

A Brief Initial Note on the Proposed Programmes of the School of Design

Ever since the establishment of Ambedkar University Delhi, a School of Design has been a part of its vision. Not only is there a great shortage of designers and design schools in India, it is also true that hardly any are located within the ambit of a university. Design as a discipline has grown sufficiently in our country that it is opportune that a school of design now be located within a university system so that not only does design gain from interaction with the other disciplines to be found in a university, but in turn it enriches the way courses and pedagogy are conceived of in the other disciplines. In addition to such synergy, it would be important that a School of Design located within Ambedkar University Delhi free itself from too close an embrace with industry and commerce and instead of its focus being on products, industry, fashion, etc should instead be on service and social design so that the School engages primarily with the concerns and problems confronting the common man. Such a formulation had essentially arisen from our initial interactions with Professor Soumitri Varadarajan and his experience and familiarity with the design situation in the country. The Advisor Planning also visited IIT, Mumbai and *Srishti*, Bangalore to discuss the idea of a School of Design in a university dedicated to the social sciences and humanities.

Subsequently, AUD commissioned two local designers, Elizabeth Jacob-Sandwick and Parag Anand, to take these initial ideas forward under the guidance of Professor Varadarajan. They came up with a position paper (see Annexure) the core of whose recommendations can be summarised as follows:

Service design is the related set of activities of the planning and organisation of personnel, infrastructure, communications and the material components of a service to improve its quality, its delivery and the interaction between the customer and the service provider. Similarly, social design refers to the strategies, concepts, ideas and organisation that meet social needs of all kinds – from working conditions and education to community development and health – activities that strengthen social structures and help build a more equitable and caring society.

India so rich in its diversity in art, culture, languages and sensibilities is unfortunate in that the major part of its large population remains relatively unaffected by change and development. This has been one of the foremost failures of the design of our official development programmes and hopefully

such issues can also be addressed by the courses we develop for the School of Design.

The problem with many design programmes in the country is that they are too western and industrial in their orientation and tend to produce, at best, designers with western aesthetic sensibilities conditioned to a standardised design process. Even designers working with traditional crafts persons tend to focus on mass production, scaling up, standardising design solutions and mechanisation, forgetting that the strength of the craft system is that it is very contextualised and possesses diverse sensibilities. If allowed to proceed in their present mode such efforts will end up homogenising and standardising the diverse crafts to be found across the country. Our attempt must be to create a new paradigm of design practice and education that liberates it from its conventional context and concerns and makes it more relevant in a deep and meaningful way to our society as a whole.

In response to our recent advertisement for appointment of design professionals in our School of Design we have received a large number of applications. These must now be sorted and short-listed so that a process of systematic interaction can be initiated with the short-listed candidates to see how far their vision of a school of design finds resonance with our own conception. We must find a way in which the outcome of such interaction feeds into our selection process. In this way there may possibly be a better chance of identifying the creative, academic and committed individuals who would work towards the foundation of a School of Design in the University in consonance with our vision of its ethos and values and thereby also identify a person who would lead such a group.



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL DESIGN

A Working Paper
for
Ambedkar University, Delhi

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Contents

Executive Summary

Vision

Introduction

- The Backdrop: The Neglect of the Societal
- The 'Marginalized'
- On Change
- The Potential

Postgraduate Diploma Course –1 yr

- Courses and Instructions

Implementation Plan for the School of Design

- Cost Structure for the institute
- Fixed Costs
- Variable Costs
- Revenues

Performance Evaluation of the School

Conclusion

Appendix

References

Introduction

Based on a draft for discussion developed and presented by Soumitri Vardarajan in December 2008 to the Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD) - a team of two consultants, working under the guidance of Vijaya Varma (Advisor Planning) was chosen to develop further the concept of a School of Design for AUD with focus on Social and Service design. The outcome of meetings, deliberations, discussions and independent work is this **Working document for the School of Design at the Ambedkar University, Delhi.**

From the outset it was agreed that the principles and guidelines of the School would be in consonance with the spirit of everything that Ambedkar stood for - an ideology of social reform based on a commitment to promoting equity and social justice, with proactive engagement for change via institutional and constitutional processes. The specific notion of equity here is one of affirmative action; the name 'Ambedkar', when associated with an agency, conveys in India a focus on the improvement of the lives of those from the marginalized castes. The moot question is therefore, what kind of a school of design would be in consonance with such a vision.

