

THE HIGHER ED REDESIGN INITIATIVE

design thinking for higher education innovation

Associates Program Pilot Description

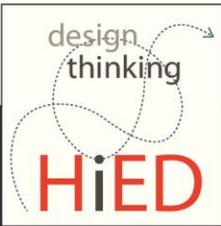
The signature program of the Higher Ed Redesign Initiative is the Design Associates Program, in which cohorts of participants will address a specific design challenge over the course of a 12-month commitment. Design Associates will be drawn from a cross-section of professional roles and backgrounds in education, design, the non-profit sector, and the creative industries.

The design challenge to be addressed by the 2013-14 Associates is how to utilize open educational resources to (1) address achievement gaps and advance equity in higher education participation and outcomes; (2) reduce cost for students and families; and (3) improve the overall quality of learning. 2013-14 will be a pilot year with all Associates program activities held in Minnesota. The program will launch fully in 2014-15 with Associates program activities held in varying locations around the Midwest.

Design Associates will meet over three weekends during the academic year, with each workshop beginning Friday afternoon and concluding by Sunday afternoon. Consistent with the design thinking approach, Design Associates will engage in a co-creative process—together with students and other higher education “users”—of new delivery and service models as well as innovative solutions, actionable plans, models, and prototypes aimed to improve educational outcomes and address persistent challenges in higher education. In 2013-14 the Design Associates will meet October 11-13, January 24-26, and March 28-30.

The results of the design process, including prototypes for new or revised products, services, or delivery processes, will be presented to policymakers and other higher education officials for feedback and refinement. These “shovel-ready” projects would be available for adoption by public higher education systems, private institutions, non-profit organizations, investors, and entrepreneurs.

The 2013-14 design challenge is aligned with the strategic priorities of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), a Minneapolis-based non-profit organization that works with policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in a 12-state region to advance opportunity, affordability, productivity, and connectivity in higher education. The design challenge also responds to the 2013 MHEC Chair’s initiative and annual policy summit, which will address the impact of MOOCs and related open education resources on higher education institutions and systems. In this sense, MHEC is a real-world “client” for the Design Associates, whose work will address the specific, identified needs of an organization represented within legislative, gubernatorial, and higher education circles.



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The goal of the design thinking workshops in the pilot program is twofold—first, to provide an opportunity to “test” curriculum, composition, and format in advance of the full launch of the Design Associates program in 2014, and second, to engage in higher education innovation from the start by addressing a design challenge facing the region and providing recommended solutions for a real-world client. Addressing the design challenge framed earlier in a specific Minnesota context, Associates will focus will on the primary “user” (the student) while endeavoring to achieve highest quality, lowest cost, and shortest time to obtain a credential.

The first Associates weekend will include an introduction to the design thinking process; immersion in background research on a specific site/context using design thinking tools; beginning the first round of problem definition, ideation, and prototyping; and receiving initial feedback from other teams. Teams will stay connected via phone, email, and web conferencing after the first workshop and will continue to advance their research related to initial prototypes.

The second weekend will include a second and more advanced design thinking process, development of another round of prototypes for review, and feedback from local expert guests. Teams will refine their work based on the feedback provided, develop preliminary business models, and explore possibilities for implementation. Again teams will stay connected after the workshop and continue to advance their research related to the refined prototypes. During the third weekend teams will further refine their work and prepare final prototypes and business models for presentation. Invited guests will include possible funders interested in making the project happen as well as specific clients and policymakers that are positioned to help implement the ideas generated.

The Higher Ed Redesign Associates Program also provides networking and professional development opportunities for the Design Associates. For associates with backgrounds in education, the program provides an opportunity to learn about design thinking and new ways of problem solving. For associates with backgrounds in design and the creative industries, the program provides an opportunity to apply one’s skills to education and policy systems and to learn about the complexities of higher education. Collectively, the energy and synergy resulting from cross-sector collaboration will make for a rich and invigorating experience for participants while generating transformative ideas to advance equity, improve affordability, and promote quality in higher education.