

For more information, contact  
Shan Hannadige  
shannadi@ucsd.edu



### Norman Design Fund for Fi@UCSD

My passion to run a design consultancy started alone in my winter-cold San Diego apartment, fueled with frustration at the current Human-Centered Design curriculum at UC San Diego, coupled with an isolation from the design community at large. I found a personal need to outlet my education with something tangible, as the infamous tagline goes “you need experience for a job, but a job to get experience.” What I learned in conversations with others in design studies was that a lot of people felt the same way. Design curriculum wasn’t providing students with a deep dive into industry practices, design organizations focused too heavily on outreach and networking, and personal time to do what we love is often harder as a full-time student.

In March 2019, I gathered 2 close friends to spearhead Fi@UCSD, a student-run experience design consultancy working with real clients to produce real impact. Our first project ran entirely bootstrapped with 7 students coming in to library study rooms work on a UX audit of Geisel Library’s digital help services. We had two missions: provide students with the hands-on education and experience they desired in carrying out a full-intensive research and design project, and then provide our client group with insights and deliverables to help them further their operational goals. We achieved both of these in a 10-week timeframe. [Project link](#)

One issue that came up was the fact that we were funding the digital operations of the consultancy and the project members’ software out of our own wallets, and as students we were very limited to how much we could expense to this endeavour. The Norman Design Fund helped us carry out our needs by providing all of our students with synced prototyping and multimedia software, while also giving our core team an ability to set up a website for further student and client outreach. The value our students received from these resources was phenomenal, as we wouldn’t have been able to provide it otherwise.

The website proved to be an effective investment as well: we were able to set up a landing page to showcase our abilities as a student-run consultancy, helping us gather 4 additional clients and over 50 students interested in participating. One of our latest projects involved the City of San Diego’s Performance and Analytics department, in which 12 new design students teamed up with city staff to perform research on citizens and provide design proposals on the city’s GetItDone platform. [Project link](#)

While our promise to deliver real design impact to organizations has been powerful, our promise to deliver real experience to students has been even more so. Many of our student-turned-graduates have gone on to design jobs in the industry, harnessing the knowledge that they gained from these first-time projects to employ themselves for work with prestigious companies.

Fi@UCSD has remained inactive since June 2020 due to the difficulties of transitioning the duties of the consultancy to other revolving students prior to our graduations. I strongly believe this model of student experience is effective in teaching students and applying their design thinking to real-world projects held at a gold industry standard. Our talks with other design organizations and staff in the Design Lab have resulted in a lot of discussion and change to both the curriculum and the community. I would be honored to consult further Design Lab affiliates in re-invigorating new methods of experiential design learning. I will undoubtedly continue my passion and use what I’ve learned from these past 18 months to create a new design studio, aimed at targeting larger-than-life questions with innovative design practices.

We’re so proud of our students, and we have Don and Julie Norman, along with the team at the Design Lab to thank for empowering us to push the boundaries of what students can do.

Sincerely,  
Shan Hannadige  
Co-founder, Fi@UCSD