Assessment by Design:
A Design Thinking Project at the University of Washington Libraries

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Transfer Student Design Thinking Pilot Project

Lead librarians provided training on design thinking method to group of 10 University of Washington (UW) Libraries staff in August 2015. From this group, a core project team of 6 people formed. The core team met weekly, and the project ran from Oct 2015 – Mar 2016. With vacation/breaks, the project took approximately 12 weeks. The three sections below (inspiration, ideation, iteration) follow the structure outlined in IDEO's *Design Thinking for Libraries: A Toolkit for Patron-centered Design* (2015).

What the project team learned about transfer student participants:
- Importance of acknowledging transfer students as a distinct group
- Transfer students often prefer Libraries spaces other than the Undergraduate Library
- Students need to "hit the ground running" – they need opportunities for getting up to speed quickly and independently; early in 1st quarter is critical moment
- Information and resources for transfer students exist in multiple places at the institution (which can make it hard to get up to speed quickly)

How the UW Libraries responded:
- Libraries integration into Transfer Student orientations: Libraries tours specifically designed for transfer students
- Events specifically focused on transfer students for Fall 2016 orientation week:
  - "Transfer Student Social with Departmental Librarians and Advisors," (partnership with the Undergraduate Research Program and First Year Programs).
  - Storytime for students & their children
- Staff development/awareness:
  - Transfer student panel to help Libraries staff better understand needs of this group
  - Creation of transfer student persona to help guide development of new services/resources
- 2016-2017:
  - Continued partnerships with First Year Programs and others on campus
  - Outreach in new "Commuter & Transfer Commons" space in Student Union building
  - Ongoing assessment of initiatives

Tips for successful design thinking projects:
- Use the *process* as an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with users and campus partners
- Be flexible: implement in ways that make sense for your library & staff (e.g., if you can't set aside dedicated time, it's ok if the process takes a little longer).

- Use the information gathered about users to inform your library's strategic plan, and use your strategic plan as a guide to stay focused on key areas for meeting user needs.

Our Process:

Inspiration

Team Building & Initial Brainstorming:
- Brainstormed ideas about what the team already knew about transfer student challenges. Also focused on logistics of design thinking (team roles, etc.):
  - Explored existing University of Washington (UW) institutional & Libraries data; reviewed higher education and LIS literature about transfer students (Fall 2015).

"Expert Interviews":
- Seven interviews conducted over 2 weeks with members of Transfer Student Union (4 students), staff in First Year Programs, Admissions Office, and the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity:
  - Questions more broadly framed about transfer student experiences (not focused specifically on library experience).

Ideation

"Storytelling":
- Interview notes shared and all interviews discussed in core team:
  - Team members who conducted interviews told the "story" of their interview (highlights, tone, etc.). Every team member wrote down on a sticky note what stood out as important as they listened to the "story."
  - Individual ideas on notes grouped together into themes.

"How Might We?" & Generating Ideas:
- Based on interview themes, team brainstormed "How Might We" questions that addressed challenges facing transfer students (e.g., "How might the Libraries help transfer students develop a sense of community on campus?").
- Questions were organized into groups to identify points of overlap. The team voted on a favorite "How Might We" question/idea.
- Based on the chosen "How Might We" question, team brainstormed possible solutions (events, services, resources). Team then voted on favorite idea: a panel session and social event for transfer students held in the Undergraduate Library.

Storyboard/Prototype:
- Created a storyboard prototype of this event, which included concrete logistical details of who would be involved, how the event would be organized, and when the event would occur.

Iteration

Getting User Feedback on Prototype:
- Attended a similar panel event for transfer students hosted by a different campus group: attendance was poor, causing the team to question whether our solution would work.
- Consulted with transfer students & staff about idea: students and staff confirmed conclusions made by the team based on the panel discussion, so we decided not to move forward with our initial solution.

Fail! Back to the drawing board….
- Returned to our "How Might We?" questions and possible solutions.
- Decided on a different question and solutions

Feedback (again) & Implementation:
- Brought new ideas back to transfer students and First Year Programs staff for feedback
- New ideas piloted in Summer/Fall 2016

Resources:

Bell, S. (January 21, 2015), "Design thinking for flexible solutions", *Library Journal*. URL: http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/01/opinion/steven-bell/design-thinking-for-flexible-solutions-from-the-bell-tower/ (accessed June 15, 2016).

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Mathews, B. (2012), "Too much assessment not enough innovation: R&D models and mindsets for academic libraries." Paper presented at the *Library Assessment Conference*, Charlottesville, VA. URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10919/19047 (accessed 28 September 2016).

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