

# User Research Plan — University of Edinburgh

## Introduction

- **Title:** Establish effective communication
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- **First edition:** 19/11/2021
- **Revised edition:** 27/01/2022
- **Project background:** Universities are concerned that students do not pay enough attention to the information they send. The service of the email system and communications seems not to function properly. However, it is no surprise that numerous messages have been ignored because many students may find those emails or probably assume them to be long-drawn, irrelevant or unimportant. On the basis of the research from Ha and colleagues (2016), a survey from Bowling Green State University shows that more than half of students do not always read emails from their institutions and that nearly 40% of students do not always read emails from their supervisors. What is worse is that approximately 70% of students treat emails like spam. Consequently, problems arise, such as students failing to complete the matriculation process and missing their coursework deadlines.
- **Research goals:** In this project, we determine to **establish effective communication** between the university and students. In particular, how do specific messages reach the relevant parties? Also, how do we create a receptive atmosphere that will encourage the students to respond?

## Research Questions

- How does the university enhance its communications service?
- Are there any reasons why students ignore the emails sent from the university? What kinds of emails are easier to be missed?
- Are there any changes that should be made for the university to establish effective communication? What measures should we take to invite students to read and to respond to the messages?
- Are there any alternative ways to reach out to students?

## Research Methods

- **Stakeholder interviews** are conducted with people who are interested in the project's success. In general, successful user research is often dependent upon stakeholder involvement.
- **User interviews** take place to focus on the user's motivations and behaviours through observation and feedback. We aim to collect in-depth information on their opinions and experiences.  
  
Note that each interview session takes place approximately 60 minutes. Date, location and compensation are TBD.
- **Diary Studies** are used to understand long-term user behaviour and experience. Daily activities are self-recorded over an extended period. When necessary, users may be required to take photos or screenshots to highlight contextual information.
- **Surveys** are sent shortly after the adjustments are delivered. By doing it, we can understand what most students think, which can be seen as a great way to measure the success of the communication.
- **Web analytics** is done to assess the effectiveness of the project by collecting and analysing the post hoc data.

## Key Performance Indicators

- **Student awareness and feedback:** Surveys will be sent to understand whether students receive the news and how they feel, which will help us get a baseline of whether the communication is effective.
- **Open rates:** The open, read and click rates of the emails will illustrate whether students pay attention to what the university has to say and whether students are actively engaged.
- **Page views:** Similar to email opens, reads and clicks, the number of page views and the time the students stay there provide another indication of whether students spend time on the news the university sends out.

## Participants

- Relevant stakeholders who should be involved will be asked to take part in this project.
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students will be recruited, including those doing online programmes
- Students who do and do not read emails
- Students who use assistive technologies such as refreshable braille displays, screen readers and ergonomic equipment

- Students with different genders, years of age, disabilities, difficulties and technology backgrounds

Note that participant backgrounds have to be as diverse as possible

### **Introducing remarks**

Hi, how are you today? Thank you for taking the time to talk with me and share your thoughts. My name is Chi Wang. I am the User Researcher working on this project. Before we begin, do I have your consent to record this interview for research purposes?

This data is being collected to help with the redevelopment of the website. What you will be sharing today will be valuable for our team to make improvements and provide users with a better experience. Do you have any questions about the session before we start?

All right! I'm going to ask you some questions. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Let's get started!

### **Concluding remarks**

Well, these are all the questions for today. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me and for sharing your thoughts. Your input today has been constructive. Is there anything you like to add, or are there any questions you want to ask? All right! Have a nice day 🍕🍷

### **Stakeholder interviews**

- Can you tell me your job title and what your role is in this project?
- What concerns do you have about this project?
- How do you know these are problems?
- Which of these problems is the most important to solve?
- How do you feel about the current website?

- Can you describe your audience?
- What do you think your audience cares about?
- Why do you think this project is important to you and the users?
- What would a successful outcome of this project look like to you?
- How will you use our insights to guide further development?
- Are there any technological limitations?
- What happens if this project is not done?

- Is there anything else you are worried about this project?
- Is there anyone else you think we would benefit from interviewing?
- Can you tell me a little about them?

### **User interviews**

- I want you to know that this isn't a test. I am here to explore how our team can make improvements to this project. There is no correct

answer, and none of your responses will be considered wrong.

- Please tell me a little about yourself.
- Can you tell me what programmes you are doing at the university?
- Can you walk me through what a typical day for you is like?
- When and where do you typically check your emails?
- What devices and apps do you use to check emails?
- How much time do you usually spend on checking emails?
- When you receive emails from the university, what do you think and what do you do?
- Is there anything that bothers you when you receive emails from the university?
- Is there any way in which you think these issues could be resolved?
- How familiar are you with the features of the email system?
- Have you ever been introduced to the email system?
- What do you think about the email system?
- Do you follow any social media of the university?
- Is there any way in which you want to receive the messages from the university?
- Do you follow the social media of the university?
- Is there any difference when you receive emails at different times?

### **Digital diary reports**

Participants make diary entries for a fortnight when spending time online, including mobiles, tablets and computers. A use-the-time-right-now button will be provided to more easily record dates and periods. There will also be assistive buttons for recording online activities and feeling at the moment. More importantly, users have to take screenshots and make comments accordingly when checking an email.

### **Post hoc survey questions**

Participants score the following statement by selecting one of five responses that range from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*:

- I think that I would check emails sent from the university frequently
- I think that the emails sent from the university are long
- I think that the emails sent from the university are irrelevant to me
- I think that the emails sent from the university are confusing
- I think that visual information such as infographics is helpful
- I think that it is unnecessary to check the emails sent from the university
- I need technical support to check my emails
- I am happy with different options of receiving news from the university
- I do not know whether I should respond to the emails

## Bibliography

Ha, L, Joa, C, Gabay, I & Kim, K. 2016. Does US college students' social media use affect school e-mail avoidance and campus involvement? *Proceedings of the 14th Annual Conference on Telecommunications and Information Technology*, pp 1-14.