

First Generation College Student Participatory Design, Winter 2020

Purpose

This project focused on understanding the needs of first-generation undergraduate students. Students and Libraries staff engaged in a co-design process for a service that responded to the needs identified during the project. This work was a collaborative project with the UW Libraries Undergraduate Student Success (USS) team, Instructional Design, and Assessment & Planning. Participatory Design is a values-driven methodology that centers equity and power/expertise sharing between students and staff. It is about designing with, not simply for students. One of the Libraries core strategic directions is to [enhance equitable environments for research, learning, and working](#); this method represented an opportunity to advance our goals by building a partnership between students, Libraries assessment, and user support teams.

Key Resources

- [“I Wish My Parents Knew”](#) video.
- A [blog post](#) on the Libraries Website features this project.

Methods

Six first generation college students and two Libraries staff met for an hour and a half twice a week throughout Winter quarter 2020 to better understand the first-generation college student experience and to co-create a Libraries resource that met their specific needs. Through participatory activities and collective brainstorming sessions, the team selected and completed a project that would help improve their experience at UW.

Results

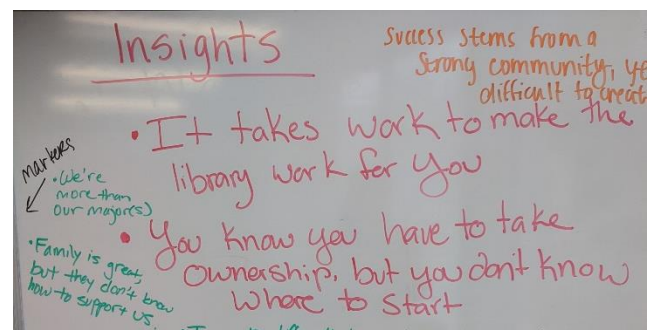
- Over the quarter, students described the importance of their families as a support network, but also their lack of understanding about the college experience (one student described it as “the right support but in the wrong places”).
- Another core theme was how “it takes work to make the Libraries work for you.” The size, atmosphere, and sheer volume of information can be intimidating and overwhelming. Students found it difficult to narrow down to get the information

they need and learn what they need to know. Even if the complexity is understandable, they said, “you are still just one person.”

- In brainstorming ideas for action, key themes centered around peer mentoring & community building, pathways for academic success, information/support for families, knowledge of and support for use of available library resources.

Actions & Improvements

- The team produced a video called “What I wish my parents knew,” written, filmed, and edited by the students, with stories and input from other first-generation students outside the project team. The students translated the captions for the video into Spanish & Japanese. This video was featured on the UW Libraries blog, the campus newsletter UW Today, and ARL Member News.
- Students also participated in an additional feedback session with Libraries staff about areas that had surfaced in discussions throughout the quarter. They shared their perspectives and ideas on Parent Orientation and the “Resource Recommender,” a possible addition to our catalog, to staff who were interested in incorporating student feedback but struggled with outreach.
- In response to this project, the Undergraduate Student Success team hosted an orientation social event specifically for first generation students in Fall 2021.



Snapshots from the First-Generation College Student Participatory Design project.