Contextual Inquiry

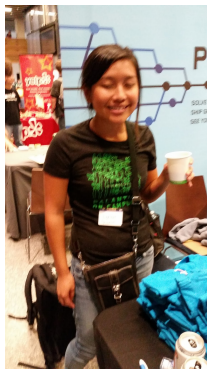## Background

Where: EECS Internship Fair, Memorial Stadium: Palantir Booth
When: 11/4/14 from 10:30am - 3:15pm

Recruiters

Female
25 years old
Econ major
3.5 years @ Palantir - first job outside of college
Hobbies: Frisbee, food
Dislikes: Dishonesty

Personality - very hands-off/learn on the job. Self-defined 'workaholic' with a separate BlackBerry for work and iPhone for personal life. Easy to work with, 'big sister' personality almost to the 3 engineers helping out. Gave me her sandwich and her cookie :)

Other observations - chews gum frequently; on not-event days has one cup of coffee, during 'business season' (fall) maybe 2 or 3 at events.

Has a small side bag: Mainly to hold phone when she has no pockets. Also had gum, pen, wifi password, keys, other personal items.

Female
32 years old
Communication/Psychology major
8 years in recruiting: 1st month @ Palantir, previously at Yahoo, Meebo, Evernote
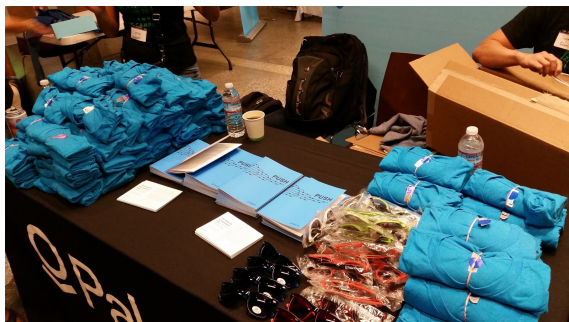Hobbies: Yoga, hanging out with family and friends, cooking
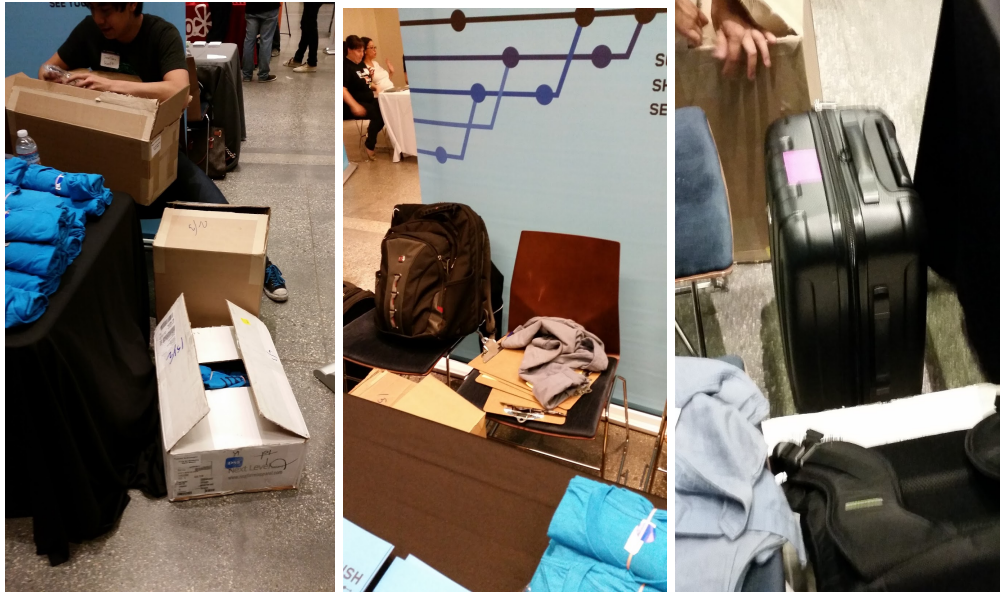Dislikes: Students who don't know why they're talking to you

