**HCI Assignment 1: Needfinding for Social Connection & Belonging**

**Objective** The purpose of this assignment is to investigate how first-year students at Drake University form social connections and develop a sense of belonging. The research includes identifying user groups and tasks, forming hypotheses, conducting desk research, observing users, and interviewing individuals to uncover both expressed and latent needs.

**1. User Group & Task Selection**

**Potential User Groups:**

* First-year students at Drake University
* Transfer students adapting to campus life
* Commuter students balancing social and academic engagements

**Relevant Tasks:**

* Making friends within their residence halls
* Finding study groups at Cowles Library and academic buildings
* Navigating campus events such as Welcome Weekend and club fairs

**Selected User Group & Task:**

* **User Group:** First-year students at Drake University
* **Task:** Finding study groups at Cowles Library and academic buildings

**2. Hypotheses & Desk Research**

**Hypotheses:**

1. First-year students at Drake University struggle to find study groups because they are unaware of available academic resources such as peer tutoring and faculty office hours.
2. Social anxiety and unfamiliarity with campus culture discourage students from reaching out to peers for study groups.
3. Online platforms for forming study groups exist (e.g., Blackboard discussion boards, GroupMe chats), but many students do not actively use them or find them ineffective.

**Desk Research Findings:**

* Platforms like Blackboard, GroupMe, and informal Snapchat groups offer study group features, but students often find them unstructured and difficult to organize.
* Drake’s Peer Academic Coaching Program provides some structured support, but not all students are aware of this resource.
* Students who study in highly visible areas like Olmsted Coffee Shop or Cowles Library tend to work alone rather than forming organic study groups.

**3. User Observation**

**Observation Setting:** Cowles Library, Olmsted Center, and Hubbell Dining Hall

**Key Observations:**

* Students often sit alone in study areas, even in high-traffic spots like the Cowles Library quiet study zone.
* Study groups seem to form among students who already know each other, rather than through open invitations.
* Informal study groups gather in lounge spaces like the Olmsted Center, but they tend to be small and limited to students from the same classes.
* Campus bulletin boards feature some postings for study groups, but few students actively engage with them.

**4. User Interviews**

**Interview Questions:**

1. How do you currently find study partners or groups?
2. What challenges do you face when trying to join or form a study group?
3. Have you used any online tools or university resources to find study groups? Why or why not?
4. What would make it easier for you to connect with peers for academic collaboration?
5. How do you feel about approaching classmates for study groups in person versus online?
6. What role does social confidence play in your decision to join or form a study group?
7. What would an ideal study group formation process look like for you?

**Interview Participants:**

* Two first-year students at Drake University from different majors

**5. Data Analysis & Need Identification**

**Data Analysis Approach:**

* Responses were organized in a spreadsheet with one column for questions and two columns for participant responses.
* Common themes were identified by analyzing repeated concerns and suggestions.

**Expressed Needs:**

1. A clear and structured platform within Drake University for study group formation, possibly integrated with Blackboard or Bulldog Foundations.
2. More university-led initiatives, such as structured study sessions in academic buildings like Olin Hall or Aliber Hall.

**Latent Needs:**

1. Students need a low-pressure way to interact before committing to a study group, such as casual networking sessions or icebreaker study meetups.
2. A guided introduction process, possibly led by student mentors or Resident Assistants, would help ease social anxiety when forming new academic connections.

**6. Reflection**

**Findings & Surprises:**

* The strongest barrier to study group formation at Drake University is social hesitation rather than logistical difficulties.
* Students would prefer structured group formation over spontaneous interactions.
* Digital platforms exist but are underutilized due to lack of awareness or perceived inefficiency.

**New Questions:**

* How can Drake University make study group formation more intuitive and less intimidating?
* Would an app specifically designed for matching study partners be more effective than Blackboard discussions or GroupMe?

**Alignment with Hypotheses:**

* The findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2, confirming that awareness and social confidence are major factors.
* Hypothesis 3 is partially supported; while online tools exist, they are not widely used in their current form.

**Conclusion**

This research highlights the need for structured, university-supported initiatives that address social hesitation and awareness gaps in study group formation at Drake University. A hybrid approach combining digital tools and in-person facilitation could be a potential solution for improving social connection and academic collaboration among first-year students.