Design in India has a unique character, defined by the nature of society, the colonial past and the prevailing culture of academic design. Through history, it has been aligned with institutions of power: the government, whether imperial, colonial or post-Independence, and industry as the wielder of technology. With class structure and social hierarchy replicated throughout the profession and its concerns, the goals of design tend to reflect an orientation that is administrative or prescriptive, where the designer plays the expert who has no need to consult the people on their needs and wants. Design thus ends up relying on a notion of society as it ought to become and not as it is or was. A broad research agenda for social design must begin by addressing a number of questions: What role can a designer play in a collaborative process of social intervention? What is currently being done in this regard and what more might be done? How can agencies that fund social welfare projects and research gain a stronger perception of design as a socially responsible activity? What kinds of products meet the needs of vulnerable populations?

As design academics, it is time we rethink the developmental paradigm along the lines of sustainability and equitability — a goal that may be achievable through social innovation but most certainly not by merely proscribing an elitist practice of the profession. This document prepares the backdrop to social design in India and explores the potential for it to affect the lives of people. This century is going to see a proliferation of the 'social' through information and communications technology and through a new kind of philanthropy. This will

call for people trained in new tools with a deep sympathy for the 'social' and for real people. The shift away from focus on the market is bracketed by many challenges — in this instance, the challenge is to design an appropriate curricular structure and it is the associated **vision for design as an agent of social change that must define the School of Design project for the Ambedkar University, Delhi.**

The report then positions the School of Design within the Ambedkar University, Delhi by attempting to articulate the need for such a School, the form of the institution, the curriculum, the structure of education, the nature of associations with other Schools of AUD, the resources required and the progressive direction that the School would take.

1. The Backdrop: The Neglect of the Societal Through history

Three things seem to be happening with the design scene in India. First, it is distinctly aligned with the government whose policies have dictated the way design has constructed its priorities. Added to this has been the fact that for years few designs for industrially manufactured products ever made it to production.

Second, although there have been notable successes in the craft sector, the approach has been to replicate the colonial view of craft as exotica admirably suited for trade, for sale in a faraway location and perspective. Technology has intervened to change the processing paradigm, yet society does not constitute a significant factor in design.

Third, privileging and status concerns modify and transform design. Design curricula were imported; they subscribed to an idea of design appropriate for a consumer-focused society. The location of design programmes in recent years in institutes of technology removed design even further from the social aspects of finding appropriate solutions. (Srinivasan and Varadarajan, 2003)

All three constructs are characterised by a focus upon the production and sale of the object, and a neglect of the societal side of design. Significantly, it is the elite, administrators and articulate designers, who take it upon themselves to decide what 'good design' is for the people. While this is how the voice of design was usually constructed in the texts of the last century, it presents a unique problem in India in that such a view becomes isolated and limits design's ambit to a small section of society, reinforcing Sainath's observation: "A profoundly undemocratic streak runs through India's development process." (Sainath, 1992)

Through Design education

Design institutes have proliferated in India in the recent past with a mitotic replication of the core curriculum as design for manufacture. India-specific projects continue to be spoken of as 'design for development' or 'design for the rural', in effect privileging technical innovation as the way for design to engage with the needs of the marginalized. The following critique applies quite precisely to these institutions — we reproduce it at some length to make the case for a new curriculum that includes the social. "Since the Industrial Revolution, the dominant design paradigm has been one of design for the market and alternatives have received little attention. Compared to the 'market model', there has been little theorizing about a model of product design for social need... Conversely, little thought has been given to the structures, methods, and objectives of social design." (Margolin and Margolin, 2002)

The 'Marginalized'

A significant proportion of the population of India lives in its villages. It also constitutes the majority of India's poor, uneducated and chronically ill. Although they have been the focus of all international aid and of the long-term development goals of both local and multilateral agencies for five decades, their numbers have only grown. Change there has been, but life for these millions continues to be harsh and to be imbued with a feeling of powerlessness and social exclusion.

