the i+t course. Creating & sustaining innovative thinking, processes, & products.

Class Time
Tuesdays, Thursdays 1:30 – 2:50pm in HBH 1001

Instructor
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Teaching Assistant
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HBH 3019; Hours scheduled by request

Phone numbers
412 268 3817 (office); 412 983 6250 (cell)

Course Website
Our old one died. I’m building a new one.

My Website
http://www.chrislabash.com

This is a course for people who want to make ideas happen: theirs, others’, and their organization’s. It is a project-based course that has at its core three activities:
1. Exposing you to the approaches, tools, techniques, and best practices in creating, developing, and sustaining the development of innovative products, services, processes, workforces, and organizations;
2. Helping you develop ideas from the imagination stage through the validation stage, to a point of near-readiness for deployment;
3. Creating the platforms, tools, and support elements that help sustain the course for the present and future.
Why this course?

Innovations, great or small, rarely come from someone trying to be innovative. Mostly they just come from someone who sees something and thinks, “How could this be better?” Or, “This annoys me, how can I fix it?” Or, “I’m passionate about this. How can I share my passion?”

All of us, especially those of us who think more linearly anyway, would love to think that we can take a basic structure and methodology, sprinkle on some magic creative dust and poof, we have innovation. The reality is much different. Consider this exchange from an interview Guy Kawasaki did with author Scott Berkun (for the entire exchange see http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2007/06/ten-questions-w.html):

**Question:** Is progress towards innovation made in a straight line? For example, transistor to chip to personal computer to web to MySpace.

**Answer:** Most people want history to explain how we got here, not to teach them how to change the future. To serve that end, popular histories are told in heroic, logical narratives: they made a transistor, which led to the chip, which create the possibility for the PC, and on it goes forever. But of course if you asked William Shockley (transistor) or Steve Wozniak (PC) how obvious their ideas and successes were, you’ll hear very different stories about chaos, uncertainty and feeling the odds were against them.

This course got its start the way many innovations get started: by focusing on a (customer or personal) need.

A student had asked me for suggestions, tools, or techniques on how to be more creative, since that was one of my old jobs. As I talked to more students, there was more energy around the idea of creating a course on innovation. So take my passion for creativity, combine it with a real need, and there’s your “poof.” Though the months of research, planning, structuring, revising, thinking, and fear put it pretty far away from “poof” for me.
The key to the course is this: as I researched innovation and innovation courses, most seemed centered around research that a professor (or consulting firm, or analyst) had done about innovation, that person then going on to talk about what the research indicated. And while there’s certainly a place for that, and I found it enormously helpful, I thought it might be interesting (and ultimately more useful for you) to teach the course from the perspective of someone who has been (and still is) a creative practitioner.

One cautionary note: creativity (the foundation of innovation) is messy. It’s messy intellectually, emotionally, usually physically, and quite often spiritually. It requires that you get out of your comfort zone, think about things in ways you wouldn’t ordinarily, work astonishingly hard, be afraid (“What if it doesn’t work? What if it does?”), put your butt on the line, panic over deadlines (at least you’re used to that) and sometimes at the end wonder what it really is that you’ve accomplished, especially when sometimes all your idea has done is seem to have spawned more ideas that you now have to wrangle. It’s disorganized. It lacks structure. Its end point seems, from time to time, unclear.

If that doesn’t sound like your particular cup of tea, please don’t register for, or please drop the course now so that someone on the waitlist can join.

If on the other hand you’re saying “what are we waiting for?” then this is the course for you. You will work hard, and some of the work will seem like work, and some of it will seem like play. And it will be fun, because creativity is fun. It’s cool. It’s inspiring, exciting, nerve-wracking, and makes you feel all tingly. You’ll learn new ways to think, and new ways to do. And you’ll take all of that with you as you move ahead in your career, and your life.
Why me?

Most of you taking this course probably know my background from other courses you’ve had with me, but for those of you who don’t, the short form is that for many years I was Executive Creative Director of the headquarters office of Ketchum Advertising, one of the largest and most respected advertising agencies in the world. I’m going to try to bring the passion I have for creative thinking, and the skills acquired over decades of thinking, guiding and managing teams of people to think creatively (and then getting clients to actually commit money to those creative ideas) into this class and over to you.

More about me: [www.chrislabash.com](http://www.chrislabash.com)

Why you?

I already know that you’re smart, and hard-working, and driven, and a good critical thinker. Now we’re going to try to broaden your point-of-view, and make you a good creative thinker, too. An essential (and I mean essential) part of innovation is ownership: you feel not just committed to, but responsible for and emotionally attached to the outcome. That’s how I want you to feel about this course. Because in the end, it’s not my course, it’s yours. I’m assuming that you’re taking this course because you want to broaden your experience, put more and/or different tools in your skills toolbox, and maybe learn something new. If that’s really the case, that’s “why you.”

Your expectations.

Good courses are built around good information, good structure, and a good professor. Great courses are built around students. This course will be, as much as possible, built around the knowledge, information, and experience that you want to get out of it. That’s why there’s a “Course Expectations Survey” that I field, to find out what’s on your mind. So if you didn’t do it, don’t come whining to me.
The aggregate expectations from previous courses (and surveys) guide the courseflow:

The two “top box” scores for what most people want out of the course:
1. You want to learn how to think “out of the box;”
2. You want to learn how to collaboratively develop innovative ideas.

The things that most people who've taken the course feel are the biggest obstacles to thinking creatively:
1. You don't have creative thinking “techniques;”
2. You think that you're too analytical, don't really know where to begin, and aren't sure of the value of creative thinking.

And in terms of learning techniques, we'll have discussions, practice innovative thinking techniques, do projects, and have some guests over.

