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# So You Want to Do a PhD in Interaction Design

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## **Abstract**

This 80-minute course builds on a course by similar name in India HCI 2018. It is meant for early-career professionals who are interested in pursuing PhD research in interaction design or overlapping areas. In this course, I will provide a brief introduction to research and contextualize design research with respect to interaction design profession. I will show some examples of work by PhD students who have completed or are nearing completion of their PhD and give glimpses into life before, during and after a PhD.

## **Author Keywords**

Interaction design; HCI; PhD; research.

## **ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

## **Introduction**

While several PhD jokes start with the phrase, “So you want to do a PhD”, they do little to clarify what is actually involved. This course will act as a primer for those who are contemplating PhD as a possible next steps in their career.

## **Learning Objectives**

The main objective of this course is to give participants a glimpse of the path towards PhD research. It tries to explain how design research is different from design itself and tries to contextualize a PhD programme in terms of the expectations, the career stages of participants, and the PhD opportunities in India. It tries to answer questions participants might have and points them towards the next steps.

## **Contents**

I will start the course with some data on why designers do a PhD. In a survey that I conducted in 2010, I found that most people do a PhD for personal growth [1]. While the context of PhD research has evolved since then, the core reasons why people do PhD continue to be the same.

I will discuss how design research is different from design itself, and how design and design research depend on each other. I will next delve upon what research is and what is expected from a student at the end of her PhD. I will illustrate this with the help of examples of a few of our PhD students who have worked in interaction design or overlapping domains. I will explain the formal PhD process as it is followed in the IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay. I will also discuss the role PhD students play in building up an academic institution, and how our students have contributed to the IDC School of Design beyond their own PhD research. The course will be interactive and the participants will have opportunities to get answers to their questions.

## **Intended Audience**

Once considered young, the professional of interaction design has grown, both figuratively and literally. On the one hand the field has expanded in terms of the number of people involved, and the kinds of things that they do. On the other hand, some of the early entrants into the field have now matured. They have been on a journey. They have experienced the woes and joys of an interaction designer in the Indian technology industry. And in the process, they have learned a lot. Yet, all of this has been in the past. While they have grown fast, some can sense that a plateau is coming. Some of these have moved into entrepreneurship or management roles. Others sense that they can grow further only by contributing knowledge, not just by consuming it. Some of these may be contemplating a PhD. This course is for this group of people.

The course is meant for early-career interaction designers. By early-career, I mean people between the ages of 25 to 35. I expect most participants will have an educational background in design, either at undergraduate or post-graduate level. More importantly, I expect them to have had several years of active interaction design experience.

This course is NOT meant for two specific groups: Firstly, the course is not meant for those who are already enrolled in a PhD programme. Such participants may find this course too basic for their needs. Secondly, the course is also not meant for those who are just starting their careers in design. This group may not find this course immediately relevant to their careers.

### **Reading Material and Pre-requisites**

There is no specific reading material or pre-requisites for this course.

### **References**

1. Anirudha Joshi. 2010. Why designers do a PhD?; India HCI / IDID 2010

### **Justification for the Course**

As mentioned above, the field of interaction design in India has grown consistently. However, the research in interaction design and human-computer interaction continues to be scant, especially in India. There is an immediate need to attract the intellectual designer into the fold of research. On the other side is the growth opportunity for the designer. Landing a job early in one's career and establishing oneself as an interaction designer is perceived to be relatively easy in comparison with other design disciplines. Apart from people formally trained in interaction design, HCI etc., designers with backgrounds such as industrial design, communication design and architecture are commonly found to be working as interaction designers. While the entry into the profession is relatively easy, interaction designers often get a sense of plateauing after 5-10 years of professional practice. A PhD could provide a growth path to several intellectually inclined designers. The course will provide a glimpse into the PhD programme and will help this group of professionals make informed decisions in the future.

### **Expected Background of the Attendees**

As mentioned above, the course is targeted to early-career interaction design professionals between the ages of 25 to 35, who might be interested in doing a

PhD in future. There is no further expectations from the participants.

### **About Anirudha Joshi**

Anirudha Joshi is professor in the interaction design stream in the Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay, India. He has published several papers in conferences and journals. He has been teaching and guiding PhD students since 2011.