design researcher to transition from being a problem solver (working on problems she has been given by others) to becoming a design leader who finds, re-frames and defines problems. This is the transition from receiving established design requirements, to creating them.

Teaching Team
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