Improving the Student Learning Experience | UX Case Study

Emilio Harrison

IBM 3 Day Workshop

Emilio Harrison
Draft

The team doing a Playback for the group.

Introduction

Myself and five other Austin Community College (ACC) students were invited to join William's College at a three day IBM Design Thinking Workshop at the Austin, TX Design Studio. This was my first experience participating in anything design-related outside of school, so I felt a mix of excitement and anxiety.

Team and Role

Personnel

- Doug Powell — IBM Principal Designer — Workshop Coordinator
- Molly McClurg — ACC Professor — Group Facilitator
- David Correa — ACC Professor — Group Facilitator
- Claudia Ulrich — Student — UX Designer
- Lori Lopez — Student — UX Designer
- Elisa Tron — Student — UX Designer
- Michelle Atkinson — Student — UX Designer
- Myself — Student — UX Designer

Doug Powell

He lead us through the workshop and introduced us to IBM Design Thinking. With his guidance the team pushed through some areas we didn't fully grasp. When the team did a playback, Doug would often say

> "That's a really interesting space. Let's explore that…"

At the time I didn't understand what he meant, but as the workshop continued I realized that he was pushing us to explore other stakeholders to see how their problems were connected, so that we could find a more inclusive solution.

Molly McClurg and David Correa

They were both immensely valuable. During the workshop there were many times when I felt unsure of myself or I started getting stressed out, but Molly was always able to instill confidence in me and the team. David pushed the team to take whatever we were working on to the next level. If we thought we were done with something he would suggest taking it another step forward.

Claudia, Lori, Elisa, Michelle, and myself

We all contributed equally throughout the workshop.

Constraints

Remote

> On the first day of the workshop the city had major road closures and we weren't able to the attend in person, so rather than just miss a whole day of work we worked in Google Hangouts, used MURAL for empathy mapping, and delivered our first playback remotely as well.

Limited Time

> By the end of the second day another constraint presented itself; TIME. Upfront we knew we only had 3 days, and at first I thought that would be plenty of time, but Iwas definitely

wrong. This was my first time working on a project outside of school so I had no concept of how long this would take.

Problem Statement

IBM's Principal Designer, Doug Powell, assigned the problem for the workshop:

> Design a better way for a college student to access the information and content that will advance his academic pursuits.

Initially we took this problem on fairly straightforward. The only user we considered was named directly in the statement, "a college student."

It was hard for me to resist immediately jumping straight into solving this problem. I imagined redesigning libraries, changing the way students do research projects, or just throwing IBM's Watson at the problem and calling it a day; all this before I had even conducted a single interview.

As the workshop progressed, our team realized the scope of this problem was much larger than we first considered.

Users

Initial Research

In the first round of user research we conducted 14 interviews with students of varying backgrounds. Some students were attending their first year of school, while others were working on their PHD's. We focused initially on students because we thought they were the only piece of this puzzle.

This is a collection of quotes or sentiments from our interviews organized into categories such as “books, databases, etc…”

Persona

With the data we developed Jack.

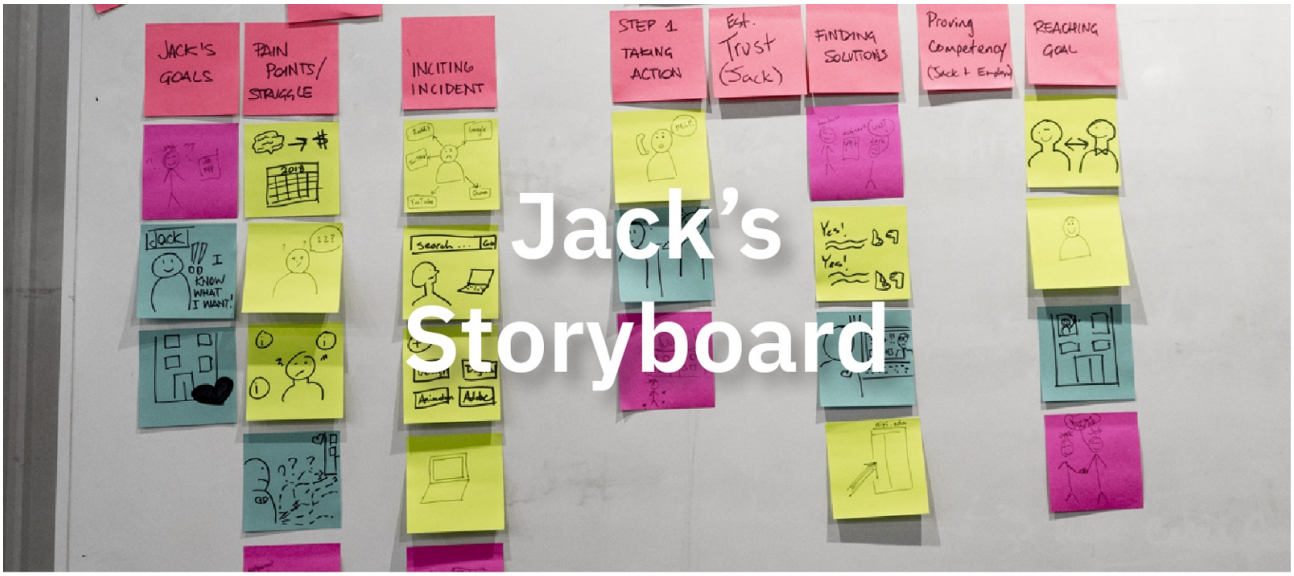
Jack wants to learn fast and efficiently, but why?