While it is not our desire to categorise this population, as 'the marginalized', we do so to emphasise that this is a segment of people that mainstream design practice has kept at the periphery of its concerns. The socially excluded constitute the focus of much academic inquiry and the construction of this population is an outcome of not only neglect but also of incorrect strategies.

"When one speaks of social exclusion, one does not refer to the exclusion suffered by a particular social group but all social groups that are subjected to exclusion. Moreover, social exclusion does not limit itself to market discrimination but refers to discrimination and denial of access in all aspects of life. Finally, social exclusion addresses the multiple and cumulative aspects of being excluded and the consequences that arise out of it." (Louis, 2007)

In small pockets, projects of non-governmental organisations, such as the Barefoot College¹ and Pradhan², have transformed the lives of the populations

¹ Barefoot college: www.barefootcollege.org

² Pradhan: an NGO

they have touched. Fuelled by enormous passion and a commitment to live and work in the field, these projects demonstrate the power of local and multidimensional problem solving. Taken in one sweep, they also look very similar to system-design projects that design students work on, except that they extend the life of the project beyond the drawing board and the folio into intervention and demonstration.

On Change

Relieving the grimness of the context, there are ample signs of hope. In recent years, there have been many shifts both in design school curricula and in the various ways the social has been incorporated. The old focus on technological and product innovation targeted at the rural and the poor continues, but there are robust examples of curricula looking at the sustainable and the social as primary issues of engagement. While interaction design looks at the people side of digital technologies, service design and social innovation have also moved from their core management roots to emerge as design specialisations. Initiatives such as [change.org](#)³, [design-21](#)⁴ are two examples of campaigns and social actions that include design and reinforce a shift in focus from a consumption-oriented practice to one of effecting change especially for those poorly served by infrastructure and state policies. This is all good news and is a sign that design is ready to join a sector dominated by aid agencies and NGOs. Yet more needs to be done. Miles to go before we sleep...

The Potential

The India project began over half a century ago as a proposition for change: after the end of colonial rule, Indians in power would work for the well being of both the collective and the individual following the Buddhist maxim that the **wellbeing of an individual lies in the wellbeing of society**. An inquiry into its success shows that much was not achieved. In this, India is similar to other parts of the planet: “Of the world’s 6.5 billion people, 90 percent have little or no access to most of the products and services many of us take for granted. In fact, nearly half do not have reliable access to food, clean water, healthcare, education, affordable transportation or shelter.” (Smith, 2007). It therefore becomes a design agenda to focus upon service provision through design.

Service design, as it has emerged in the west, primarily focuses on the notion that what the artefact designers come out with is a service. Which means there would be two kinds of projects — the redesign of existing services and the design of new ones. In the Base of the Pyramid (**BoP**) context **service design**

³ [change.org](#): Leading site for social *change*, providing daily news and information about important social issues and empowering people to take action.

⁴ [Design-21](#): a social design network in collaboration with UNESCO

can be seen as being primarily suited to central agencies in creating programmes for social welfare. However, there is room for another kind of strategy, one centred on the individual: social innovation.

Social innovation refers to new strategies that meet social needs — including projects that have a social purpose like microfinance or distance learning — and that extend and strengthen civil society. The concept can also be related to **social entrepreneurship**, which recognises a social problem and creates, organises and manages a venture to make social change. Whereas a business entrepreneurship typically measures performance in terms of returns and profits, **social entrepreneurship assesses success in terms of the impact on society.**

It is these two perspectives that offer up the potential to focus design attention upon the BoP and provide an alternative to its material focus.

The Bottlenecks

Given the absence of a focused program, the design profession re-purposed systems thinking to address the large problems that surrounded design in India. Offered as a studio topic, the systems design project would point students to issues of health or waste and, in the process of research, allow the student immersion in the field. While it was quite possible for the outcome of the systems project to be a service, it was only the odd student who ventured there. In the main, the dominant discourse would make the project fold into a technical innovation project, so the fieldwork came in time to be the site for finding problems and the outcome another product or object. Over time, the ever-present brief of these kinds of projects, for the problems never seemed to go away, wore out the collective design community and it became okay to design a composting bin rather than take on the unaddressed problem of pervasive waste.

