DP 2 Project Summary

The Bicyclists: India, Claire, Isaac, Maddie, Jay

We observed a diverse group of staff members to collect a general overview of the staff experience. We considered different schools, departments (dining hall, office of President, service, etc), ages, and genders to ensure that we included a wide range of perspectives in our project. Early on, we realized that 5C staff are lacking in workplace culture and community in a number of ways.

We met with six staff members from all five Claremont Colleges, as well as TCCS. Each of our interviewees offered us insights into what it is like to be a staff member here, including shifts in their workplaces since COVID, people they interact with on a daily basis, staff-created groups (book club and knitting club!), and more. As we developed our project, we thought about which of our interviewees had similar circumstances to each other — like the two relatively recent hires we spoke to, and the two staff members who have been at the 5Cs for 20+ years — which helped us to think about the layers of their experiences and emotions.

One thing that seems to be important to them is a sense of belonging and connection with coworkers, and how this could help create a deeper sense of meaning in their work. Some interviewees discussed how they enjoyed pre-pandemic activities such as staff luncheons and book clubs. A few mentioned feeling physically isolated within their office spaces. Others brought up self-formed staff committee groups such as the Pitzer Staff Social Committee, which independently organizes events for staff to connect.

We wondered about what this means: We developed potential ideas for the people we interviewed. One was about a staff member who has been working for a long time and who values collaborative work styles; however, COVID-19 brought on a lot of changes to her office's culture. We focused our project on a different person, though, one who completed onboarding at Scripps with just simple logistical information without much staff interaction, which made them feel overlooked. This left them feeling confused without people they felt comfortable talking to for advice or who involved them in the office culture. We learned that first impressions matter because they foster a culture of inclusivity from the start, which influences how valued and engaged an employee feels within their office space and community. From their point of view, we considered some provoking questions like, how might we:

- Use onboarding activities to ensure integrated staff members?

- Leverage insights from recent hires to improve onboarding experience?
- Measure the effectiveness of our onboarding process for new employees?
- Tailor onboarding experience to address individual needs?

But the questions we felt that would illuminate the most productive responses were:

- How might we ease transitions into new workplaces?
- How might we better balance community and working in the workplace?
- How might we get bosses/veteran workers to think more about new hires?

The ideas we considered were: We drafted nearly 200 ideas for these two staff members, but we narrowed it down to a final 100. One category of ideas involved personalizing workers' physical personal or communal space, such as decorating work tables or even rotating the office space every year to keep the job dynamic. Another category focused on the sense of belonging with communal events, like staff-led skill workshops, fantasy football, or daily yoga. We also pursued ideas around helping new hires feel more involved and part of the community, like creating a welcome committee designed to help integrate new hires and a mentorship program partnering experienced workers with new ones. Some of our craziest ideas included sending new hires on a deserted island retreat, rotating their departments or campuses every year, and above all, locking hires in the office. Some of our worst ideas included raises based on employees' relationship with others and workers being paid in hugs.

We prototyped the "Time Capsule Wardrobe," designed to bring together memories and stories of employees who have been at the colleges for decades. From the conversations we had with workers, we felt that sharing memories and community history is an effective way to increase a sense of belonging. Getting to know employees can be challenging and time-consuming, but we can create a time capsule with mementos, stories, and objects already available to staff workers. As part of the onboarding process, veteran staffers bring new hires into the capsule wardrobe to learn about the office's history through the items stored there. We aim to create an opportunity to talk — and to listen — in order to straddle differences between staff workers, paving a way for conversation, relatedness, and belonging. A notable feature about our initiative is that it is repeatable and sustainable. As the inventory of the capsule increases, there will only be more things to talk about, more memories and stories to be shared. And as time goes on, those new hires will soon see themselves included within the memories and mementos in the wardrobe.

We tested the wardrobe with a few people, both in class with our peers and with two employees of the Claremont Colleges. During the tests, we explained the general concept of our prototype to the users and asked them to imagine if it would have changed their onboarding experience. Our tests made us question the practicality of the product. How it would be implemented and who would be in charge of maintaining it? Our test subjects liked the way it would provide a collection of stories that they could familiarize themselves with and would allow them to feel more comfortable speaking to their new coworkers, but would not truly help with integrating a new hire into the office. When we began to iterate, we proposed making a database of office stories, having students organize and curate the wardrobe, or creating a mentorship program between new employees and veteran ones.

In this project we learned how many different perspectives there are among staff members. We knew we could dive into many different employee needs and insights, and the variety of solutions that our group — and the other groups — came up with is a testament to the diverse opportunities to improve the Claremont employees' work lives. If we had more time, we would have loved to start the first generation of the Time Capsule Wardrobe for a department and host an initial gathering where employees are encouraged to bring in items and tell stories revolving around them.

The Time Capsule Wardrobe - Version 1

On wednesdays, we drink tea!

Beachtrip summer '21

Brad's iconic HOLE-IN-ONE! Spring '02

"Love All" Tournament '16

Coffee with the 2022 newcohort

TCCS together