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“I just want a place to cry”: Advocating for Asian American Students Using a Participatory Design Process

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ABOUT US



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Outline

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Project Goals

- Create a student-led opportunity to advocate for changes to Library services, collections, and spaces
- Increase Library engagement with historically underserved communities



What is participatory design?

- Methodology often used in computer science, architecture, planning, etc.
 - E.g. website design
 - Iterative design process with users and contributors involved as collaborators throughout
 - One-off or long-term engagement in process
 - Similar projects done at Penn State, Montana State, Duke (for example)
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Why APISAA students?

- APISAA = Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian American
- Largest racial/ethnic minority at UVA
- Organized with demands for better treatment for years
 - Especially after 2020
- Historically left out of conversations related to race at UVA
 - Focus on African American students and legacy of slavery




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**What group(s) on your campus
are coming to mind?**



Project Details

- Started summer 2022 with IRB, securing funding
 - Recruited 40+ applicants
 - Selected 8; 7 committed
 - Not a representative sample
 - Recruited library consultant group to help with implementation of project results (from library spaces, liaisons, collections, and DEI)
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Project Details, cont'd

Project design:

- 10 facilitated sessions in Fall 2022
- Students identified challenges and designed potential solutions
- Students paid \$15/session with dinner provided

Based heavily on Young, Scott W. H., Fargo, H., Borrelli, S., Chao, Z., Gass, C., & Swedman, D. (2018). Assessing and improving the experience of underrepresented populations: A participatory design approach. In S. Baughman, S. Hiller, K. Monroe, & A. Pappalardo (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2018 Library Assessment Conference* (pp. 630-646). Association of Research Libraries,

<https://www.libraryassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Proceedings-2018-rs.pdf>.


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Example: Community Guidelines

- To begin our process, we created community guidelines.
- These were "*Agreed upon values that we have as a group, so we can co-work creatively and comfortably*".
- We reminded the students that this was a process for them to be part of, rather than us observing them as subjects. To create that environment, what would they need?
- We read these at the beginning of every session.




Example: Ideal Library

- We did a generative activity each week.
 - Week 6: "if we had unlimited resources and access, what would the perfect library look like?"
 - Students demonstrated they wanted large, open spaces - as well as private ones.
 - Clear signage and centralized resources.
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Students identified some strengths and challenges of the APISAA community at the University of Virginia, including:

- A “safe space” to celebrate culture and learn about each other’s backgrounds, including complex, regional identities.
 - Lack of resources and programming for cultural communities
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Students identified many challenges about being an APISAA student at UVA as well:

- Lack of resources and programming for cultural communities
 - Intimidating and confusing academic infrastructure at UVA
 - Rigorous and competitive culture at UVA
 - Loneliness, lack of friendship, community, and belonging
 - Burnout, well-being, self- acceptance
 - Creating a welcoming environment for immigrants and international students
 - Balancing academics and a social life
- 




Takeaways

- Students expected there to be more overlap between all the academic systems at UVA, like curriculum and advising.
 - Students shared with us large and systemic problems that Library services aren't equipped to serve, like loneliness, burn out, social insecurity, and more.
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Digging into these challenges led to a vote about what our students feel like should be prioritized and what the Library could take steps to improve:

- Collaborate with APISAA student organizations: spread information about ongoing library programming and create programming together
 - Display modern/contemporary Asian/APISAA art in library spaces
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Takeaways

- Even though our group was small, it was diverse.
 - Variety of nationalities and ethnicities, academic interests and disciplines, extracurricular involvements, and more.
 - Immigrant students, first-generation students, and trans-racial adoptees represented.
 - This contributed to a breadth of perspective in many ways
 - Still a small, non-representative sample
 - We were also interested in how students described their perceptions of the Library as they came to UVA
 - Some picked UVA intentionally because of the size, some felt overwhelmed by the size of the system.
 - Self-perceived rigorous students who had to adjust
 - Some were surprised at the social aspect of the Library
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Next Steps



- Work with partners to identify funding, design, and space for a mural
 - Tackling this project as non-managers
- Identify ways to partner with APISAA student organizations
- Consider how to go through this process with other identity groups




Challenges

- "Red tape" that prevented us from easily compensating our students, both with their pay and with our catering system
 - Lack of clarity on the Library's role and reach on campus - students brought forth important issues that we don't have the power to fix
 - Continued student engagement, especially after on-campus shooting in November 2022
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Advocating as Non-Managers

- Had to gain support from:
 - Our supervisor/library middle management
 - The consultant group
 - Assistant Dean for IDEA
 - Library spaces folks
 - Art faculty
 - Art in Library Spaces group
 - SO MANY MEETINGS
 - Lots of compromises
 - Funding challenges
 - Power of student support
- 



Reflections

- Real challenges - but they provided opportunity and crucial moments for advocacy
 - We had an idea of what our students were going through, but now we know in their own words
 - Overall very positive professionally and personally
 - Meaningful and impactful
 - Improved teaching skills
 - Our students are wonderful!
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Guiding Questions

- What group(s) do you need or want to hear more from?
- How can you reach those students?
- What resources do you need? Who controls those resources?
- Do you have time in your schedule to run this project? If not, how can you make time?
- What do you want to get out of this process? What do you want the students to get out of this process?
- Who might be impacted by the results of this project? Who can you get on board before the project starts?
- How are you going to communicate the results of the project?





THANKS!

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More information:
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Questions?

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