Action is difficult, owing to two factors: the first is design's training and curricula, which are deficient in tools and ways to work in a non-material project, and the other is the context. Sainath looks at what happens during drought; at the way good schemes end up benefiting agencies and not the populations targeted. Another barrier, ironically, is that business investments in social and infrastructure needs often face the highest regulatory hurdles. The sieve of Corruption becoming a veritable colander has now been accepted as a way life, which dries up all aid but for a mere trickle to the actual beneficiary? This is a by-product of how policymakers and nonprofits often approach the needs of the poor, which are mostly handled within the realm of social or government work.

Meeting the social and infrastructure needs of the poor is a complex challenge for design as the arena is charged, with social scientists, development experts and political commentators all proffering solutions. Design as the aesthetic as well as the technical specialisation feels especially out of place and unsophisticated in this dialogue/ discourse.

But design can engage with the construction of projects and solutions that can enable an individual to live with ease and dignity. Immediately we see that we may not be talking about the profession of design at all in the sense of an aesthetic-material project to make objects better. This is the challenge of design in India — should it keep its engagement with the material⁵, compromise so that it is part material and part service⁶, or take the extreme step of seeing itself as a component of a collective enterprise⁷?

If we take the third option we are confronted with the fact that we may be keeping only the intellectual aspect of design — problem solving — and letting go of all else. Additionally the designer at work would be seen as employed in the field of NGOs and other service organisations, designing and redesigning things, which may have a service system solution rather than just a stop at product outcome that is only a small slice of the larger service system pie. Which immediately raises the issue of whether this is Design at all. The profession of service design has addressed this question, though interaction design is still negotiating its roots in design, where the social science collaboration with design results in a greater role for the individual who is the focus or locus of change. (Sachs, 2008)

The Social in Design

There is an ever-widening gap between longstanding assumptions about design education and where we are going in design practice, between the circumstances of 21st-century life and the worldview from which we devise the content and pedagogy of professional design curricula. (Davis, 2008)

Design does not train for sociality — it has always been about mass markets, one-size-fits-all, top down, quality. Most importantly, design trains for discrete projects, not long-term engagement or slow change. The social is a different thing altogether, embracing conversation, narrative, engagement, and facilitation.

⁵ New design for Reebok or Nike

⁶ Sachet packaging of shampoo and soaps

⁷ Rethink waste management with energy crisis and fossil fuel depletion

There are a few trends in the year 2009 that will mean something to how and what we design now and in the future.

- Increasing complexity in the scale of design challenges.
- Thinking about the people for whom we design as participants in the design process.

This necessitates a new knowledge base that supports new practices. It is necessary to be both bottom up (centred on the individual, the field of social innovation) and top down (emanating from the collective-state-corporate, the arena of service design).

Curriculum Strategy

Porter's five-force analysis suggests that Postgraduate Diploma courses could be a very attractive industry to begin with. Ambedkar University will have a first-mover advantage as no other institute in India offers a similar one-year program. This is a corporate social opportunity for Indian industry and the design community. We have here the foundation of a cooperative movement that could conceivably create health, wealth and the freedom to choose - not just for a fortunate few but for the vast majority across our nation.

A strategy for a curriculum is speculated upon here. In curricular terms, both Service Design and Social Innovation are postgraduate specialisations, but when introduced at the undergraduate level comprise Social design.

Service Design is the activity of planning and organising people, infrastructure, communication and the material components of a service, in order to improve its quality, the interaction between service provider and customers and the customer's experience. The increasing relevance of the service sector, both in terms of the people employed and its economic importance, requires services to be accurately designed. Service Design is an emerging discipline that lies between the various fields of Design and Management. It is the cusp of both these major disciplines, which in India have rarely met or exchanged expertise in an educational setting.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Indian Corporates as also MNCs operating in the country have shown great interest in recruiting design architects. Indian public sector enterprises are also open to taking design graduates into their fold. Service Design agencies, such as live|work⁸ and IDEO⁹, apply design tools, techniques and thinking to service challenges, either to improve existing services or to create new ones.