Engineers

Observations

General setup

Left to right, top to bottom:
1 - Palantir's booth setup. Lots of things to give out: guys' and girls' cut t-shirts, sunglasses, pamphlets, women's scholarship flyer
2 - Drinks of choice: water, energy drinks, coffee. Most needed to be replenished by 12pm
3 - The table space and chairs were taken up by the boxes needed to bring all the swag. It was hard to retrieve anything and pretty much impossible to stand behind the table.
4 - Pile of clipboards used to hold resumes
5 - The 'survival kit': tablecloth, tape, scissors, clipboards, hand sanitizer, paperclips, post-its

Career fair setup: Different from the usual RSF location. A lot more ventilated and 'new'. Still crowded though; Lynne observed that the lines for booths would cut into each other because of how the tables got set up.
Surrounding volume: See this file

Talking to students

3 engineers + Brittony each get a clipboard, pen and post-its. Post-its go on the back of the clipboard; they're there in case there are double-sided resumes, or there are people who didn't bring resumes and they need to write down contact info.

After talking to someone, recruiter will flip resume over and write down 2 or 3 lines
1. The initials of whoever talked to the student
2. The student's interest/possible team
3. Internship/full time
4. If there was a technical question, the rating. Usuall, the problem is also on the resume itself.

Periodically, unload clipboards with resumes into the white Palantir folders. This is actually troublesome; usually takes a few tries to tug all the papers out. If there is no one coordinating, actually getting these resumes to the folders is difficult because you have to reach over the table, open the folder without letting the other resumes slide out, put yours in there, and then close them again.

Clipboards: JYu would give out clipboards and pens for technical questions and then struggle to write questions down without a hard surface. Clipboards were a space for collaboration, not just recruiter notetaking. He'd explain the problem, give the boards out for students to work on, then gesture and point along with them when asking them to explain the solution. Technical questions: They took a while. Ranged from 5 minutes to 30+ minutes. Students would search for space to write; luckily Palantir was located near the entrance where there was a ledge they could perch on.

Other Misc. Thoughts/Observations
- Lynne didn't do a lot of talking - did a lot of coordinating these kinds of small details instead. Making sure the tables were stocked, making sure resumes were unloaded, making sure people got lunch. Yun was particularly stubborn about not getting food...
- Gesturing while talking is important: one hand on clipboard, one hand free to emote
- Reaching over to find the right tshirt size takes a while; hard to get everyone on the same page as to what sizes are left unless someone is behind the table coordinating
- Women's engineering flyer often forgotten in the rush of other things to communicate
- Didn't ask for resumes right away - always a handshake or introduction first.
- Lynne would use the pamphlets to help her explain Palantir to the people she talked to. Most of the other people at the table only gave out the pamphlets at the end as a takeaway
- Getting people's attention is hard because (1) it's loud and (2) it's hard to reach across the table to physically tap someone. To get from one side of the table to another you have to literally walk around the whole line of students to the other side because there's no room.
- Everyone had a different standing style. Andrew was solid, 2 feet planted, shoulder width apart. Yun leaned casually against the table. Jonathan, Brittony and Lynne had weight distributed more on one side, though Jonathan felt like he moved around a lot because he was explaining technical questions and looking at answers.

