Observations and Insights Report

Observing on Studying

## Domains

1. **People who study in MAGNET**

Interest

1. We’re all MAGNET students
2. The people that study here seem to be more connected to their work (The people that study here have a strong connection to the outcomes of their work)
3. Diverse group of students

Accessibility

1. We’re all MAGNET student
2. Diverse group of students

Feasibility

1. we’re all MAGNET student
2. MAGNET is a space designed for the kind(s) of work students like us are doing
3. We have a better sense of what to look for and the kinds of questions to ask by default of being MAGNET students
4. **Student study in Dibner**

Interest

1. We thought it was the default location to observe
2. We all think there is a more interesting alternative to this domain
3. It’s more diverse there in terms of fields of study and
4. Less diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity

Accessibility

1. Easily accessible because we are all NYU Poly students
2. Default studying location, especially in a university setting
3. We probably won’t encounter many MAGNET students there

Feasibility

1. Harder to identify what people are doing; everyone is focused on their own work on their own laptops
2. It seems like everyone is doing regimented work
3. **People study in non-traditional places**

*(i.e. NYU brownstones, independent work spaces such as Goethe Institut, museums, etc. )*

Interest

1. People there may be different from the people study in the normal places such as library and coffee shop.
2. Not a default location
3. Diversity of works (people there may do things other than (school) assignments)

Accessibility

1. Multiple locations (anywhere that isn’t a traditional/default space to study)
2. Not that easy to access, since some of them are private
3. People probably don’t want to be bothered

Feasibility

1. People probably don’t want to be bothered
2. Too general
3. Will most probably be independent work for the most part; not a lot of collaborative or group project work
4. **People study in coffee shop**

Interest

1. Multiple locations
2. Relationship between the people, study/work there and the style of the coffee shop

Accessibility

1. Unrestricted access
2. Many locations to choose from

Feasibility

1. Would be difficult to differentiate between students studying and regular people working
2. People probably won’t like being bothered

## Conduct and Record Observations

**Pivoting**

Our initial domain was students who study at Dibner Library because it seemed like a default choice for studying. After conducting our observations, however, we decided we were not interested in pursuing that because it lacked a diversity in students and work being done. We also felt that turning our focus to the students in MAGNET would be a more feasible choice since we ourselves fall into that category, more diverse work is being done there, and we have a greater interest in studying students there.

**Observation**

Location: MAGNET

Time: Sep. 30, 2014 5:30pm~6:15pm

* Guy in corner sitting with crossed legs on computer
* Group studying at one table, interacts with a group studying at another table; they are part of the same class
* Nobody is using the projectors available for them
* People with food really spread out on the tables
* Around this time, the whole area is pretty empty; probably because everyone is in class
* Students seem to prefer to sit in the single chairs with attached table top, than at tables (especially those who are studying alone)
* Everyone is studying/working on computers or tablets; no books or pen/pencil
* A professor approaches and talks to a student at a table
  + Prof. McMillan talks to our fellow student, Helen, about the feasibility of a project idea she has and the skill set she has being not quite what is needed for his project but that he would love to have her involved in it regardless
* The portable whiteboard actually gets used in MAGNET; the used one looks like it was used to keep track of scores in a game
* Students prefer to sit on the black regular chairs as opposed to the sofas
* Though MAGNET does not define itself as a quiet studying place like a library, it is much quieter than Dibner
* Equal numbers of men and women visible; a greater ethnic diversity as well
* Teachers often talk to students in the lobby; professors are generally more visible here than in Dibner
* Window views are killer!

Location: MAGNET Grad Research Lab

Time: Oct. 1, 2014 5:30pm~6:15pm

* Only two students in the lab
* One student, Neill, is working on his programming homework for C++
* Both have snacks for themselves
* Neill is studying using both a textbook and laptop
* Another student, Ayanna, is only using her laptop
* Nobody is using the provided computers
* The whiteboards all have writing and information on them; probably from past meetings
* Very quiet; the observers (Sandra and Sriya) are whispering because we don’t want to interrupt or disturb anyone
* Quietest place we have observed so far, even though it is not billed as a quiet study area
* Fully stocked in terms of markers, erasers
* The printer needs paper but it has a big sign marking that
* The area is decorated - the organizers clearly wanted to create a comfortable and creative space
* There is an unequal number of chairs and tables; more chairs are needed
* There is only one desk lamp
* View outside the windows is of another building
* Constant whirring of the AC is audible (or some sort of air ventilation)
* Two small plants are placed on the windowsill
* The tables are really clean and uncluttered
* Neill gets help with his programming help from Sandra; he just found out she knew C++ and

**Interview Notes**

As the Interview Notes document.

**Notes Summary**

We summarized our notes from both the observation and interview and classified them into five categories: space, study style, goal, and what helps.

Space

* Not like discussion room and library, more like a creative space.
* Feeling relaxed, good mood staying in the MAGNET.
* Quieter and fewer people in MAGNET than in Dibner.
* It’s more likely to have pears around, which is more convenient for discussion and group work.
* Decorated space: comfortable and killer windows.
* The environment helps think creatively.
* There are whiteboards and people discuss by using the whiteboards.
* Markers are available to use. (Dibner has whiteboards but doesn’t provide the markers)
* It’s easy to get distracted at home.
* Comfortable with surroundings and easy to feel productive
* Almost equally male and female.
* People from different backgrounds working on various things
* Professors are visible here and some students are discussing with the professor.

