“I just want a place to cry”: Advocating for Asian American Students Using a Participatory Design Process

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ABOUT US

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Outline

1. Project Overview & Examples
2. Next Steps & Project Takeaways
3. Challenges & Reflections
4. Guiding Questions

Slides: at.virginia.edu/LOEX-slides
Create a student-led opportunity to advocate for changes to Library services, collections, and spaces

Increase Library engagement with historically underserved communities
What is participatory design?

- Methodology often used in computer science, architecture, planning, etc.
  - E.g. website design
- Iterative design process with users and contributors involved as collaborators throughout
- One-off or long-term engagement in process
- Similar projects done at Penn State, Montana State, Duke (for example)
Why APISAA students?

- APISAA = Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian American
- Largest racial/ethnic minority at UVA
- Organized with demands for better treatment for years  
  - Especially after 2020
- Historically left out of conversations related to race at UVA  
  - Focus on African American students and legacy of slavery
What group(s) on your campus are coming to mind?
Project Details

- Started summer 2022 with IRB, securing funding
- Recruited 40+ applicants
  - Selected 8; 7 committed
  - Not a representative sample
- Recruited library consultant group to help with implementation of project results (from library spaces, liaisons, collections, and DEI)
Project Details, cont’d

Project design:

- 10 facilitated sessions in Fall 2022
- Students identified challenges and designed potential solutions
- Students paid $15/session with dinner provided

To begin our process, we created community guidelines. These were "Agreed upon values that we have as a group, so we can co-work creatively and comfortably". We reminded the students that this was a process for them to be part of, rather than us observing them as subjects. To create that environment, what would they need? We read these at the beginning of every session.
Example: Ideal Library

- We did a generative activity each week.
- Week 6: “if we had unlimited resources and access, what would the perfect library look like?”
- Students demonstrated they wanted large, open spaces - as well as private ones.
- Clear signage and centralized resources.
Students identified some strengths and challenges of the APISAA community at the University of Virginia, including:

- A “safe space” to celebrate culture and learn about each other’s backgrounds, including complex, regional identities.
- Lack of resources and programming for cultural communities
Students identified many challenges about being an APISAA student at UVA as well:

- Lack of resources and programming for cultural communities
- Intimidating and confusing academic infrastructure at UVA
- Rigorous and competitive culture at UVA
- Loneliness, lack of friendship, community, and belonging
- Burnout, well-being, self-acceptance
- Creating a welcoming environment for immigrants and international students
- Balancing academics and a social life
Takeaways

- Students expected there to be more overlap between all the academic systems at UVA, like curriculum and advising.

- Students shared with us large and systemic problems that Library services aren’t equipped to serve, like loneliness, burn out, social insecurity, and more.
Digging into these challenges led to a vote about what our students feel like should be prioritized and what the Library could take steps to improve:

- Collaborate with APISAA student organizations: spread information about ongoing library programming and create programming together
- Display modern/contemporary Asian/APISAA art in library spaces
Takeaways

• Even though our group was small, it was diverse.
  ○ Variety of nationalities and ethnicities, academic interests and disciplines, extracurricular involvements, and more.
  ○ Immigrant students, first-generation students, and trans-racial adoptees represented.
  ○ This contributed to a breadth of perspective in many ways
  ○ Still a small, non-representative sample

• We were also interested in how students described their perceptions of the Library as they came to UVA
  ○ Some picked UVA intentionally because of the size, some felt overwhelmed by the size of the system.
  ○ Self-perceived rigorous students who had to adjust
  ○ Some were surprised at the social aspect of the Library
Next Steps

- Work with partners to identify funding, design, and space for a mural
  - Tackling this project as non-managers
- Identify ways to partner with APISAA student organizations
- Consider how to go through this process with other identity groups
Challenges

● “Red tape” that prevented us from easily compensating our students, both with their pay and with our catering system

● Lack of clarity on the Library’s role and reach on campus - students brought forth important issues that we don’t have the power to fix

● Continued student engagement, especially after on-campus shooting in November 2022
Advocating as Non-Managers

- Had to gain support from:
  - Our supervisor/library middle management
  - The consultant group
  - Assistant Dean for IDEA
  - Library spaces folks
  - Art faculty
  - Art in Library Spaces group

- SO MANY MEETINGS
- Lots of compromises
- Funding challenges
- Power of student support
Reflections

- Real challenges - but they provided opportunity and crucial moments for advocacy
- We had an idea of what our students were going through, but now we know in their own words
- Overall very positive professionally and personally
  - Meaningful and impactful
  - Improved teaching skills
  - Our students are wonderful!
Guiding Questions

- What group(s) do you need or want to hear more from?
- How can you reach those students?
- What resources do you need? Who controls those resources?
- Do you have time in your schedule to run this project? If not, how can you make time?
- What do you want to get out of this process? What do you want the students to get out of this process?
- Who might be impacted by the results of this project? Who can you get on board before the project starts?
- How are you going to communicate the results of the project?
THANKS!

Slides: at.virginia.edu/LOEX-slides

More information: guides.lib.virginia.edu/tl/assessment

Questions?

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