Quantitative Observations
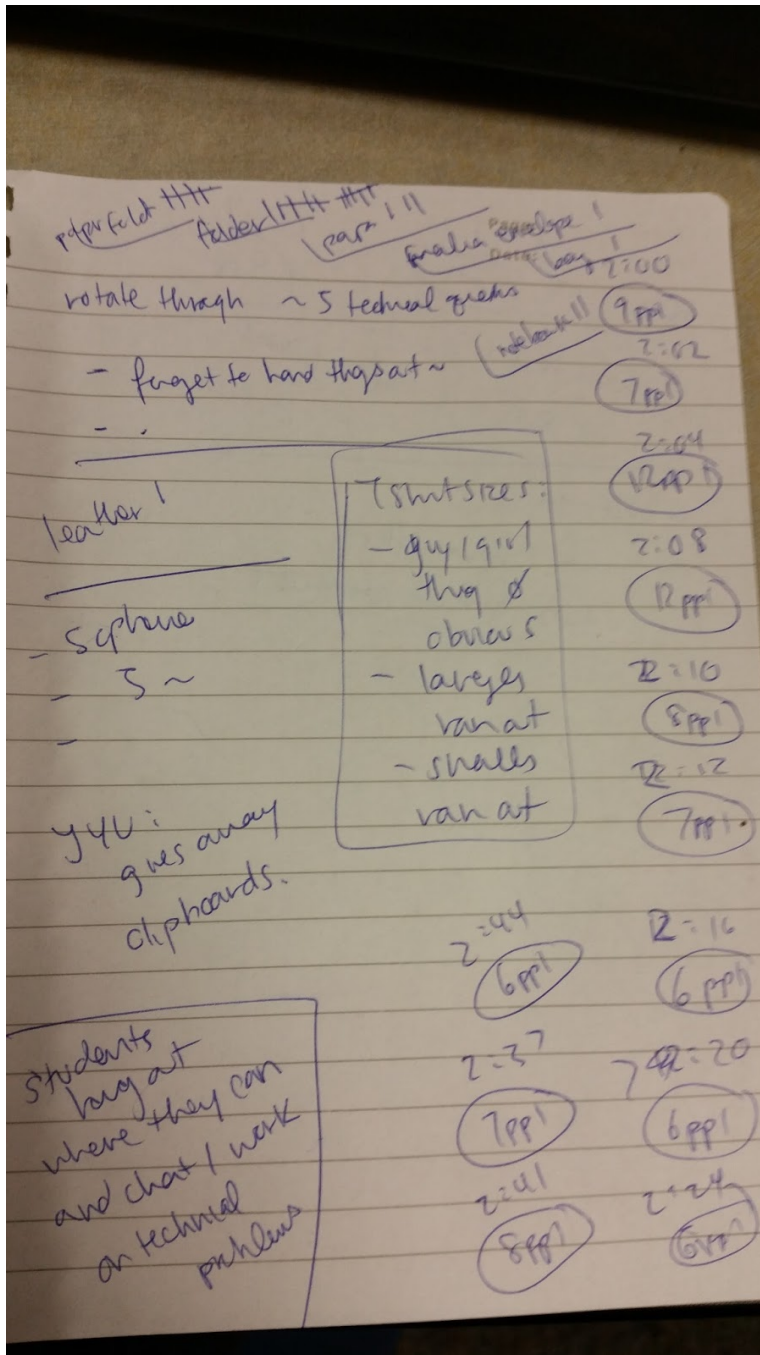
What students carry. Most have only one hand free; the other hand is:
- Plastic or other cheap folder - 26
- Just papers - 18
- File folder - 16
- Notebook - 7
- Manila envelope - 4
- Binder - 3

- Nice leather folder - 2
- Accordion folder - 1
- Clipboard - 1
- Sketchbook - 1
- Bags - 14
- Backpacks - 6 (only counted people who pulled resumes out from backpack)
- One guy had a coffee with him. Put it down on the ground to talk to JYu. Thankfully it didn't spill

Recruiter talking times (in minutes) - polled infrequently. Not very scientific. Lynne said a good time to aim for was ~5 minutes with each student. But some are more difficult to conclude than others.
- Brittony: 6, 9, 5, 6, 3:40, 3:27, 3:40
- Yun: 5:51, 9, 8:47, 5:40, 11
- Andrew: 3:52, 7, 6:35, 3:30, 5:58
- Jonathan: mostly technical questions so I didn't time
- Lynne: 5:35, 4:29, 10:08, 8:00