⁸ live|work: <http://www.livework.co.uk/>

⁹ IDEO: www.ideo.com

In the last few years, the public sector has expanded, with new investments in hospitals, schools, cultural institutions and security infrastructures. The number of jobs in public services has also grown. Such growth is also associated with large and rapid social change that is calling for a re-organisation of the welfare state. In this context governments are explicitly considering service design for the re-organisation of public services.

Social innovation refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet social needs of all kinds – from working conditions and education to community development and health- that extend and strengthen society.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

In the field of social innovation, India offers huge opportunities with its 1.1 billion population of which about 70% resides in rural areas. Of late, the priority sector has witnessed a lot of interest in India and many national and international organisations have driven into innovation in the fields of green energy (from biogas to harnessing wind and solar energy), sanitation (closed circuit renewable power and disposal units), water harvesting (water budgeting to recycling) etc. India has also witnessed significant scientific and technical growth over the last two decades, capabilities which social innovation can easily harness.

Amidst the recent financial slowdown, India is slated to grow at 6.5% even as some developed economies have plunged into recession. Social innovation opportunities could come from the corporate sector as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. Other opportunities lie with NGOs both domestic and international. Students could also take up entrepreneurship as a new career option.

Social Design has many definitions and the term is put to very different uses across the globe. Some definitions exist within the design world and refer to design in its traditional sense, meaning the shaping of products and services. Other definitions refer to social design as the creation of social reality: design of the social world. To comprehend it in its polarity are selected two divergent interpretations from which we distil our relevant context for the curriculum.

As perceived by Wibowo Sulistio an Industrial designer for Wiserearth.org Social design is - Weaving Human Intention Across Divides. Design is first and foremost about intention. Intention is starting point, path and destination at the same time. Social is about human, the fountain of intention. People working

individually with similarly aligned intentions, will inevitably bridge many divides along the way and eventually solve complex problems.

Albio Nascimento of Illegal Beauty (an organization providing cultural asylum and expression for illegal immigrants) believes that everything that works with creating, shaping or reshaping elements that define society is Social Design.

For our curriculum we phrase it thus: Social design thinking within the design world joins developing human and social capital with new products and processes that are profitable. Profitability and ownership of the processes are the cornerstones of sustainability that underpins human wellbeing. In this view social design is an activity that should not be framed with connotations of charity, aid donations, help etc. It is not voluntary work but should be seen as professional contribution that plays a part in local economic development or livelihood. Social design is the art and science of setting structure in social systems. It is the link between Facility Design, Organisation Design, and Corporate Strategy.

Postgraduate Diploma in Social Design

Scope of studies: 32 credits

Start date: Monsoon 2009

Starting capacity: 20

Duration: 1 year

Language of instruction: English

Background required: Relevant varied fields of study or experience or application

