

I did my undergrad in Computer engineering back in India. During my course, I studied multiple subjects to earn my degree. 98% of these subjects are based on technology or coding. We barely had any topics that spoke about design. After working as a software developer for almost five years, I realized there is so much more to being a software engineer than just writing code. That's one of the primary reasons why I applied for MSITM. It was the flawless blend of courses I was looking for. Design methods was one such subject that caught my attention. After going through the syllabus, I had a bleak idea of what the subject might be. It was not until we started classes that I discovered its depth. Design and coding seemed like two independent worlds to me before, but after completing this course, I know they go hand-in-hand. I was a stranger to the concept of empathy building. All my life, I was always taught to find solutions to problems right when they were presented. To take a step back and calm my "problem fixing attitude" and listen to all the issues was new to me. Thanks to this course, I have realized the significance of empathy building and comprehending the profundity of the problem.

In our group project, we used various research methods to build empathy. My favorite one among them was personal interviews, simply because it was conducted in person and I could register the movements of the other person and their emotional responses. I genuinely believe that when people have conversations in person, it increases the quality of it by ten folds. This course introduced me to multiple research methodologies entirely foreign to me. Even though a personal interview is one of my favourites, performing various other research methods gave me an insight that wouldn't have been too obvious during interviews. During group projects and assignments, I conducted immersive research like Stake-out, concentric circles, journey mapping, and photo and daily journaling. I learn better when I apply the principles I study, and this course provided just that.

Now I want to move on to my next favourite thing about the course, Prototyping! I worked for the operating system team back in India, so I never had the chance to design UI or use any tools that would let me achieve something like that. I consider myself someone who loves to be creative. I doodle a bunch and adore decorating spaces. So I was over the moon when we had to do that for Prototyping. The best part about this phase of design thinking is the freedom. I love that we could start the process by just drawing things down on paper, nothing too fancy. This low-resolution Prototyping in the tangible form is minimum effort and adds immense value to the creative process. The book Design works mentions how resisting perfection in the initial days is crucial.

I couldn't agree more. It would slow us down if we went on to get things perfect. Once we have a basic idea of what we want to do, we can take it further by wireframing. During my assignments and group project, I got to use diverse applications. Here is a list of my favourites: Figma, canva, Balsamiq, Xtensio, and mural. These tools allow us to engage end users with a visual representation of what our final product may potentially look like. We could describe it to them in words, but as we know, "A picture speaks a thousand words". When our group created the wireframes and showed them to our research participants, we had many positive reviews. This workflow lets us get feedback in the early stages of design, helping us modify and add changes with minimum cost. Ideally, we would have to go through numerous iterations of ideating,

Prototyping and testing. Due to time constraints, we could only have one iteration. We got an idea of what works and what doesn't in the design, which helped us better understand their needs. I have learned that one has to keep an open mind about their idea and be ready for criticism. I tend to be someone who gets overly attached to things sometimes, so this step was a little uncomfortable for me, but I am proud to say that I am better at handling criticism now.

I had the best time working on the group project with my team. However, if I were to change something, I guess I'd go with the step where we all had to prototype one page for the final presentation. As someone with minor control issues, I like it when the design flows smoothly between pages, and there is uniformity. We did achieve this at some level, but the problem with different people working on designing one feature with no default background design can be challenging to say the least. Prototyping is all about bringing out the idea in your head into something more tangible, and we were able to achieve just that. If we had the liberty to take more time on this phase, we would have had the chance to brief the entire team about the base design. This way, there would be a consistent design with easy transitions.

Some of the members of our group loved to work independently as much as possible. We believed they put forward their best work when they worked on topics alone. But on the other hand, we also had folks who valued working in a group setting. They would stay motivated that way. They loved to be a part of the team while working, which would allow them to ask more questions and get answers immediately. Discovering a proper balance between these two sets of individuals was challenging but not too hard. Our vision was for each of us to come up with one idea and discuss all the concepts together. This way, each of us had the chance to bring something to the table. We were involved in every step of the process. This gave us all the insights and a great learning curve.

Group work can seem intimidating to a few, but working for a corporate company has prepared me for this. I love that we didn't get to choose our teammates, and it was pre-decided for us. Our team was so diverse: we had two boys and two girls. Each of us belonged to different ethnicity. We also had other majors: One with computer science undergrad, one with finance undergrad, one with accounting and another with mechanical engineering—two with work experience and two with none. Two of them were bridge students, and the other two weren't. To watch all of us come together and collaborate was honestly so beautiful. Each of us added a new flavour to the group—a point of view which wouldn't have been so apparent to the other. If we were to pick our teammates, I am sure we would have wanted to work with our friends, which is not particularly bad, but when you get out of your comfort zone, you learn new things, and I am proud to say that we learnt a lot from each other.

Any group will thrive if there is mutual respect and understanding for each other, something like this seems so obvious at first, but one would be surprised to learn that this concept is lost in many. I feel grateful to be a part of a team that values each other's inputs and listens patiently. We talked about how creativity can hinder when people don't feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. I am glad we created a safe space that lets one speak their mind. We had no judgements. Feeling heard and valued boosts the confidence of any individual. I always felt assured and appreciated during our team meetings and collaborations. Design methods as a

course was placed at the right time during the graduate program. We have had so much to learn in just five weeks. I am pretty sure that each of us would use these concepts in the subjects taught in the following semesters and at work after graduation or pretty much at any point in life.

Lastly, I want to thank you for being the most fabulous professor I've ever had (although I may be biased because you are my second professor in the US). Also, you were absolutely right; I will now never walk past a door without thinking about its design.