SI 500 one sheet

SI 500: Problem-Solving with People, Information and Technology

What is SI 500?

In SI 500, graduate students apply interdisciplinary problem-solving approaches to identify, investigate, and address complex information challenges. Each year, the course partners with external organizations to explore issues connected to a university-designated impact area through collaborative, research-driven projects.

We are seeking host partner organizations interested in engaging with students on organizational, community, or societal-level challenges. Suitable projects are framed as problems, opportunities, or emerging areas of inquiry that would benefit from deeper investigation and multiple perspectives. Rather than focusing on narrowly scoped operational issues, projects should involve broader, complex situations that intersect with information, people, systems, technologies, or decision-making processes.

Course Theme: Human Health and Well-Being

For the 2026–2027 academic year, SI 500 will align with U-M's theme and impact area of **Human Health and Well-Being**. This theme emphasizes helping people and communities thrive, and invites students to explore health and well-being as broad, interconnected social, organizational, technological, and community challenges. Projects may relate to healthcare, public health, mental health, wellness, accessibility, caregiving, community support, health technology, prevention, health equity, or other domains that shape people's ability to live healthy and meaningful lives.

Partner Organizations We're Seeking

We are seeking partner organizations interested in working with graduate students on complex challenges related to Human Health and Well-Being, broadly defined. Strong partner organizations may include healthcare providers, public health agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, technology organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, research centers, or other groups working to improve individual, organizational, or community well-being.

Ideal partners can offer a challenge that is meaningful to their organization or community and that would benefit from student research, interdisciplinary thinking, and multiple stakeholder perspectives. Partners should also be able to help students understand the context of the challenge by connecting them with relevant staff, subject matter experts, community members, service users, or other stakeholders for interviews and qualitative research.

We are particularly interested in challenges that operate at the organizational, community, or societal level, rather than narrowly scoped operational tasks. Projects should involve complex situations that intersect with information, people, systems, technologies, services, or decision-making processes.

Types of Projects that Fit the Course

Suitable SI 500 projects are framed as problems, opportunities, or emerging areas of inquiry. Students are not expected to simply implement a predetermined solution. Instead, they investigate the challenge, learn from stakeholders, identify patterns and tensions, and develop thoughtful recommendations or concepts that can inform future action. Examples of potential project areas include:

- Improving how patients, caregivers, or community members navigate complex health or support systems
- Understanding barriers to equitable access to health technologies or digital health services
- Exploring how health information can be communicated more clearly across diverse audiences
- Reducing information overload or alert fatigue for healthcare workers, caregivers, or service providers
- Investigating how organizations can use sensitive health, biometric, or behavioral data ethically and effectively
- Designing more accessible services, tools, or environments for people with diverse abilities
- Understanding how misinformation affects community health behaviors and trust
- Supporting mental health, belonging, and emotional safety in digital or physical environments
- Improving coordination among organizations that serve overlapping populations
- Helping communities prepare for or respond to environmental conditions that affect health and well-being

The following examples illustrate the kinds of open-ended questions that could serve as starting points for student inquiry:

- How might we make health and wellness resources easier for community members to find, understand, and use?
- How might we help patients or caregivers manage health information without increasing stress or burden?

- How might we design digital health tools that are trustworthy, accessible, and useful for diverse populations?
- How might we build health interventions that respect cultural context and meet people in familiar, non-clinical spaces?
- How might we create digital social environments that prioritize emotional safety, belonging, and meaningful connection?
- How might we use existing community infrastructure, such as schools, libraries, transit, or local organizations, to improve access to wellness resources?
- How might we redesign services for older adults to support agency, connection, and contribution, not only safety and medical care?
- How might we improve the flow of information and work in high-stress care environments to better support staff well-being?
- How might we help communities maintain health, mobility, and social connection during environmental health disruptions such as poor air quality, extreme heat, or severe weather?

What You'll Gain

This is a low-cost, high-value engagement for your organization. In return, you'll receive:

- 5–7 unique, interdisciplinary student proposals
- Practical, innovative insights tailored to your context
- Final reports, presentations, and optionally: prototypes, program designs, or data analyses
- An opportunity to shape the learning of emerging professionals passionate about health and information equity

What We Ask of You (~15–20 hours of commitment, Sept–Dec 2026)

As a client, your engagement would include:

- Co-develop a project brief in collaboration with ELO staff to define the challenge, context, goals, and relevant background information for students (~2–3 hours, summer)
- Meet with faculty to align on the project scope, student learning goals, and class engagement plan (1 hour; early September)
- Identify and facilitate access to one or more subject matter experts who can support class visits, presentations, or student learning related to the challenge (1 hour; early September)
- Identify and facilitate access to potential interview participants who represent a range of stakeholder perspectives related to the problem under investigation (1 hour; early September)
- Present your challenge to the class and provide initial context, background, and goals for the student teams (1 hour; Friday, September 11)
- Schedule check-in times to provide feedback to student teams and help guide their understanding of the challenge (10-15 hours, October & November)

    - Meet with each student team for a short mid-project check-in (15 minutes per team, about 1.5 hours total; Friday, October 23, during class, otherwise that same week)
    - Meet with each student team for a longer feedback session as their work takes shape (30 minutes per team, up to 3 hours total; Friday, November 6, during class where possible, otherwise that same week)
- Attend final presentations and hear student teams' recommendations (2+ hours, December 11)

Additional guidance for a successful client engagement

Based on lessons learned from previous client partnerships, the following practices help create a productive and manageable experience for clients, faculty, and students:

- **Designate a primary point of contact.** Each client organization should identify one primary contact for scheduling, communication, and coordination with faculty, ELO staff, and student teams.
- **Share relevant background materials when possible.** Helpful materials may include reports, existing data, strategic plans, examples, organizational context, prior research, or other resources that can help students better understand the challenge.
- **Plan for reasonable responsiveness during the semester.** Students may have questions as they conduct research and develop recommendations, especially during October and November. Timely responses help teams stay on track.
- **Help students understand the problem context rather than provide a predetermined solution.** Broad, thorny problems are better than projects with obvious solutions. The client role is to help students understand the context, stakeholders, constraints, goals, and real-world complexity of the challenge.
- **Support access to a range of perspectives.** When possible, students benefit from hearing from people with different roles, experiences, or relationships to the challenge. These perspectives can help teams develop more thoughtful and grounded recommendations.
- **Clarify any sensitive or restricted information early.** Clients should identify confidential, sensitive, or restricted information in advance so that faculty and students can establish appropriate boundaries for the project.

Interested in being a part of this unique learning opportunity? Submit your idea **through our submission form** or contact umsi.client.engagement@umich.edu for any further questions.