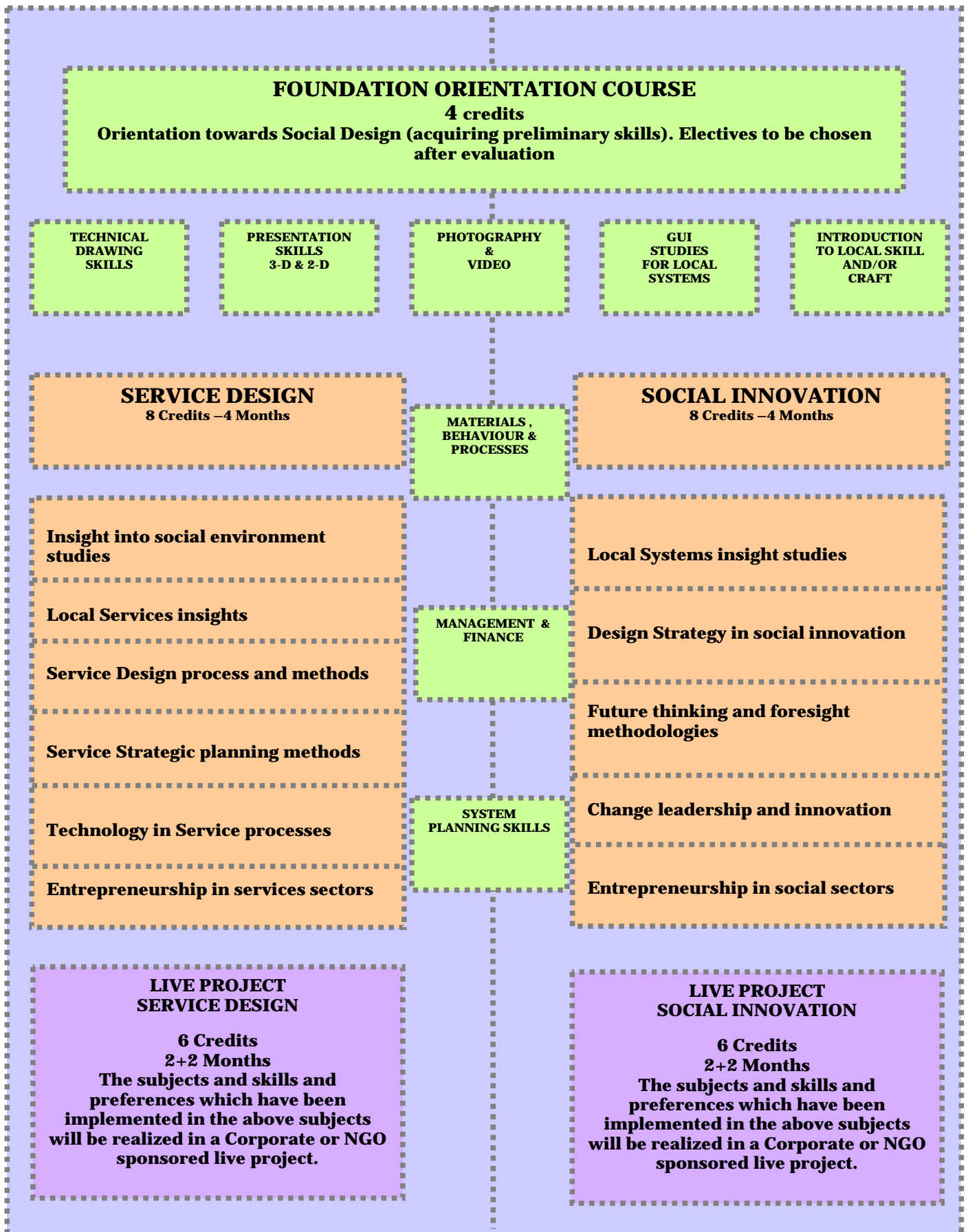
Entrance examination: Evaluation of grades and/or experience supplemented by test and interview

BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS

There is a growing tendency among Indian bureaucrats to take time off from service for further education. Social Design is one course that could attract considerable talent from this pool. In many parts of the world, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) emerged as an interdisciplinary activity between the fields of Computer Science, Cognitive Psychology and/or Human Factors. In India, however, it emerged as Interaction Design. Designers with an exposure to Human Factors inputs will be very effective in tackling many HCI problems. Freelance designers and small design firms of Indian origin have been consulting in HCI in India and abroad. Companies in e-learning and new media

that emerged in the early 1990s were the first to hire designers for Information Architecture, Instructional Design, Visual Design and Interaction Design.

Management professionals engaged in planning interventions in social systems and NGO's, both domestic and international , would also greatly benefit from a formal structured approach to Social design.



IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

In AUD courses the active participator replaces the traditional learning role of the passive listener. The program brings students to the forefront of recent developments in the fields of Service Innovation and Service Design by including supervised development training. Another important objective is to improve students' competences in combining academic rigour with managerial relevance when working on independent projects.

The study modules distributed over the year are:
Foundation/Orientation course – 4 electives and 4 credits

Service Design 8 credits

Social Innovation 8 credits

Projects: 1 Service Design and 1 Social Innovation project 6+6 credits

FOUNDATION ORIENTATION COURSE

As the background of the students is likely to be rather diverse there will be an initial orientation program for the students to get acquainted with the concept of 'What is Social Design' and the scope of the basic and in depth skills that will be required for this one-year course. This will allow them to then choose the Electives that can supplement the education, skills and experience they bring with them at the start of the course. 4 Electives will have to be chosen from those offered, some are likely to be from the interdisciplinary offerings shared with the other Schools such as the School of Developmental Studies, and can last till the end of the first semester. The credits for this course will be **4 credits**, one per elective.

