Going Native

Using Ethnography to Study Students Studying

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Introduction / Background

• Wesleyan University
• Information Commons
  – Phase 1
  – ?
• Who are we doing this for? What do they want?
  – In general: all future phases
  – Specifically: new Science Library study space
Ethnography Project

• Grant from the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education
• Nancy Foster - Lead Anthropologist, Digital Initiatives Unit, University of Rochester Libraries
• General Training / Workshops
• Wesleyan as guinea pig for specific projects
The Plan

• Three exercises
  – Photos
  – Maps
  – Drawings

• Record interviews for photos and maps
Photo Elicitation

- Students provided disposable cameras
- Students photographed 23 specific items based on a pre-determined list
- Students interviewed to explain their photographs in greater detail
- Interviews were recorded using Morae software
Examples of Photo Topics

- The things you always carry with you
- All the stuff you take to class
- The place you keep your books
- Something you can't live without
- Your favorite footwear
- A picture of your dorm room, showing your computer
- A place in the library where you feel lost
The things you always carry with you
A picture of your dorm room, showing your computer
Your Favorite Footwear
Photo Elicitations – Findings

• Students aren’t necessarily “high-tech”
• Libraries need to have the “right” personality
• Every space has a purpose
• Resources and tools need to be nearby
Photo Elicitations - Findings

• Ability to spread out but still “their own” space
• Desire for “non-institutional” ambiance
• “Parallel playing” vs. working together
Campus Maps

• Students tracked times and locations of their activities on a specific day during which they had classes and studied outside of class
• Students were interviewed about their maps and explained their activities
Campus Maps - Findings

• Designated spaces for designated purposes
  – Separate work and home spaces
  – Separate social and study spaces
  – Read in Olin, study in SciLi
Campus Maps - Findings

• Don’t like carrying laptops (weight; theft; distracting in class)
• Nice view to look at while procrastinating
• Usually have specific goal
Student Drawings

- Students brought to the space in question
- Given large sheets of paper, markers, Post-it notes
- Student groups told three different options:
  - Group Study Space
  - Study Space
  - Anything they want to do with the space
The Space – View 2
Example Drawings – Group Study
Drawings – Study Space
Drawings - Anything
Drawings - Findings

- Desire to bring nature inside
- Light
- Food and/or drink availability important
- Privacy issues
- Adjacencies
Drawings - Findings

• Low seating/moveable furniture
• Tables designed for the task
• Connectivity
  – Human
  – Technical
• Different weather elicited different design responses
Compiling Data

• For the interviews:
  – Co-view interviews, note significant points
  – Combine significant points from all interviews
  – Translate into form: “I need X (to do Y)” (e.g. “I need food/drinks when I study”)
  – Categorize (e.g. comments on furniture; lighting; technology; adjacencies)
  – Compare comments within categories
Compiling Data

• For the drawings
  – Note significant features of each
  – Compare lists of features, derive categories (e.g. open areas; partitions; attention to light; food/drinks; floor treatment; seating)
  – Count number of times each category is mentioned
  – Compare specifics within category (e.g. agree or disagree)
Conclusion

• Logistical Aspects
  – IRB/Compensation
  – Recruiting Students Who are Representational
  – Photo Elicitation Problems
  – Recording Software
• Time Needed for Pilot Project
• Learning Curve
• Time Spent vs. Information Output
• Next Steps
For Additional Information on Ethnography

• Nancy Foster’s Web Site
  – [http://docushare.lib.rochester.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/StaffPage-20](http://docushare.lib.rochester.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/StaffPage-20)

• [Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester](http://www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/downloadables/Foster-Gibbons_cmpd.pdf) available for purchase or download it at [http://www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/downloadables/Foster-Gibbons_cmpd.pdf](http://www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/downloadables/Foster-Gibbons_cmpd.pdf)
Thanks!

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