Shaping Up Services: Developing Prototypes for Student Success

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What is service concept testing?

- A mixed-methods market research process, guided by a participatory decision making framework
- Entails gathering data on user needs, generating possible offerings, and testing those offerings
- Driven by evidence and bolstered by creativity

Why do this work?

- Gather strategic intelligence about an underserved user community
- Brainstorm and develop ideas for support services based on user needs and challenges
- Provide evidence for piloting a new support service or adapting an existing one
- Test out ideas, user preferences, and practices before piloting or implementation

Who should do this work?

- Individual college and university service providers (e.g. IT, Infodesk, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, the Library, etc.)
- Multiple service providers at one campus
- Service providers across multiple campuses or institutions

Learn more:

You can find more information on Service Concept Testing in our **Toolkit:** https://sr.ithaka.org/our-work/toolkit-for-developing-new-services/

Qualitative Discovery

Learn about the practices, preferences, and needs of college students and their relationship to success by means of on-campus, in-depth, in-person qualitative interviews

- Examine existing internal or external data sources on direct measures of user behavior or self-reported perspectives
- Conduct a literature review on user community needs and challenges
- Interview a representative group from the user community to supplement existing information and research

Service Concept Development

Develop a series of concepts for services that colleges might seek to offer based on the discovery phase

To effectively construct service prototypes:

- Brainstorm first; narrow and prioritize later
- Center design on community goals, challenges, and needs
- Consider the unique contributions of the department
- Prioritize collaboratively
- If working across institutions or departments, recognize local differences
- Advance several concepts rather than seeking unanimity

Survey Assessment

Evaluate the service concepts with college students by means of a survey to determine their potential value

- Determine what service concepts would be of the greatest value for your user community
- Assess potential demand among different populations
- Discover frequency with which these new services might be used
- Evaluate where your user community would most likely use these services

Service Concept Testing in Action

We tested this methodology through the Community College Libraries & Academic Support for Student Success (CCLASSS) project. The project's goal was to provide community colleges and their libraries with strategic intelligence on how to adapt existing, or develop new services to most effectively meet student needs, centering on three high-level research questions:

- How do students define success?
- What challenges are they facing?
- What might help them succeed?

Results

The following figure displays how valuable each of the service concepts were rated by students and the corresponding descriptions that were developed using this methodology

Knowledge Base: A single point of contact for help navigating any part of college. This service would offer expertise in connecting students with the right college employee for assistance.

Loaning Tech: Access to technology either to borrow for use outside class and at home, or on-site with expert training and assistance.

Personal Librarian: Dedicated professional available to help students find and use all kinds of content sources needed for coursework.

Social Worker: A dedicated social worker who provides personal assistance depending on students' needs, such as finding housing, securing childcare, transportation, etc.

Child Care: Array of services to accommodate students who have children or are caregivers. These services might include designated spaces for families to study together, regular or emergency childcare services, etc.

Privacy: Workshop about how to operate effectively and safely in today's digital world.

Community Advocacy: Opportunities to better develop a student's capacity as a member of the community and society. These could include one-time presentations by faculty, members of community groups, industry experts, etc.

Student Showcase: Opportunities to publicly display work from classes or contribute personal and professional expertise developed outside of classes through various displays, presentations, workshops, and more.

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Extremely valuable   ■ Very valuable   ■ Somewhat Valuable   ■ Not too valuable   ■ Not at all valuable