SERVICE DESIGN

Service Design is the activity of planning and organizing people, infrastructure, communication and material components of a service, in order to improve its quality, the interaction between the service providers and their customers, and customers' service experiences. The increasing relevance of the service sector, both in terms of the people employed and its economic importance, requires services to be accurately designed.

Service Design has a long tradition of focusing on services in the areas of operation and management, for instance, connecting operational factors that affect quality to customer loyalty and service orientation. There is a long tradition of service thinking in economics as well. More recently, designers have started to turn to service design, which is a very practical approach to create outstanding and innovative customer experiences. Service design focuses on knowing the user and bringing many intangible elements together into a cohesive user experience. In addition, service engineering has been researched and discussed from the industrial engineering perspective and service computing from the computer science perspective.

The study modules are:

1. Insight into social environment studies
2. Local Services insights
3. Service Design process and methods
4. Service Strategic planning methods
5. Technology in Service processes
6. Entrepreneurship in services sectors

INSIGHT INTO SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT STUDIES

To comprehend the selected Social environment from the viewpoint of there being elements that define society. (Refer to definitions of Social Design)

LOCAL SERVICES INSIGHTS

To analyse and categorise the elements as Services, which make the environment a complex piece of working machinery.

SERVICE DESIGN PROCESS AND METHODS

To extract a process that can function as a template for handling a Service Design project.

SERVICE STRATEGIC PLANNING METHODS

The strategy of implementation of this design process in various Service situations creating scenarios that emulate a polarity from the realistic to the extreme providing a wide gamut of choices.

TECHNOLOGY IN SERVICE PROCESSES

The re-evaluation of the role of technology, present as well as those suggested within the services, with specific emphasis on the local context and implications.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SERVICE SECTORS

To comprehend and assign the significance of sustainability in the Services sectors.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovation refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet social needs of all kinds – from working conditions and education to community development and health – that extend and strengthen society.

The course in Social Innovation is an ideal vehicle to create distinctive competencies. This professional program educates students from diverse backgrounds to become practicing service developers. The aim of the program is to provide students with multidisciplinary knowledge in service innovation and design through advanced studies of different service theories and their implications for service innovation and design practice. A central theme of the studies is that services possess a set of unique characteristics that require a distinctive approach to strategy, innovation and design.

The study modules are:

1. Local Systems insight studies
2. Design Strategy in social innovation
3. Future thinking and foresight methodologies
4. Change leadership and innovation
5. Entrepreneurship in social sectors

LOCAL SYSTEM INSIGHT STUDIES

A critical study of various systems from the selected environment in the context of their relevance, significance, functionality and efficiency.

DESIGN STRATEGY IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

Formulate a strategic approach to innovation, concept and organisation.

FUTURE THINKING AND FORESIGHT METHODOLOGIES

Project the trajectory of movement of society with respect to time and scale for changes that are likely to affect the systems, pre-empt probable scenarios and then plot these as methods for application at a generic platform level.

CHANGE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION

Create rigorous continuous collaborative inquiry for the improvement of learning, teaching and instructional leadership at the classroom, levels in order to help all students to meet the new performance standards for learning innovation in a knowledge economy.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SOCIAL INNOVATION SECTORS

To Comprehend and assign the significance of sustainability in the Social Innovation sectors.

PROJECT: SERVICE DESIGN PROJECT

The skills and preferences that have been acquired within Service Design will be realized in a Corporate or NGO sponsored live Service Design project. The selection of the project and its evaluation will both be based on the focus of Ambedkar University – namely the BoP and its width.

PROJECT: SOCIAL INNOVATION PROJECT

The skills and preferences that have been acquired in Social Innovation will be realized in a Corporate or NGO sponsored live Social Innovation project. The selection of the project and its evaluation will both be based on the focus of the Ambedkar University – namely the BoP and its width.

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