

Project Overview – Enhancing Accessibility for Seniors at Shady Grove

Dr. Galina Reitz, the challenge provider, introduces the project aimed at improving the experience of older adults interacting with students at the Shady Grove campus, which houses nine universities, including the University of Maryland, College Park.

“Shady Grove is a campus that houses nine universities, including University of Maryland College Park. One of our programs there, Information Science, is offered at the Shady Grove campus, which is located in Rockville, Maryland, and a lot of the work that we do on the Shady Grove campus overlaps a lot of initiatives that we have on the main College Park campus.”

The focus is on addressing both physical and digital accessibility barriers faced by seniors—primarily independent living adults aged 70 and above—who visit campus to engage with students.

“In the last couple of years, we have been working closely with the local community in Montgomery County, Maryland, and we have been ***engaged in having older adults come to the Shady Grove campus and really be involved in all types of interesting initiatives with our program and the college***, and so we want to continue to do this.”

Identified Challenges

1. Physical Accessibility Issues:

- Seniors face challenges when navigating the physical campus environment.
- “For example: Scanning, figuring out the QR code in the parking machines. Scan that, paying that with your credit card, let's say if you have visual impairment.”
- Other concerns include navigating campus maps, walking to classrooms, and using stairs.

2. Digital Accessibility Issues:

- Seniors encounter ***difficulties interacting with digital platforms*** like Figma, chat tools, and Discord.
“Sometimes the students have to work with our seniors on Figma, and so there's *not really a good outline of how to interact* with Figma, how to log on, and so there's a lot of teaching and learning that goes on when it comes to digital accessibility.”
- ***Communication with students through digital platforms*** can also be a barrier.
“Our seniors also find it sometimes difficult to engage with our students, whether

it's through text, chat, Discord. *We don't have a lot of guidelines on specific ways to interact.*"

Project Goals

The project seeks to improve accessibility by addressing these barriers through innovative solutions. Potential deliverables include:

- Accessibility Audit: **Evaluate the physical or digital environment** to identify and address challenges. "Whether you would like to do an accessibility audit of the campus, I have included several links to the Shady Grove campus... so you don't actually have to travel to us."
- Guidelines and Playbooks: Create clear **guidelines for seniors on using technology, navigating the campus, and interacting with students**. "We would love to see... some kind of an implementation plan, something maybe along the lines of a **roadmap** of guiding our seniors on coming to campus, what to do, where to go."
- User-Centered Insights: Develop a **user report or prototype that enhances the senior experience**. "Anything and everything that you design will directly affect the project next semester, how the students will be engaged with our seniors... the type of available information they'll have next semester."

Resources Provided

Dr. Reitz has shared various resources to assist the team:

1. Campus Overview: Digital resources, including campus maps and video walkthroughs.
2. Collaboration Insights: Information on the Empowering the Ages partnership and how seniors engage with students. "I have provided some links to YouTube videos, a comprehensive campus map, as well as a really good overview of what the feel of Shady Grove is to kind of give you an idea."
3. User Access: The team can survey the 15 seniors who actively participate on campus. "I also want to offer you the ability to survey our seniors. And so if you are looking to send out a survey, I will share it with our seniors."

Collaboration and Next Steps

Dr. Reitz encourages innovation and offers ongoing support through Zoom and Discord.

“If there’s something that we haven’t thought of, we’d love to see it and hear it from you... I will share all of my contact information. So please feel free to let me know if you’d like to jump on Zoom, chat further, or if there’s anything else that I can share in terms of content and information.”

The overarching mission is to ***improve the senior experience on campus by addressing physical and digital accessibility***, fostering smoother interactions, and creating actionable solutions.

“Overall, the overarching mission is to enhance accessibility for seniors on our campus.”