



A PROGRAM OF EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

**DESIGNING POWERFUL SOLUTIONS WITHIN COMMUNITY  
PAX 685**

**SPI 2023**

*Online via Zoom: Wed/Fri 11am-1pm ET (May 30-June 30)*

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In a complex, interconnected, and emergent world we have to change **how we do things**, not just what we do, in order to truly co-create meaningful innovation and catalyze positive social change. Unwittingly, the conventional structures we use to organize, plan, and collaborate (lectures, open discussion, round robin updates, brainstorming, etc) stifle inclusion and flatten complexity. Whether you work in an NGO, a public institution, a community group, a school, or a social movement, you may regularly experience some of the following realities that block most people's ability to work together creatively and productively:

- Rigid organizations expressing a desire for change but little movement
- Power and hierarchy getting in the way of freedom and responsibility
- Exclusion, mistrust, and disengaged people
- Unproductive, boring meetings
- Difficult conversations routinely avoided

In this course, we will practice the mindsets, processes, and skills needed to lead meaningful innovation. Through hands-on, experiential learning, we will explore **emergent facilitation and strategy, equity-based human-centered design**, and a set of **30+ Liberating Structures** designed to unleash more creativity, more complexity, and more wisdom. Participants will walk away with tools that they can immediately apply after each session as well as practice opportunities to begin designing, facilitating, and receiving feedback within a supportive community.

**COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

1. Resist, subvert, and transgress habitual ways of working and organizing.
  - a. *Students will actively participate in and experiment with new ways of working and organizing and record observations about what the processes make possible for the individual and group in journal entries.*
2. Explore the fundamental principles of a design methodology called **Liberating Structures**, to create truly participatory and collaborative processes.
  - a. *Students will demonstrate an understanding of the underlying principles of each structure in their design intervention.*

3. Learn how to choose, facilitate, and sequence Liberating Structures and other methods for your individual facilitation challenges and context.
  - a. *Students will produce a thoroughly developed proposal for a process design intervention.*
4. Investigate and interact with liberating structures practitioners and others using process design in pursuit of dialogue, systems change, and equitable innovation.
  - a. *Students will produce a written reflection on their understanding of highlighted practitioner's process approaches, adaptations, and examples. This will be fueled by conversations and presentations in class as well as readings and investigations of the work.*
5. Practice the mindsets necessary for navigating the unknown and embracing emergence.
  - a. *Students will fully participate in structured debriefs to unpack the experience of emergent facilitation as compared to traditional ways of facilitating.*
6. Create ample space to connect with and support each other in developing new practices in ways that are coherent with our local or personal contexts.
  - a. *Students will demonstrate an understanding of the community history, traditions and context for their design.*

### REQUIRED TEXTS AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- Blignaut, Sonja. "Navigating Uncertainty - Pioneering Habits of Mind." *YouTube*, Wardley Maps BarCamp, 31 July 2020, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec1TrfKlgks&t=492s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec1TrfKlgks&t=492s).
- Hurst, D. K., & Zimmerman, B. J. (1994). From life cycle to ecocycle: a new perspective on the growth, maturity, destruction and renewal of complex systems. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 3(4), 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105649269434008>
- Lipmanowicz, Henri and McCandless, Keith (2014). *The Surprising Powers of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash a Culture of Innovation*, ISBN 0615893376, \$20 online.
- Parker, Priya. "3 steps to turn everyday get-togethers into transformative gatherings." Ted Talk. [https://www.ted.com/talks/priya\\_parker\\_3\\_steps\\_to\\_turn\\_everyday\\_get\\_togethers\\_into\\_transformative\\_gatherings](https://www.ted.com/talks/priya_parker_3_steps_to_turn_everyday_get_togethers_into_transformative_gatherings)
- Ryan-Hart, Tuesday, and Tim Merry. "Shared Work & Collaborative Leadership for Systemic Change." *YouTube*, Borderlands Restoration Network, 12 June 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4\\_Ptu5RU5k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4_Ptu5RU5k).

### REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS:

- Journal of reflections and learnings on the required readings.
- Attend one Liberating Structures virtual user group meeting and submit a written 1-page reflection on the experience.
- Proposal for a design intervention, including a full description of the design, rationale for specific choices, adaptations for local context, and facilitation notes/storyboard.
- Small group in-person facilitation. Students will work in design groups of 3-4 people to come up with a design string, around a clear purpose, to practice facilitating in-person during the course. Students must submit a 1-page reflection, following a "What? So What? Now What?" format on the experience.

