AnnX x AIL: CRUNCH Accelerator
ASCJ 420 | 2 Units | Spring 2016
Fridays 10:00 AM – 1:20 PM

Classroom: Annenberg Innovation Lab, ASC 104

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Course Description & Objectives
The AIL's CRUNCH Accelerator returns! In this intense, 7-week course, your team will learn the secrets of a successful startup, including how to accomplish the following:

• Determine your minimum viable brand
• Discover ways to motivate customers
• Define and share your story
• Design your competitive advantage

Throughout, we'll be focused on new media literacies and learning by doing. Each student startup must pass multiple checkpoints over the 7-week intensive; then, at the end of the semester, the teams will present to a jury of successful industry leaders and entrepreneurs at the AIL's Spring 2016 Evening of Innovation, with the chance to win additional funding!

Eligibility
Applications to participate in this Experimental course are due November 30, 2015.

Competition
Teams will have the opportunity to present their ideas at the Annenberg Innovation Lab's Evening of Innovation in April. A panel of judges and the audience will have the chance to vote a $10,000 prize to the winning team.

Mentors
Each team will have to pitch their idea to an industry mentor at some point during the seven weeks. She or he will offer advice regarding the team's development.

Schedule

Educational researchers are calling for more time and space for people to learn through tinkering and making rather than simply absorbing information from books and lectures. Our emphasis on creative practices in education is linked to a constructionist approach, which posits that effective learning comes out of building things that have either personal or social meaning and offer a means for creators to contextualize their knowledge.

Based on these ideas, this course offers an immersive experience in the form of a 3-hour class meeting on Friday each week. Each class will begin with a brief review of what each team has been working on over the past week, including sharing and offering peer-to-peer feedback on weekly assignments. Following these reports, we'll devote approximately an hour to lecture, debate, and discussion focused on that week's topic, followed by a brief lunch break at noon. The final hour of class, from 12:20 until 1:20, will be spent in individual group meetings with class facilitators and mentors.

We've designed this course to include 7 weeks where we structure your schedule, but you'll also have the remainder of the semester, during which time you'll be expected to continue developing on your own in preparation for your presentation at the annual Evening of Innovation (April 2016; exact date to be determined).

Required Text and Materials

There is no required textbook for this course; instead, selected readings from books, journals, and popular press publications will be made available via shared links or posted on our course wiki. Some initial readings are listed in this syllabus, but additional readings may be assigned as the semester progresses. Students should expect around 25 to 50 pages of reading each week.

Laptop Policy

You are encouraged to bring your laptop with you and use it in class for taking notes, looking up information, finding relevant websites, and contributing to the collaborative wiki.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 15): Introduction and Team Identity

We will go over the course, policies, and teams. Next, we will talk with students about what needs and expectations they have in relation to the course. Team members will also write a contract for working with each other that outlines how and where they can communicate.

Our next goal will be finding out a little more about each team member's strengths and role in relation to their project. We'll use the personality profiles from *Hearts, Smarts, Guts, and Luck* to

identify various approaches to startup design and help each team figure out what approaches will work best for them. We'll pivot from this discussion of individual contributions towards development of an overall identity and mantra for your team.

Reading due for this week:

- Anthony Taun, Richard Harrington and Tsun-Yan Hsieh – *Heart, Smarts, Guts and Luck* p. 133–159 (and take the Entrepreneurial Aptitude Test referenced in the reading at http://www.hsgl.com/entrepreneurial_aptitude_test_overview.php)

Assignment to do before next class:

- Identify the unique strengths of each member on your team, assign specific roles to each team member, and consider what might be missing in your group.

Week 2 (January 22): Pitching and How to Find Talent

Each team will brainstorm a core summary statement for their project, identifying their hook and/or mantra and refining these ideas into a brief, appealing elevator pitch. They'll then practice these pitches with their peers, smoothing out delivery and receiving feedback.

Reading due for this week:

- Scott Berkun – How to Pitch an Idea (http://scottberkun.com/essays/38-how-to-pitch-an-idea/)

Assignment to do before next class:

- Generate two different versions of your pitch: a 75-word abstract for potential funders and a different 75-word summary for your end users. Consider what different features you'd need to highlight, and what different goals you might need to accomplish, with each group.

