Using Culture to Cultivate Conversations:
Lessons Learned from Whiteboard Ethnographic Research

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Project Goals

➡️ Explore the ways in which ethnographic studies can inform libraries' understanding of **student usage of space**

➡️ Examine students' personal and academic habits, interests and preferences, with the aim of using their responses to better identify **ways in which libraries can contribute to student success**

➡️ Gain a greater understanding of methods through which students **engage in dialogue and develop informal learning communities within library spaces**

Methods

Approach

Participatory on multiple levels
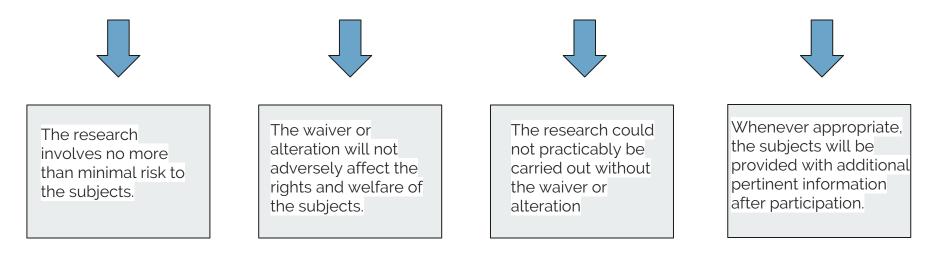
Timeline and field sites

Spring 2015: 3 whiteboards, 30 days, UT Knoxville
Spring 2016: 5 whiteboards, 8 days, UTK and University of Richmond

Locations

Gathering/transitional space
Collaborative study space
Quiet study space

Waiving Informed Consent

Receiving signed informed consent statements from each subject will not be possible. The PIs request a waiver of informed consent under the guidelines of 45 CFR 46.116(d)

| The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects. | The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects. | The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration | Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation. |

Categories and Questions

A: Student Success

B: Demographics

C: Habits & Preferences

D: Dialogue & Community Opportunities

A: My dream/ideal library has _____.

B: In three words or less, why did you choose your major?

C: If there were a song about your life, what would it be called? Or, what song defines you?

D: What is the most interesting thing you've learned this semester?

Coding and Transcription

Student Success	Positive	Response to another response	Physical/Mental Health & Wellbeing	Habits and Preferences
Negative	Current or campus events	Advertisements or Promotions	Dialogue & Community Opportunities	Neutral
Jokey/Sarcastic/ Whimsical	Social	Literal Answers	Library Spaces	Library Services/ Resources
Academics	Creative Answers	Non-Library Spaces	Political	Unknown Reference

Findings and Considerations

➡ Student-focused versus library-specific questions

➡ Board locations and placement

➡ Privacy and openness

➡ Range of responses and experiences

➡ Role of the library

➡ Value of student voices

"**Ethnography is always local;
it is about particular individuals in a specific context.**"

Hobbs & Klare (2010, p. 356)

Course Corrections

➡️ **Consider your work style and comfort zone**
        Does this project relate to or challenge your approach?

➡️ **Expect the unexpected**
        Weather, external events, (re)moveable data

➡️ **Budget more time than you think you'll need**
        Setup, transcription, and coding

➡️ **Continue the conversation**

                        And bring others into this conversation!

Lessons Learned

➡ **Don't get too tied to the methods**

Our method helped us think beyond the instrument

➡ **Think about your marginalized communities**

➡ **One assessment is not going to change everything**

Assessment is a puzzle/ecosystem

➡ **Every assessment that you do is also the beginning of another project**

Q&A

Recommended Reading

Asher, A., & Miller, S. (n.d.). *So you want to do anthropology in your library? Or, a practical guide to ethnographic research in academic libraries.* Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries Project. Retrieved from http://www.erialproject.org/publications/toolkit/

Foster, N. F. (2007). *Studying students : The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester.* Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Hobbs, K., & Klare, D. (2010). User driven design: Using ethnographic techniques to plan student study space. *Technical Services Quarterly, 27*(4), 347-363.

Wu, S. K., & Lanclos, D. (2011). Re-imagining the users' experience: An ethnographic approach to web usability and space design. *Reference Services Review, 39*(3), 369-389.

Thank you!

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