User-Centered Planning—Challenge and Participation

By Deborah Lauseng and Rebecca Raszewski

Within the University of Illinois Chicago libraries, a key priority is being student-centered, which is very similar to a number of our academic library colleagues. As information professionals we are very vested in providing the best for our users, whether students, faculty, staff, researchers, or clinicians. We are creative in our efforts to provide what we know is best for the success of the information seekers we interact with (or hope to interact with). Unfortunately we don’t always engage those same information seekers or library users in our planning initiatives. During the recent joint meeting of the Midwest and Midcontinental Chapters of the Medical Library Association, attendees were challenged to implement more participatory planning, then participated in an actual planning initiative.

Roger Alan Altizer, PhD, of the GApp Lab of the University of Utah, Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library, used his keynote address to share how his therapeutic games and apps lab works within the framework of inductive and participatory development, focusing on what is needed before starting design efforts. He stated that participation of the intended audience is a requirement of the design process, not starting with a solution in mind first. After several examples of successful implementation of this framework, Dr. Altizer went on to discuss the difficulties in finding and curating therapeutic games, and suggested that something like a “Games for Health Organization” would be beneficial.

The following day, conference attendees gained a clearer understanding of Dr. Altizer’s participatory development process through the Pac-Man vs. Ghosts: Librarians Overcome Barriers post-lunch activity. In an effort to gain a better idea of the issues and barriers librarians face, the NN/LM regional staff within the Midwest and Midcontinental Chapters engaged everyone in some “gaming” to gather valuable user-input. Each attendee wrote a brief action that they would take to vanquish a ghost barrier, posting them on designated posters. Examples of ghost barriers included Challenges to Joining Forces, Educating Administration about Today’s Libraries, IT Challenges; Lack of Planning, and Poor Communication.

Then, participants used Pac-Man stickers to tag those actions that might work within their own institution, and used cherry stickers to tag actions that they would need help to carry out. The top “we can do that” actions and “we need help to do that” action (based on the number of stickers) were shared with the participants. This activity was a great example of Dr. Altizer’s earlier statement that is essential to learn what the needs are from the intended audience before developing a new program or service.

Deborah Lauseng

E-ppendix: online newsletter of the UIC Library of the Health Sciences, Vol 7, Issue 1, Fall 2016