

GES491 Engineering Special Topics – Entrepreneurial Ideation and Customer Discovery – Spring 2024

Prerequisites: Sophomore level standing

Instructor: Dr. Peter Ludovice, 2065 H.M. Comer Hall, (205) 348-1645, pete.ludovice@ua.edu
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:

(3 credit hours) Introduction to Venture Ideation and Customer Discovery using the Evidence-Based Entrepreneurship Approach of the NSF I-Corps Program. The course covers ideation, teaming, customer discovery and the use of the Business Model Canvas to create and optimize a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). Teams will focus on the creation of an actual venture, and explore additional concepts such as the cognitive biases that prevent accurate customer discovery, and how and when to execute venture pivots. This is the first incarnation of this course, and will eventually be the first course in a three course series in the Engineering Entrepreneurship Program. The value of this course is to help students optimize their original idea with active customer discovery and analysis of a value proposition in the Business Model Canvas. This course will prepare them for future courses on prototype creation, and business venture launch.

Required Textbook:

Business Model Generation by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur, John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Grading Policy:

Weekly quizzes will be given to test students basic knowledge of assigned lessons from text, previous lectures and other resources. Group presentation on various aspects of the evolving proposed venture will occur most weeks. Students will take a midterm and final on aspects of generalized venture development and its application to your team’s venture. A Minimum Viable Product/Process will be produced and will be the subject of a class presentation.

Weekly Quizzes	10%
Regular Class Presentations	40%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%
MVP & Presentation	15%
Team Evaluations *	5%
TOTAL	100%

*Instructor reserves the right to adjust Team Evaluations by up to 25% based on classroom observation and discretion based on other assignments.

Office Hours: TBD

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will...

1. demonstrate an understanding of the basic components of the business model canvas for the purpose of creating a new technical venture.
2. demonstrate effective customer discovery interviews to optimize a venture idea.
3. test a venture proposition using customer discovery in the context of hypothesis-driven entrepreneurship and pivot if required.
4. demonstrate the ability to create an effective Minimum Viable Product (MVP).
5. demonstrate the ability to work effectively in a development team.
6. understand the underlying cognitive biases inherent to the customer discovery process.

Make-up Policy:

A student with an excused absence may make up a missed class assignment. Talk with the instructor to discuss the process.

Disability Accommodations:

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services, 348-4285. Thereafter, you are invited to schedule appointments to see me during my office hours to discuss accommodations and other special needs.

Generative AI Use Statement:

Students are welcome to explore generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, to seek support for their assignments or other activities. These are useful tools to investigate topics of interest for the proposed venture, but **their generative output should never be used verbatim**. Students should also cross-check the content and citations generated by these tools to ensure they are accurate and properly referenced. In particular, ChatGPT often produces false references.

Students should incorporate the subsequent statement in their assignments when using a Generative AI Tool: "For this assignment's preparation, the author(s) have utilized [Generative AI Tool Name], a language model created by [Generative AI Tool Provider]. Within this assignment, the [Generative AI Tool Name] was used for purposes such as [e.g., brainstorming, grammatical correction, writing paraphrasing, citation, specific sections of the assignment]."

Code of Academic Conduct:

All students in attendance at the University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student.

The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

Severe Weather Protocol:

In the case of a tornado warning (tornado has been sighted or detected by radar; sirens activated), all university activities are automatically suspended, including all classes and laboratories. If you are in a building, please move immediately to the lowest level and toward the center of the building away from windows (interior classrooms, offices, or corridors) and remain there until the tornado warning has

expired. Classes in session when the tornado warning is issued can resume immediately after the warning has expired at the discretion of the instructor. Classes that have not yet begun will resume 30 minutes after the tornado warning has expired provided at least half of the class period remains. UA is a residential campus with many students living on or near campus. In general classes will remain in session until the National Weather Service issues safety warnings for the city of Tuscaloosa. Clearly, some students and faculty commute from adjacent counties. These counties may experience weather related problems not encountered in Tuscaloosa. Individuals should follow the advice of the National Weather Service for that area taking the necessary precautions to ensure personal safety. Whenever the National Weather Service and the Emergency Management Agency issue a warning, people in the path of the storm (tornado or severe thunderstorm) should take immediate lifesaving actions. When West Alabama is under a severe weather advisory, conditions can change rapidly. It is imperative to get to where you can receive information from the National Weather Service and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take.

The Office of Public Relations will disseminate the latest information regarding conditions on campus in the following ways:

- Weather advisory posted on the UA homepage
- Weather advisory sent out through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign up at myBama)
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA at 90.7 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over Alabama Public Radio (WUAL) at 91.5 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA 7. WVUA 7 Storm Watch provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone. Check <http://www.wvua7.com/stormwatch.html> for details.

Elasticity Statement:

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.