

LEARNING CLUSTER

USER RESEARCH

EXPLORING AN SBS CAREER IN TECH

Jan 2026 | M T W Th F 2 to 5pm

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Tanushree Agrawal

EMAIL: tagrawal@soka.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Held in Ikeda 451, by appointment using the following link: xxx

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This Learning Cluster introduces students to User Experience (UX) Research, the process of understanding user needs, behaviors, and motivations to inform better design decisions for real products and services in everyday life. Students will be exposed to one example of a behavioral science career conducting qualitative and quantitative research at companies (particularly in the fast-growing Technology sector). We will go over the different types of UXR methods, the basic theoretical principles involved, hear from guest speakers every week, and end with a group project involving research/design for a real product.

Through a mix of discussions, exercises, and a final project, students will gain experience in planning, conducting, analyzing, and presenting UX research in real-world contexts. This is a **collaborative, exploration-based course** — no previous UX experience required! You'll learn by doing, discussing, and sharing insights with your peers. You will also gain extremely valuable insights from successful UXR professionals at renowned companies. Curiosity, empathy, and clear communication are the key skills you'll practice every day.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of this quarter, you will learn to:

- Explain the purpose and value of UX research.
- Design and conduct small-scale user interviews and usability tests.
- Create surveys and interpret basic quantitative data.
- Synthesize insights and communicate findings clearly.
- Apply ethical and professional standards in research practice

ASSIGNMENTS

ENGAGEMENT WITH SPEAKERS (15%)

This component evaluates how actively you participate and engage with guest speakers, ask relevant and thoughtful questions, and showing genuine interest in the topics presented by external experts.

CLASS ACTIVITIES & DELIVERABLES (25%)

APP CRITIQUE (5%): A short verbal review of the user flow for a mobile app, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement.

RETAIL STORE JOURNEY MAP (5%): A visual story of a user's experience charting over time their actions, thoughts, feelings, and/or pain points as they try to achieve a specific goal.

WHITEBOARD CHALLENGE (5%): A live, on-the-spot challenge where you try to tackle a user problem by thinking out loud and roughly visualizing your ideas.

"LAWS OF UX" ACTIVITY (5%)

UXR METHODS QUIZ (5%)

UXR PROJECT (60%)

This is the largest portion of your grade and is divided into four key deliverables:

PROJECT PROPOSAL (5%): A document outlining the specific product/service, the research idea, goals, and proposed methods. It sets the foundation for the entire project.

RESEARCH PLAN & MATERIALS (15%): This involves detailed planning of the research approach, and development of interview questions, surveys, or any data collection materials.

DATA REPORT (15%): A detailed outline of your main insights and discoveries from the research, which should demonstrate your ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data.

CASE STUDY PRESENTATION (15%): The final story you present of your UX project, explaining the problem, the process, and your suggestions. The goal is to showcase your problem-solving skills, design thinking, and your understanding of the "why" of user experience.

POSTER & LC FAIR ENGAGEMENT (10%): Finally, you will be evaluated on the poster you prepare for the LC Fair, as well as how effectively you present your work to others, how you respond to questions, and how receptive you are to any critical feedback you may receive.