**My expectations.**

My expectations are that you will walk out of this course looking at the world, your job, your life, and yourself in a different way. That you'll appreciate more things that are out of your sweet spot, that you'll try more things that are out of your comfort zone, and that you'll think, at least sometimes, in non-linear, questioning, questing, creative ways.

Specific to the course, my expectations are that you show up, keep an open mind, participate, collaborate, and push yourselves to embrace new ideas, thinking, methodologies, experiences, and so on. And also that you be respectful of others, of ideas, and of the course. And that you do your best on the assignments, and in life.

I can’t teach you how to be creative. No one can. No one has to. You already are creative, and there are certain things that you can do that will allow you to be more creative, and apply more innovative approaches to everything you do. And then, you just have to have fun. Because if you’re not having fun, you’re not doing it right.
Classflow.

Yes, I made the word up. Cool though, eh?

While I do want you to “own” the course, humans look for structure and there is of course a structure to each class, and to the course itself. I’ve referred to them as “classflow” and “courseflow” because ideally, the different parts of the class, and of the course, will neatly flow together. Each week has a theme that it’s built around, and has recurring bits of structure and content. On the following page is a rough outline, structured by a “phases of innovation” approach. Your presentation and assignment due dates are in the yellow boxes.
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Grading.

The course has two components which (for the most part) comprise your grade: your research project – because we want you to know about innovation and contribute to the body of knowledge about it – and your class project – because we want you to change the world.

As always, participation in class counts, as do good written and verbal communication skills.

The scheme:

Research project contribution: 40% of your grade
- Mid-term presentation: - 10%
- Final presentation: - 30%
Final project outcome, presentation, and documentation: 50% of your grade
- Mid-term presentation: - 10%
- Final presentation: - 35%
- Poster: - 5%
MakerTool presentation: 5% of your grade
Fun Facts: 5% of your grade

The rubrics:

I’ll be the first one to admit that creativity and innovation are tough to grade. Do you grade by the quality of the insight? By how well it’s thought through? By its deployability? By whether or not it makes money? Or other results?

For your projects, I’ll be looking for the quality and thoughtfulness of your creative insights: how well you see, how well you noodle around with stuff, how well you apply the phases of innovation. You’re not graded on your artistic ability, or your ability to come up with the replacement to the wheel, or literally how “creative” you are; instead I’ll be looking for your
willingness to explore, to step out of your comfort zone, to think creatively (which is different than "being creative"), and to effectively communicate your thinking (otherwise, you’ve created a Secret Innovation that does no good), attention to necessary detail, deployability, and the value that it adds (or could add) to real humans.

For your final project, the rubric looks like this (10 points each):

1. Articulation: Can anyone understand what this project is about with minimal explanation?
   - Quality of problem statement: does it clearly identify the problem that's being addressed?
   - Quality of elevator speech: can anyone understand, in 30 seconds, what this will do and how it will do it?
   - Quality of visualization: can anyone understand, with a visual our two, how this works?
   - Quality of visual presentation (poster, video, etc): is it "quick," clear, and compelling?
   - Benefit: benefits to target audience are clear, significant, and detailed.

2. Exploration: were enough options considered?
   - Was only the "first idea" developed or were there multiple paths explored?
   - Was the degree of exploration cursory or well-thought-out?

3. Progress: Has the idea moved (well & thoughtfully) through the five stages?
   - Is there a clear understanding of what took place at each stage?

4. Deployability: How easily can this project be deployed right now?
   - Idea is ready to go with the right support (funding, resources) behind it, and that support is very possible.
   - Idea needs a connection or two to be deployable.
   - Idea needs multiple connections and/or sponsors and/or resources.
   - Idea cannot be deployed.
I should like you to keep a journal and visual log of your project’s development, which you can then use to remind yourself (and show me in your final presentation) what you did, why you did it, and what else you explored.

For your research paper, I’m shamelessly stealing the rubric that George Mason University shamelessly stole from someone else. Look for it in “Course Documents” on Blackboard.

Finally, please come to class on time. Showing up late is disrespectful to your colleagues and to me, is rude, is unprofessional, impedes creative development and productivity, makes me seriously grumpy, and makes me want to lower your grade. And then I do.
Academic Integrity
In other words, cheating. Here’s the good news: this is a really hard course to cheat in. Here’s even better news: we can be very clear about what cheating is (and if you have any question about whether something would be considered cheating, ask me)…

Cheating: “intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.”
Fabrication: “intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.”
Plagiarism: “deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas or words or statements of another person as one’s own without acknowledgement.”

…about the University’s policy toward cheating…

http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html

…about the best ways for you to not feel compelled to cheat (not that you would)…

Prioritize your work: time management is your friend.
Own your own work: Be proud of your work. Why would you want to take credit for someone else’s? Always cite your sources.
Get help: When you have trouble, get help from Instructors or TAs.

…and most important, of the overriding ethical consequence: when you cheat you diminish your self (yes, in the psycho-philosophical sense), you devalue your work, and you dishonor your community and your history. So don’t.

(Many thanks to the students of course 95718, Professional Speaking, Sections A3 and B3 – Spring 2007, and to my teaching assistants, Shivani Pandey and Nomita Rajan, for their hard work in putting the above together.)
Sources & Resources
I refer to a great many sources as we go through the class. Below is a list of most of them. You’ll find more on my website, and for more on the random quick references that I make all too often, just ask.

Academic and Professional Research:

**Blog posts:**

**Books:**

Periodicals:
Innovation + Technology 95859 A2  |  Fall, 2015
Course outline, syllabus, rubric, and schedule

Video links:

Webinars:

Tools Mentioned:
1. Lino: http://en.linoit.com
3. The Brain: http://www.thebrain.com
4. Trello: https://trello.com