

Thinking by Design

New course aims to expand students' problem-solving toolkit

By Ashley Zlatopolsky

A concept called “design thinking” is being integrated into Walsh’s management degree programs. “Management 601: Design Thinking” emphasizes a different way to develop products and services and solve problems.

“At its core, design thinking is a human-centered problem-solving process,” says Ann Saurbier, director of the MBA and professor of management. “That means we need to start with a focus on our customer or user and empathetically address their needs — not just create the solutions that are the easiest or cheapest. This viewpoint is critically important for business students today, whose role it will be to create strategy that allows organizations to succeed in some of the most dynamic market conditions we’ve seen in a while.”

The Henry Ford Learning Institute partnered with Walsh to create the course, which is already proving popular as sections fill up fast. Institute Executive Director Deborah Parizek describes the premise as “a collection of different strategies and tools that people can use to think about problems from a different perspective.”

The Institute shared its resources to de-

velop Walsh’s pilot course, while providing feedback and support to the faculty who were facilitating the experience for Walsh students.

“We’re discussing and thinking about possible opportunities where we can work together to bring value to all students,” Parizek says, “with a particular emphasis on how to bring the tools and methods from design thinking outside of your class and into your work every day.”

For those considering leadership positions and taking business management courses, design thinking is a concept that’s vital to developing and shaping a strong organization that’s mindful of the unique needs of its employees and clients and cognizant of other critical factors, Parizek explains.

“You really want to think about how you can best respond to a changing situation — how you can be a leader who recognizes when a challenge needs an adaptive, problem-solving approach,” she says.

Walsh graduate Sonya Nicks is director of finance and administration at the Henry Ford Learning Institute, a position for which

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she says she was prepared because of her Walsh background.

“The education I received from Walsh did help set me up for success in my role as director of finance and administration,” Nicks says. “The courses I attended at Walsh were taught by professors with real life experiences that often used current events and actual situations when teaching the course, which made learning interesting and relevant to my leadership role.”

She’s convinced design thinking is similarly relevant, noting the concept can help students build and embrace empathy.

“You need to be able to relate,” she says. “You need to hear (people); you need to understand what they really want. Design thinking gives us that ability to collaborate and cause transformational change for the good.”

It’s an important tool that can help students identify problems, Nicks adds.

“Organizations and companies are really trying to make sure their voices are heard and their customers are heard, but by (practicing) design thinking as a Walsh graduate, you will be able to ... go in and say, ‘We could cause these changes and make things happen for the good of the community,’” Nicks says. “We’re in a different time where we must take more responsibility and action to make that happen.”

To learn more about Walsh’s management degree programs, visit walshcollege.edu. ■

The Henry Ford Learning Institute describes design thinking as a collection of mindsets and methods that allow students to creatively explore problems, then reframe and act on them. Walsh students may now enroll in a design thinking class that is a collaboration of Henry Ford and Walsh faculty.