Week 3 (January 29): Understanding Your Users

User stories are a way to develop features and involve various stakeholders in user experience design. For this session, teams will brainstorm different user roles, categorize them into groups, and lay out stories about their experiences. We also will check in with teams to discuss how their anticipated needs have evolved, in order to determine what kinds of support, materials, and mentorship we can provide over the remainder of the course.

Reading due for this week:

- [5 Focus Group Questions to Feed Your Content Marketing](#)

Assignment to do before next class:

- Interview a minimum of 3 people who represent your user roles and ask them questions

to determine if your product is a must-have rather than a nice-to-have, and how it stacks up against competing products. Refine your user stories for primary and secondary users based on these interviews.

Week 4 (February 5): Differentiating Yourself

In order to be successful in an increasingly competitive marketplace, it's important to know the history of your market, who your competition is, and what sets you apart. Building on last week's insights about your users and recommendations from your mentors, identify what makes your product and company unique. Then, figure out how you can best offer your users a uniquely valuable experience with your product, and how to tell (and sell) that story.

Assignment to do before next class:

- Review previous Evening of Innovation CRUNCH pitches at AIL's Vimeo site (http://vimeo.com/annenberg), identifying various strategies—namely concept videos, presentation decks, and prototypes—used to communicate the unique value of each product. Pick two or three that you found particularly effective and be prepared to discuss why they worked so well. Think about which of these strategies (or what other methods) might work best to showcase your own product's unique value.

Week 5 (February 12): Communicating Your Vision—From Pitch to Prototype

Show, don't tell: the old storyteller's adage holds equally true when it comes to demonstrating your product's unique value and end user experience. Product pitches can employ beautiful "design fiction" videos, physical prototypes, paper prototypes, "beautiful corners" or "vertical slices" for software demos, and a myriad of other options. In this class, we will review a number of strategies and techniques for how to best tell your product's story, without you yourself saying a word.

Assignment to do before next class:

- Knowing your team's weaknesses is just as important as knowing its strengths—possibly more so. Brainstorm what you can do in terms of building your pitch and your product using the resources you already have; then, identify what else needs to be done and what outside resources (including funding and additional talent) that you will need to succeed.

Week 6 (February 19): Budgeting and Finance

So now you have a viable potential product and are looking at what it means to become a startup. How will you decide who owns what? How can you manage the expectations and needs of various stakeholders, while also retaining creative control and being fiscally stable? Together we'll consider the different routes to funding in the Los Angeles area, including bootstrapping, incubation, and angel investment. This will give you the opportunity to project a future plan for how your company will develop over the next several years.

Reading due for this week:

- [Top 10 Crowdfunding Sites for Fundraising](#)
- [Free Crowdfunding Bible](#)

Assignments to do before next class:

- Draft a CAP table.
- Develop a complete line-item budget for your team.
- Sketch out a fundraising strategy for the next six months (approximately one page).
- Develop presentation deck and/or other pitch materials to present in class.

No class on February 24th – Instead meet with your Mentor we pair you with to get feedback on your startup.

Week 7 (March 4): Putting It All Together

In preparation for the Evening of Innovation at the end of the semester, we'll devote most of this class period to rehearsing each team's 3-minute pitch and giving feedback on presentation/demo materials; we will also go over the judging criteria for the event.

Next, each team will identify a projected schedule of goals to accomplish during the remaining weeks of the semester. Team budgets will also need to be turned in, so they can be approved by the beginning of Week 8.

Finally, we'll discuss the importance of utilizing various media to your advantage—beyond building concept videos, presentations, and marketing materials, ways to leverage social media, email distribution lists, and media outlets. This will prepare you to generate buzz for your team leading up to the Evening of Innovation.

Assignments to do before the Evening of Innovation (optional, but encouraged!):

- Attend Lunch and Learn sessions hosted by Blackstone LaunchPad:
  - **Go to Market (DATE TBD)**
  - **Community Building (DATE TBD)**
  - **User Retention (DATE TBD)**
- Meet with venture coaches at Blackstone LaunchPad for additional insight and guidance.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct,

http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* http://equity.usc.edu or to the *Department of Public Safety* http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems
A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis
In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.