Number of students at booth:
11:40 - 7
12:07 - 8
12:14 - 5
12:18 - 8
12:23 - 10
12:26 - 12
12:30 - 10
12:34 - 10
12:42 - 9
12:48 - 8
12:50 - 10
12:53 - 8
12:57 - 7
1:03 - 6
1:09 - 11
1:21 - 15
1:29 - 10
1:35 - 11
1:41 - 5
1:44 - 8
1:55 - 8
2:00 - 9
2:04 - 12
2:08 - 12

2:12 - 7
2:16 - 6
2: 20 - 6
2:24 - 6
2:37 - 7
2:41 - 8
2:44 - 6
2:47 - 4
2:57 - 9
Average number of students: 8.4; meaning 4 were waiting in line at any one time while 4 were able to talk to a recruiter/engineer

Other Things I Learned

Since Lynne was doing a lot more coordinating I had a chance to for more conversations. Not exactly the contextual inquiry model, but it was the best way to get some information on a recruiter's tasks outside of just the career fair.

Tablets - Palantir doesn't use them; they're known to cause backlog and prevent personal conversation, but something along the lines may be in the works

CMS - They use Salesforce, but the scanning and inputting of contacts is still manual.

Business cards - Don't really collect them at fairs, don't have them on her either.
 I had to write my contact info down on a post-it, and she gave me her personal contact on my notebook.
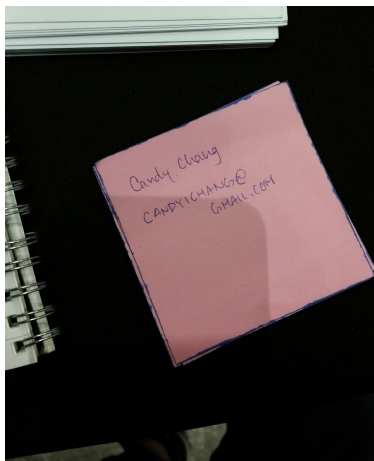
What they do give out are pamphlets, where they indicate the contact info on the back with the general recruiting email address.

Debriefing -
- Ask engineers about their experience, get some fresh eyes on the process
- Local
  - Do it at the office with other recruiters afterward
- Away
  - Review resumes right away in hotel room or wherever
  - Schedule any outstanding candidates for interviews right away
- Review session:
  - all recruiters (depends, maybe around 10)
  - every couple of weeks, ~2 hour sessions
  - Pass around resumes to recruiters for different teams
    - make sure to keep track of where resume came from (what school and so on)
    - mark notes on the resume/on post-its
    -

Recruiting is pretty seasonal - fall is the busy time.
Depending on recruiter's preferences, you can go to more or less fairs. Lynne has gone to 12 so far; the EECS Internship fair is one of the last ones they go to.

Summaries
- At career fairs, the goal is to get personal face time with candidates and carry on a conversation
- Pass out as much swag/physical promotional material as possible
  - This means digitizing everything might not be the best - contact info and such is currently contained on physical pamphlets, Palantir's logo is on the tshirts and sunglasses.
  - Physical takeaways are free advertisement.
- Resumes are the main contact exchange, not business cards
  - They're used well too - written on, passed around and so on
  - Good prompter for conversation during the fair - great jumping point for questions and discussion. Again, would lose something if the exchange only happens digitally.
  - The painful part is the manual processing, entering of information into whatever digital management system exists
- Space and coordination is difficult to get by at career fairs
  - The fewer things you have to hold, the better
    - Once you place something down you'll probably forget where you put it
  - The less retrieving/reaching back/unpacking you have to do, the better
  - Pens are in high demand.
- Time is important - students will leave if they have to wait too long, unless you have a lot of pull
  - It's hard to have a standardized talk time because everyone is different and it's hard to end conversations...

- Recruiters talk to LOTS of students. Keeping everyone straight is really difficult. They also visit many locations, so it's keeping students and where they're from and what they're interested in straight, not just their names and emails
- Keep notes on resumes is important, but Lynne also said that avoiding bias is also important
    - sparse notes, with the bare minimum of info + an option for followup with the person who talked to the student