Research Question:

    • How can MySHU better serve the university, both faculty and students alike?

Research Methods

    The following researhcmethods have been chosen as viable options for learning more about the MySHU portal and its users.

Focus Groups

    Focus groups are semi-structured, organized discussions with a group of individuals who utilize product or service. A qualitative method, focus groups differ from one-on-one interviewing by allowing the group to interact freely, openly discussing their views on a product. This allows for a far more interactive dynamic than a group interview. The interpersonal interaction can often allow the moderator more insight and can uncover issues the researcher may not have identified. Participants can share their priorities, preferences, and frustrations, which may allow other participants to voice similar experiences. Users may be too embarrassed to discuss frustrations in one-on-one interviews, fearing judgement, but may feel more comfortable once another user brings the issue forward.

Interviewing

    Interviewing is far more structured than a focus group. The research prepares an "hourglass" format, in which the questions start general, focus in on topics pertaining to the research question, and then broadening to conclude the interview. While the interviewer may allow for some discourse in each question, he or she is in control of the interview and its progression. This method is desirable due to its consistency: every interview will follow the same format, with little variance depending on follow up questions or clarifications. This consistency allows the interviewer to gather dependable data during each session. One-on-one interviews are also helpful for users who may feel intimidated in larger groups. There are no others to distract the interviewer or user, and the participant may feel more comfortable giving honest, accurate answers.

Card Sorting

    Card sorting allows participants to reorganize information into logical groups according to their workflow or organizational systems. The participant is given cards with content or tasks on each, and allowed to restructure the cards according to their preferences. Card sorts provide measurable data, however users can answer questions or provide opinions during the sort. This method allows the communication of user preferences and a more logical hierarchy of information based on a user's goals and priorities. The resulting sorts can reveal a meaningful structure to their everyday usage. These structures may not have been considered by those developing the product or service as they are not the end-user.

Surveys

    Surveys are a quantitative research method, which allow the researcher to identify product usage, complaints and their consistency, as well as other demographic information about a large number of users. These statistics are easy to understand, and allow for little-to-no interpretation of a user's opinion or true meaning. Surveys offer a more accurate method of predictability. Due to the pervasiveness of technology, surveys can be distributed to a large group of global users. Results can be returned quickly, allowing for a rapid start to data analysis. Social media, email, and online providers offer a simple platform for digital surveys. The difficulty rests with the researcher: they must be able to create an effective survey with meaningful questions. Surveys may be very complex in structure, and the creation of effective

questions is paramount to its success. Meaningless or unrelated questions can lead to invalid results.

MySHU Research Methods

The following methods will be used to investigate the usage of the MySHU portal:

Interviews

nterviews will focus on three distinct groups of users: students, faculty, and IT Staff. Faculty and student interviews will also include a short usability test, allowing the participant to refer to the MySHU site as questions are asked. Faculty and student interviews will focus upon how they utilize the portal, their goals, their needs, the context, and any pain points they encounter during usage. These interviews will also contain a card sort. By allowing the user to reorganize the information on the main MySHU page, meaningful structure can be given to the overwhelming amount of information presented. It will also allow the researcher to assess what information can be removed or added for faculty and student usage. As each group has different needs and goals, the card sort may be able to break the portal into separate interfaces for each group. These interviews can be conducting during office hours Monday through Friday, with Fridays being completely open for the researcher. Since the campus is divided between Main campus and Downtown, a variety of faculty can be interviewed on Friday in the Downtown buildings. This will allow for a diverse cross-section of faculty. Student interviews can be scheduled based upon the student's availability. Many students have a two-hour break between the morning and afternoon studio sessions on the Downtown campus. This will provide an excellent window for thirty to forty-five minute sessions.

IT staff interviews will be conducted to discuss their vision of the portal and its evolution. Early discussions have indicated setbacks and problems during the development and migration to MySHU. These problems will be investigated. The original vision of the project is very important, as it will guide what MySHU evolves into in the future. These interviews may include viewing original prototypes, sketches, or old user research. These interviews will help provide context for the intent of MySHU.

Focus Groups

Moving away from the structured rigidity of an interview, focus groups will allow students and faculty to discuss the portal in a more informal session. The goal is to open a dialog about problems, frustrations, workarounds, and user goals. Participants will be asked questions to guide the discussion, but ultimately issues addressed in conversation will lead topic exploration. Two main focus groups will be used: students and faculty. Seton Hill University's Academic Technology group discusses technology usage on campus, including digital assets used by faculty and students. AT has devoted time to a focus group session during their November meeting to discuss MySHU. This group is completely separate from the IT department, and no members of IT sit on the group. Members are also from very different backgrounds and departments. This will allow for a frank, open discussion about usage of the portal for faculty and their students. As such, the AT group meeting is a very feasible option for a faculty focus group.

Two sessions of student focus groups are scheduled to discuss how the students utilize MySHU and the difficulties they face. These sessions will be held in two separate classes with very different groups of students. The first group is compromised of sophomore, junior, and senior Typography students. This group was chosen because they have an already established comfort level with each other. They are willing and able to speak freely about their opinions, feelings, and frustrations. They also represent varying levels of usage and different goals based on their position in their student career. The second session will be a smaller Saturday session.

Students across multiple majors will be in attendance. These students are also comfortable speaking about their experiences. However, since they represent several majors, they will allow more insight into usage and goals. Student focus groups will discuss problems they encounter, their current usage, and information or functions they desire from the portal. It will also address information not needed on the MySHU portal.

Resources

Goodman, E., Kuniavsky, M., & Moed, A. (2012). *Observing the user experience: a practitioners guide to user research.* Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann.

O'Grady, J. V. (2017). Designers Research Manual: *Succeed in Design by Knowing Your Clients and Understanding What They Really Need*. Quarto Publishing Group USA.

Sharon, T. (2012). I*ts our research: getting stakeholder buy-in for user experience research projects.* Amsterdam, Heidelberg: Kaufmann.