

Shared Futures Workshop

Nicole Reyes

B.A. Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, Advisor: Dr. Divya McMillin and Lan Allison

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Purpose: Shared Futures is an annual networking event that brings together UW Tacoma students and faculty, and South Sound community leaders. The goal of Shared Futures is to make new connections and assist in the development of Tacoma's future. The theme of this year's event was designing the future for Milgard Hall's new Global Innovation and Design Lab (GID), which is set to open in January 2023.

Design Challenge: This year's students, faculty, and community members collaboratively brainstormed ideas of what we envisioned for the GID lab. Which was...

How might we best use the different spaces in the new GID Lab to offer inclusive, engaging programming and events?

PROPOSED SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

What is the Design Thinking Process?

We first began with thinking about solutions for the people, not the issue itself. As the core of the human-centered design is empathy. The problems you're attempting to solve are almost often those of specific users. Thus, you need to learn about your users' values to develop empathy for them. So we presented the participants with universities and centers that have created an environment that fosters design learning and thinking. In addition, we explained what design thinking was to them to grasp the idea to come up with ideas for the new GID lab. We then moved on to practicing design thinking by allowing the participants to brainstorm as many ideas as they could within their groups. Lastly, we had groups share out the ideas they came up with and how it connected to the original question.

METHOD(S), AND DISCUSSION

To help with the ideation process the participants were given a multitude of materials to promote quick brainstorming. Markers, sticky notes, and a whiteboard that was divided into different categories: the x-axis held the types of groups we would see at the GID lab which was students, faculty, staff, and community members, and on the y-axis, we had events, workshops, curriculum, and physical space/materials. This is known as the **Creative Matrix Exercise**, which was provided for the participants so that they already had a general idea of how they would want the GID lab to function for the four groups. In addition, this process sparks new, wide-ranging ideas in a short amount of time, represents the intersection of two disparate categories, and uses columns for categories related to people and rows for enabling solutions. Ideas for the new GID lab being built in Milgard Hall ranged from what resources we could provide for students, faculty, and community members to encourage ideation and creativity, to what about having a coffee shop smack in the middle of the lab. We encouraged the participants to come up with as many ideas as they could, without thinking about the pros and cons of each idea.

After the event, all the whiteboards were collected and we turned to the next step of the process which is **Affinity Mapping**. The process of producing an affinity map is sometimes known as affinity diagramming, snowballing, or collaborative sorting. When you have a lot of mixed data, such as facts, ethnographic research, ideas from brainstorms, user opinions, what the user wants, insights, and design concerns, affinity diagrams are a wonderful way to help you make sense of it all. Thus, worked on Mural and collaboratively pieced together all of the ideas that were brainstormed during the Shared Futures workshop. We then came up with our design goals and principles from the Affinity Mapping exercise.

REFLECTION

Shared Futures was one of my first in-person events after the pandemic. Being in an event where collaborations were encouraged was a refreshing feeling after having done meetings and conferences online for the past two years. That was also my very first time engaging in the process of ideation. I was able to interact with faculty and community members that I otherwise would not have been able to do because I have always been intimidated by those types of settings. Although with ideation, all ideas are equally important and reflected on. We were able to creatively express ourselves no matter our age or status. I also loved that ideation began with empathy; it was a method that prioritizes human requirements, capabilities, and behavior rather than designing solutions that disregard human needs. I hope to see Shared Futures occur next year, and can't wait to see what design question they focus on next.

