Reimagining the First Year Experience for Students at Your School

Session 2 – Design Thinking

University Innovation Fellows

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Gergana Stefanova Stefanova

Varna Free University

1. **Empathize**
   1. Conducting interviews with students from the university:

**(After making some meetings with different students of the Varna Free University, we have different answers and emotions. Here I present three examples.)**

Student 1.

Questions to ask:

**1) How did you choose to study in this university?**

Because they offered me the career I needed and for the prestige of the VFU.

**2) What motivates you to learn harder?**

If I go to university I will have better benefits such as health and possibilities of being employed. And those who have these benefits have a better quality of life. They live better!

**3) What are you passionate about and how do you like exploring this passion of yours?**

I'm passionate about making a difference. When I am involved with a project at work I want to do my best to achieve success. I feel the same for what I do in my personal life.

**4) What was your first thought when you went in the university for the first time?**

Although I arrived with enthusiasm, it was a little disappointing that, although I expected something more, there is no place in good condition for the students to practice sports and meet others, to be able to make relationships. And it's a little complicated to find some classrooms.

**5) What skills do you feel are important for you to acquire? Why?**

Personal management, the ability to plan, organize, create and execute independently my own life and my time.

**6) What classes will you be taking (or did you take) in the first semester?**

I don't know. I'm not sure.

**7) Which classes would you take if you could create your "dream curriculum"?**

Python, PHP Knowledge in Programming, Knowledge in Databases, Knowledge of management software, programming or implementation, customer support.

**8) What is your favourite classroom or space in the university? Why?**

I don't know. I'm not sure.

**9) Where do you spend most of your time when you are in university?**

In the classroom.

**10) Were you anxious / worried about something during the first year? What would make you more comfortable?**

I don't know. I'm not sure.

**11) What would make your experience as a student better at the first year?**

Make new friends, learn new things, and improve my skills.

**12) What do you think would have prepared you better for the 1st year at university? If you could go back to this moment, what would you want to advise yourself, what would you do differently?**

Improve my knowledge in mathematics and languages.

Student 2.

**1) How did you choose to study in this university?**

I chose to study at VFU because here I can have a career that fulfils my dreams and my desires.

**2) What motivates you to learn harder?**

Taking courses at the university will provide me with more experience and knowledge in particular areas.

**3) What are you passionate about and how do you like exploring this passion of yours?**

Play Videogames and Design Videogames.

**4) What was your first thought when you went in the university for the first time?**

There is nothing more exciting than losing yourself in a new city with nothing to discover but new places and people. And as I begin this new chapter of my life.

**5) What skills do you feel are important for you to acquire? Why?**

Improve my skills, believe in myself.

**6) What classes will you be taking (or did you take) in the first semester?**

I don´t know. I'm not sure.

**7) Which classes would you take if you could create your "dream curriculum"?**

Artistic Drawing, Vector Design, Video Game Technology, Digital Image Processing, Representation and Perspective Systems, Programming, Database, English, History of Art.

**8) What is your favourite classroom or space in the university? Why?**

The gardens with the sea views.

**9) Where do you spend most of your time when you are in university?**

In the classrooms.

**10) Were you anxious / worried about something during the first year? What would make you more comfortable?**

I don´t know. I'm not sure.

**11) What would make your experience as a student better at the first year?**

I don´t know. I'm not sure.

**12) What do you think would have prepared you better for the 1st year at university? If you could go back to this moment, what would you want to advise yourself, what would you do differently?**

My preparation is starting now. I do not think I should change anything.

Student 3.

**1) How did you choose to study in this university?**

Because it's very prestigious, it always was.

**2) What motivates you to learn harder?**

Students who go to university are exposed to diverse cultures and knowledge where they can gain an understanding of people from different parts of the country and the world.

**3) What are you passionate about and how do you like exploring this passion of yours?**

One of my great passions is to help others. I like to help people find solutions that meet their specific needs.

**4) What was your first thought when you went in the university for the first time?**

That this is very exciting to start this new stage of my life with multiple possibilities from now onwards.

**5) What skills do you feel are important for you to acquire? Why?**

Self-motivation. Because when somebody want something very strong and he's trying to get it, it arm himself with unexpected forces.

**6) What classes will you be taking (or did you take) in the first semester?**

I prefer to have more classes of programming languages with more hours of exercises and practices.

**7) Which classes would you take if you could create your "dream curriculum"?**

Languages of programming, Networks and communications, IT security, Network security, Organizational psychology.

**8) What is your favourite classroom or space in the university? Why?**

I have no preferences at the moment. Everything is very new to me and everything is interesting for me.

**9) Where do you spend most of your time when you are in university?**

In the classrooms and sometimes drinking coffee with friends in the garden.

**10) Were you anxious / worried about something during the first year? What would make you more comfortable?**

Not at all. At the moment everything is fine. Since everything is new I cannot make comparisons. I'm waiting to see what happen...

**11) What would make your experience as a student better at the first year?**

Learn new things, meet new people, make friends and have the possibility to participate in different projects.

**12) What do you think would have prepared you better for the 1st year at university? If you could go back to this moment, what would you want to advise yourself, what would you do differently?**

I don´t know. I think I'm ready for this new stage of my life and I am very optimistic.

1. **Define.**
   1. **Students suggested that:**

**There should be more activities (social events, sports activities, team work) to share at the university for students outside of the classes to meet the other students.**

**They need better guidance to move around in the university, it should be easier to find their classrooms.**

**Synthesis:**

The students come with enthusiasm and desire to learn and change or improve their lives.

The radical change in their personal lives - the new environment, the new obligations and new people who do not know each other, make it more difficult to integrate into university life and provide less time for the development of the most important tasks in the university.

If the integration of the students in the university environment can be achieved until the first six months from the beginning of their studies, inviting and involving each student in different university activities related to their interests or their specialty, outside of the classes, making them feel part from something bigger and important, will focus the effort and energy of the students in another direction.

Converting their university life into their daily lives, meeting and relating with different people will impel the students to do the best of themselves and want improve their skills, want to be innovative and not “followers”, thus achieving their dreams.