*These are brief descriptions of required graded assignments for the course. More details for each assignment can be found on the "Guidance Notes" that will be provided in class.*

Percentage of overall grade:

- Attendance and Participation: 20% - 200 points
- Journal: 20% - 200 points
- LS User Group Reflection: 10% - 100 points
- Proposal: 40% - 400 points
- Small Group In-Person Facilitation: 10% - 100 points

	3-credit	2-credit	Audit
Journal Entries	X	X	
Liberating Structures Virtual User Group Meeting and Reflection	X		
Design Intervention Proposal	X	X	X
Small Group Facilitation and Reflection	X	optional	optional

**All SPI 2023 coursework will be due no later than August 20, 2023**

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

\*Note: This course is based on **emergent facilitation!** What does that mean? It means that you won't be given a detailed agenda that we will adhere to with fidelity. It means that the learning experience, while holding on to key guiding questions, themes, and purposes, will move with what is co-shaped and evolved by our learning community. This requires a mindset shift to embrace uncertainty, trust in people and process, and be willing to practice voice, choice, and agency throughout. I believe that we can do it.

All of that said, below are some of the key topics and questions that will guide our time together. Expect our flow to CHANGE, expect to be surprised, and expect the experience to be more than you could have imagined! My hope is that each session, each person discovers tools that are intriguing enough to start experimenting with right away. Since it is difficult to predict which ones each person will find interesting, I've chosen an approach that surveys many of them instead of going really deep with only a handful. I am always available outside of class for little 1:1 conversations to talk through application ideas, questions, or challenges you might be facing.

In addition to what's listed, each day we will begin together by a three-part ritual: Becoming Present, People Before Process, and Weaving the Past into Today. After the first class where I will model this ritual, you will be invited to lean in and step up in facilitating us. We become stronger and wiser through the unique contributions of each of us; and we will practice growing our muscles to really sense into what the group might be needing to shape our design choices for each part of that ritual.

1. **Coming together, making our space:** This is our starting point, and starting points matter. Who is here? Who are we together? How can this be a thriving space for us all? What do we need to learn and grow openly and honestly together? In this first session, we will begin to shape the rituals that will guide us and co-create the container for our learning journey.
2. **Our experiences of design & complexity:** What do we notice about the processes we use to work, live, and organize together? What microstructures might support different kinds of interactions? What paradigms are being disrupted? What rigid ideas and habits are loosening and ready for transformation? What new ideas and practices need more resources and nourishment to take hold?
3. **Purpose, the most essential ingredient:** What are the ingredients for a sharp, bold, meaningful purpose? How can getting clear on our purpose(s) help us filter and specify our design choices towards more meaningful outcomes?
4. **Wise crowds:** How do we better unleash and include the wisdom of everyone in the room? What ways exist to invite in more voices, more perspectives, and more ideas? How do we attend to the diversity in the room and not flatten complexity?
5. **Design Arch & Logic:** How do we craft experience arcs that guide and support a group to get to where they need to go? How do we think about stringing together different structures to create a cohesive design that meets our objectives? Let's build our capacity to get clear on the underlying logic of our designs and notice how each choice is supporting an overarching purpose or objective.
6. **S/Slowdown:** Let's have more of that rarity--blocks of time set aside to slow down, reflect, and make sense together. Where are you longing to go deeper? Where do we need more experimentation and practice? What tiny adjustments could we make?
7. **Dynamic, perceptive & responsive spaces:** How can we embrace the complexity in the room and the system, not as a barrier but as a creative source? How do we build our skill to meet disruption with enough curiosity to extract learning and contributions that we might not otherwise welcome? How do we hold care for those in the room who are used to the status quo, who need support as we make room for more to be discovered, collectively?
8. **Design Sprint:** It's time to dive in and start designing with your groups. We'll go over the essential components of creating a Storyboard and work in rapid cycles to reach a design sketch.
9. **Small-group facilitation and debrief**
10. **Small-group facilitation and debrief**

### **SPI ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

It is expected that individuals registering for an SPI session will attend the entire course (barring unforeseen travel delays or emergencies). Please contact SPI directly at [spi@emu.edu](mailto:spi@emu.edu) before registering if you know you will have to miss any days of a course. SPI certificates are provided to participants only if they miss no more than one class day unless prior arrangements have been made with the SPI Director. For-credit participants are expected to attend all class sessions unless they are given permission from the instructor to miss a session. SPI courses rely on active student participation in a learning community. If a participant misses class repeatedly and this disrupts the learning for others, they will be asked to leave the course and no money will be refunded for remaining course time.

### **GRADING CRITERIA AND OTHER POLICIES:**

SPI provides all students taking the course for graduate credit some supplemental information that will serve as a resource after SPI when students are working on course assignments. This includes information on library resources, EMU's academic integrity policy, and guidelines for writing graduate papers, information regarding the grading scale and course deadlines, and then some suggestions we have for you in order to make your experience of taking SPI courses for graduate credit as successful as possible! These [documents](#) are all available online.