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Agenda</u>	<u>Deliverables</u> (due by class at 2pm)
Week 1			
Jan 5	Mon	What is UX? GUEST: Mingi Chung	
Jan 6	Tue	Designing the course together <i>Workshop: UX app critiques</i>	Readings
Jan 7	Wed	<i>Student Demos: UX app critiques</i> The UX Research process	<i>UX App Critique due (5% of grade)</i>
Jan 8	Thu	Qualitative Methods 1 GUEST: Alexis Flores-Smith	Readings
Jan 9	Fri	Qualitative Methods 2 GUEST: Rose Schneider	Readings
Week 2			
Jan 12	Mon	FIELD TRIP (5-9pm): Irvine Spectrum <i>Observations at a retail outlet</i>	<i>Project Proposal due (5% of grade)</i>
Jan 13	Tue	Qualitative Methods 3 GUEST: Jonathan Keefe	<i>Journey Map due (5% of grade)</i>
Jan 14	Wed	<i>In-class Whiteboard Challenge (5% of grade)</i> User Psychology & Behavior 1	Readings
Jan 15	Thu	User Psychology & Behavior 2 <i>"Laws of UX" Activity (5% of grade)</i>	Readings
Jan 16	Fri	**Class Time Change** 9am to 12pm GUEST: Aubrey Lau	<i>Research Materials due (15% of grade)</i>
Week 3			
Jan 19	Mon	~~~ NO CLASS! (MLK Day) ~~~	
Jan 20	Tue	Exploiting the Seven Deadly Sins in UXR GUEST: Dave Baker	Data collection & analysis
Jan 21	Wed	Project Working Session GUEST: Brendan Tomoschuk	Data collection & analysis
Jan 22	Thu	<i>UXR Methods In-Class Quiz (5% of grade)</i> Project Working Session	Data collection & analysis; Quiz prep
Jan 23	Fri	FIELD TRIP (Details TBD) <i>Maybe: ArtCenter Product Design Lab Tour</i>	<i>Data Report due (15% of grade)</i>
Week 4			
Jan 26	Mon	Peer feedback on presentations/posters GUESTS PANEL (Full Product Team)	Practice Presentations due
Jan 27	Tue	<i>Student Case Study Presentations</i>	<i>Presentations due (15% of grade)</i>
Jan 28	Wed	LEARNING CLUSTER FAIR	<i>Posters & LC Fair (10% of grade)</i>

COURSE POLICIES

EXCUSED ABSENCES

If you have a scheduling conflict or an emergency arises that affects your ability to complete any of the graded components of the course, please contact me as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements. You must provide documentation for a university-approved reason, such as hospitalization, family emergency, etc. Note that you must notify me AND obtain my permission to miss any graded component of the class PRIOR to its occurrence; otherwise, you will receive a zero for that assignment. If you are not sure whether your reason for missing class counts as an approved reason, please ask me!

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to adhere to standards of academic integrity. Cheating of any kind on any assignment will not be tolerated. It is disrespectful to your peers, the university, and to me. If you are unsure what might constitute a violation of academic integrity, consult me and/or the Soka website on academic honesty: <https://catalog.soka.edu/academic-honesty>. Any evidence of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. Consequences for academic misconduct may include a failing grade in the course and official action (e.g., academic probation or suspension) by the University.

My advice to you is to always err on the side of caution. If you have questions about whether something is okay or might constitute academic dishonesty, just ask! I am happy to provide clarification and would much rather have a pleasant conversation with you before you submit an assignment than discuss concerns about academic integrity after you turn it in.

GEN AI POLICY: You are allowed (and encouraged!) to use Gen AI or any other tools for all aspects of this course, unless otherwise stated.

UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRING SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS

Can you not see or hear very well? Is English your second or third language? Do you have to miss class because of work, childcare, or parole appointments? Is money tight, and you can't afford books right now? Can you concentrate better if you stand or walk around in class? If, at any point in the block/semester, a disability or personal circumstances affects your learning in this course, please contact me. I am committed to helping you succeed in this class as this course is intended for all students, including those with mental or physical disabilities, illness, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that tends to affect one's equal access to education negatively. If at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me. For services and resources on physical, mental and

social well-being, contact our on-campus counselor or the Student Health Center. If you have a documented condition (physical or psychological) and experience educational barriers due to your condition, I encourage you to contact Disability Services as soon as possible to explore what accommodations may allow you to access your education fully. None of these resources will disclose your specific condition to your instructors without your permission.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

TIME MANAGEMENT

For some helpful tips and tricks related to improving time management skills and creating good study habits, check out <https://www.soka.edu/writing-center/time-management> and <https://sites.rhodes.edu/time-management-tools/apps-managing-time-study>. There's even a link to some handy apps!

COUNSELING SERVICES

If you wish to speak to a counselor about any psychological and/or emotional distress that you are experiencing, you can get in touch with the Soka University Counseling Services (<https://www.soka.edu/student-life/living-sua/counseling-services>). April Nelson Afoa is Soka's primary counselor on campus. Students can request an appointment by contacting the counselor directly at Counseling@soka.edu or by calling (949) 480-4192.

NATIONAL HOTLINES

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- National Eating Disorders Association Information and Referral Helpline: 1-800-931-2237
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Treatment Referral Helpline: 1-877-726-4727