This was a question the team knew the answer to, but we never clearly stated it. We received that feedback from various IBM’ers after playbacks.

So why was Jack so concerned with learning quickly and being efficient?

He wants a job.

Storyboard



We mapped out the various steps Jack would have to go through to get a job.

1. Jack wants a job.
2. He realizes he doesn't meet the requirements.
3. He looks for guidance.
4. He learns school is the best way to get a job.
5. He goes to school.
6. He applies for a job.
7. He gets the job.

When we mapped out Jack's story we picked up on two other key stakeholders.

Educators and Industry leaders.

With two additional stakeholders we did another round of interviews. This time we interviewed professors and administrators from our school ACC.

Here is a quote directly from a professor when asked, *"What are the measurable goal(s) for the program?":*

> "Graduation/ completion rates. Persistence (returning next semester), enrollment, employment in field of study, faculty evaluations, satisfied students, student grades, quality of work…"

We also received some feedback about the hiring process from an HR Representative for IBM:

> "The perception [of applicants] is that you will be trained [during on-boarding], [but] now companies want employees to hit the ground running."

Why are they important in Jack's journey?

The Educator wants to maintain "graduation/completion rates" and the Industry wants to trust that a Jack can actually do what he claims on his resume.

Jack's goal is to get a job, so he may not decide to stay in school the whole time which negatively affects the Educator'g goal. The Industry Leader is the proverbial gatekeeper of Jack's goal, so in order for jack to succeed he must fulfill the Industry Leader's goal as well.

Solutions

On the third and final day, feeling the constraint of time, we quickly came up with some solutions. We didn't have a chance to create wireframes or user test these solutions.

Personal Trainer

Fill out a profile of your goal, learning style, and time requirements; then a Coach will guide you on the correct path.

Education Wiki

A database for information and resources offered by schools and companies.

Reddit for Education

A crowdsourced education feed. The content is generated by companies, schools, and industry leaders. With upvotes and downvotes the most credible courses will rise to the top. There would be different domains of interest like graphic design, metal working, etc….

Follow Up

1. Next steps will be to create some wireflows/prototypes of our solutions and test them with users.
2. Conduct more research on the Industry Leader persona. I realized they were important and had one quote from someone, but then made assumptions about other aspects. I'd like to have a more believable and fleshed out persona.

Retrospective

Be aware of time

It was too easy to lose track of time when we were fully into the project, which lead to rushing to meet the deadline. That "rushing" may lead to interesting results for some, but in our case it was stressful and didn't lead to the most valuable end.

Not all feedback is created equal

Be able to take feedback, but also realize that not all feedback is good. Throughout the workshop our team sought feedback from other teams and got what we asked for; tons of feedback. With Molly's guidance we were able to sort through the noise and find insightful and

actionable feedback.

Play to your teammate’s strengths

If someone on your team is stronger at a particular skill, then utilize that person to do what they do best.

Embrace ambiguity

This was a struggle for me, but I learned the importance of it. Don’t get derailed by being frustrated with not having an answer; embrace it. The answer will come.

Challenge Assumptions

- I **assumed** the only relevant user was going to be a student. **Wrong.**
- I **assumed** the solution would be a redesign of a library or something similar. **Wrong.**
- I **assumed** that just because something was obvious to me (jack wants a job), everyone else knew it to. **Wrong.**

In other words, realize when assumptions are made, and be willing to challenge them.