

Executive FollowUp

A productivity and organization tool

Design Problem

How do you provide enough structure to students in the upper high school years and early college years so that students can be successful academically? Is there a way to provide a system that students can actually grow in their ability to manage their time and workload? Can a student, then, turn these skills into success in their academic life and adulthood?

Section 3: User Needs Analysis

Students have two types of skills that need to be acquired in order to be successful academically and in other aspects of life. The first need is to *learn the subject matter at hand*. The second need is to *develop planning skills, often considered part of a set of “executive functioning skills.”* Executive functioning skills is really a family of skills that pertain to an individual’s self-discipline and, ultimately, self-esteem. The skills include time-management, work and work-life balancing, prioritization and others. A student learns much of this in school but, for many students, the education in school is not enough.

From the Needs Finding Study

Both parents and students expressed the need for more “personal attention.” Some students don’t feel comfortable *“speaking up”*, afraid they will ask *“dumb questions.”* They have expressed that in smaller group or one-on-one situations, they have learned *“how to talk to teachers”* and like the *“focus on them.”*

Students also have a need for “more structure” and feel that this engenders success. Both parents and students expressed their highest concern for the *“lack of structure”* that begins to present itself in the upper

grades of high school. According to the study, this may lead to *“procrastination”, “handing things in late and losing points”, “Not spending enough time on assignments”, and “poor spacing”* of the workload.

Students have a need to develop better *“time management skills”*. In both high school and college, the schools utilize software systems to facilitate communication between the students and the educators. On the whole, educators take advantage of the software so that students can view courses, assignments and grades. This is crucial to student success but does not address management of time for individual assignments and deliverables.

Students need an extremely convenient tool to keep track of deliverables. All of the participants noted utilizing desktop apps, provided by the school system, to view the information on grades and assignments. They will go to mobile apps and consider going to the desktop *“a pain”* but will go to it to get *“more detailed information.”*

Any solution needs to be reasonable in price. In High School, the other most prevalent external supports are *“Parental Support”* and *“Tutoring”*. Parents see the need for these soft skills but expressed that any kind of support outside of the school is *“extremely expensive.”* The priority is subject matter expertise, so if money is spent on outside help, it is, inevitably, to develop subject matter expertise. In college, the primary external support mechanisms that are used are *“Getting Help from Friends”* and *“Load Balancing/Course Selection”* to improve and maintain academic success. Both of these options are free.

Additional needs from the Micro Usability Study and Final Usability Round

Students feel that they need regular reminders of their commitments to be more likely to adhere to their schedule. All participants asked if there was going to be a “push notification” function.

Students want to get the *“satisfaction”* of *“checking off”* items that they have completed. Participants compared the use of this app to a written checklist. The satisfying part of a checklist is *“crossing the item out,”* and *“knowing that it is done.”*

Students generally do not use any digital organizational tools after high school. Participants reported trying some digital organizational tools in high school at the recommendation of parents or teachers but did not take advantage of anything currently available in college. Most participants *“didn’t know of any tools out there”* although they said they *“know there are some.”* They *“just don’t know the names of any.”*

Students need to be able to access the data from anywhere. Students reported mostly *“work at their desktop.”* However, for at-a-glance information, like grades, they *“will look at their phones from wherever they are.”*