Study style

* Need a quiet environment to study.
* Listen to music while studying helps ignoring the outside noises/distractions.
* Study individually then discuss the questions and problems with peers.
* Preview before the class, do homework by self after class, searching on the internet if any question or doubts.
* In general, people studying/working on their laptops or tablets rather than using a print book, pen/pencil, or public computer.
* Prefer to sit on the black regular chair than the sofa.
* Study at night.
* Needs to find a better work-life balance
* Normally study for a long period instead of short segmented periods since it’s more coherent and easier to get focus; once get into the study mode it would be really effective.
* Working in groups is alright only if everyone is on the exact same page
* Time has to be spent outside of class learning (individual)--especially software
* A tool to help organize notes, across devices, for thesis would be useful

Goal

* Find a better job, better pay.
* Create a company.
* Interested in the new fields for the thesis.
* Networking/meeting the right people; connecting with people from different culture and walks.
* Broaden a global vision.
* Improve English.

Problems

* The tuition and living expenses are expensive.
* Wants to be a better programmer but hasn’t developed the skills yet
* Not enough mentorship.
* Need more faculty feedback.
* Group studying doesn’t get much done.
* Long commute from home.
* Social media is very distracting.
* Professor can’t be expected to give utmost attention to all students

What helps

* Studying with comrades either physically in person or through the videocon.
* Study gets more effective if there are more incentives.
* Selective internet connections would be helpful.

**Assumptions and Verifications**

Grad students, in particular, want a decent paying job after graduating and think this will give them the skill-set(s) needed to do so.

* Basically this is the goal of everyone we interviewed.

Students who have outside financial support do not study as hard as students who are paying their own tuition because those students want to get the most bang for their buck.

* Financial support does not have as significant a relationship with studying as we thought it did.

Students get easily disappointed when they don’t understand challenging material and see it as a reflection of their own inabilities. They may be discouraged from trying again.

* We had one case confirming this assumption, but it was not a widespread confirmation or disproving.

Students are enthusiastic in what they are studying/working in MAGNET.

* Based on our observation and interview, we can deduce that this is the case. Nobody we interviewed was jaded or unenthusiastic about coming to study at MAGNET. The majority of our interviewees were excited to describe why they studied here and the perks of doing so.

Students will study better in traditional study spaces than at home/non-traditional ones.

* Students may prefer to study at home, but there’s too many distractions there for it to be an efficient way to do so.

Students prefer to study in MAGNET than at Dibner.

* Students preferred MAGNET’s environment to Dibner. The environment is unconventional and more conducive to creativity.

**Role-play**

Scenario: Studying at home.

Process:

1. Identified project to work on
2. Began researching on laptop in my bed
3. Took a Facebook break
4. Got sucked into rabbit hole of internet
5. Fell asleep
6. Woke up and felt terrible because I was so behind on my work

How I felt:

1. It’s in line with my own personal reasons for studying in MAGNET
2. I felt too comfortable and familiar at home
3. Way too distracted
4. Got way less done at home than when at school

Scenario: Individual study before group/peer discussion.

Process:

1. Choose a quiet corner besides the window in MAGNET to study.
2. Study for the class material taught by the professor for this week.
3. Meet my comrade in MAGNET and discuss for the problems and questions with the whiteboard.

How I felt:

1. I personally hadn't really study in MAGNET before, even I already find a quieter corner, it’s still a little distracting because people here are mostly doing the team work. The environment is more social.
2. I like the window because the light is more nature and I can look out when I am thinking or get stocked. It feels great if you can see the sunshine and the blue sky. One more thing is my eyes could get relaxed by looking out since it changes the eyes’ focus.
3. For the individual study part, I think it’s more effective, less procrastination, mainly because there is a specific time and goal which is I have to finish studying the whole material before I meet my comrade, otherwise not only I could have contribution to the discussion but would waste both of our time.
4. The discussion is awesome because we all studied before, we could help each other on all the doubts and questions. More importantly, since we all understand the materials better and deeper, we were able to explore new challenges together.
5. The whiteboard really helps because it’s easier for everyone to see the same thing and it’s easier to modify. Truly benefit for discussion.
6. Overall, not only I but also my comrades think this is awesome effective.

Scenario: individual study on Magnet:

Process: Doing Live Performance’s assignments in our research lab.

Fully focus on my homework totally ignore other thing.

Feeling:

1. Time flows slower. I felt it was 2h but it was actually 10 min.
2. That room is good. Not too cold or to hot and the decoration makes this room comfortable for us.
3. Chairs is not so good to sit for a long period. My back hurt a little.

## Ah-Ha Moments/Insights

* Computer and the internet are the must tools for everyone while studying, however, this is also where people get distracted.
* People like to study with groups but this is just the second part which they all worked on their own in advance.
* Through the role play and discussion we found deadline is the cure of procrastination, and the tool to make people dive into the entirely concentration status.
* The comfort and ease of MAGNET and MAGNET-style environments can also be a distraction.
* Money is a self-reported problem for everyone but it does not consciously influence their study habits
* Even with basic homework assignments, students crave creativity
* Students see studying as a way of life at this stage, rather than an activity in life

10/14:

* Procrastination might be a result of being disorganized
  + Maybe create a scale and have them rate their organization skills

Interview with Eddie:

Is procrastination a problem you face?

* Yes! Absolutely! (He answered before I even finished the question)

Rate your organization skills on a scale of 1 - 10

* 0
* My desktop is so messy that I just hide everything