Comfort zones stretched in design thinking

Design thinking. Ever wonder what that means and what it may have to do with you?

Tulane University faculty, staff, students and community partners are invited to attend Human-Centered Design “Crash Courses” at the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking to find out about design thinking — a process to solve complex problems.

Laura Murphy, clinical associate professor of global community health and behavioral sciences at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, is an endowed professor of social entrepreneurship, coordinator of design thinking outreach and lead convener of graduate and professional programs for the Taylor Center, located in Flower Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus.

Murphy is especially interested in seeing faculty from all academic departments — from anthropology to psychology, classical studies to medicine and everything in-between — at the fast-paced seminars that include hands-on activities.

The Taylor workshops are not just for those already involved in social innovation, says Murphy.

“What we do is present a different, more collaborative way of looking at problems.”

Laura Murphy, Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking

At a recent two-hour crash course, run by Julia Lang, Taylor program manager, with help from Tano Trachtenberg, an undergraduate Taylor student fellow, 14 participants paired up to address each others’ problems — social dilemmas from real life.

The step-by-step design project involved empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping and testing. The result: prototypes of solutions to real world problems constructed of clay, pipe cleaners, tin foil and other art supplies.

The goal was to learn about new mindsets and methods to quickly, imaginatively and optimistically address challenges.

The crash course was just a “teaser,” says Murphy. In other Taylor Center offerings, such as the weekend Fast 48 and the semester-long course, Social Innovation/Social Entrepreneurship 3010, Design Thinking for Collective Impact, “we dig in and do things over longer periods. If you repeat things a few times, you get the hang of it.”