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Age-Friendly University

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2019

Portland State University

Anali Gomez

[AGE-FRIENDLY UNIVERSITY]

One Sentence: Youth and wisdom from the past and the present should be heard to impact our future.

Each generation has had to make similar decisions. The advice about these important decisions from people who made these decisions can help the generation that has yet to make this decision. Advice from experience, experience leading to stories, stories shaping each generation.

OVERVIEW

This project's goal is to connect different groups of students: Senior Auditors and High School Students with their current college student mentors. One group is in the stage of life where decisions about college are expected to be made, one currently in that decision, and one who has experienced college and decided to come back. The plan is aimed to bring together these groups, separated by generational gaps, to talk about their experiences in college, thoughts, advice and ask questions.

Through a project involve asking and answering questions in regards to the future, about high school, college and after college life. The project involved choosing between different activities; decorating mason jars, painting and photography. By combining an activity with guided conversation points, conversations were had between the groups.

PROJECT

Definitions

Senior Auditors/Senior Learners: At Portland State University people aged 65 and older who can audit classes for free. They do not pay tuition and can sit in the class and learn but are not required to do the assignments or tests.

SALC: (Senior Adult Learning Center) Within Portland State University, this center allows Oregonians, ages 65 and older to audit courses for free at PSU. It is required that a faculty member approve an auditor in the class. Each faculty member may have different requirements depending on the class. 11000 auditors sign up a year to audit classes. Some popular classes include; art, art history, geography, world languages, history.

RAPSU: (Retired Associates of Portland State University) Offers 14 educational programs throughout the year. The only requirement is to be 50 years old and have no affiliation with PSU. There is a small annual fee. The talks range from social history, art and music to national level history.

Auditing [a class]: Listening. Based on the instructors' requirements for the class, some require more than listening, homework, etc.

Institute on Aging: under the umbrella of the College of Urban and Public Affairs within Portland State University. The oldest research institute on aging in the west coast. Focuses on research, education and community partnerships.

High School Students: Students between the ages of 14-18 going through the next phase in their education. At the end of this schooling, ideally the next step is college.

Alternative School/Alternative High School: An educational setting designed to accommodate educational, behavioral, and/or medical needs of students that cannot be adequately addressed in a traditional high school environment

Friendtorship: a class at Portland State University where students from Centennial Park High School, once a week are mentored by PSU students. This includes building working relationships and having time to be creative. The high school students are paired with college students. Each college student takes a week to teach a small lesson to the rest of the group to encourage art, creativity, and working with their mentors.

Mentor: an experienced and trusted adviser. In this case, the mentors are experienced in being a college student.

Mentee: a person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor.

Who

Within this project there were 20 high school student mentees with 20 college student mentors and 4 senior auditors.

Goals

I set out to understand how the advice of an older generation would be taken by a generations still deciding on an important high-pressured decision being the decision to attend college. Additionally, these were two groups that often overlooked in regards to the next steps in their futures or decisions they have already made. With high schoolers, as the young generation who “don’t know what they’re talking about” that they’re not “mature enough to make such decisions” are often disregarded. When it comes to making decisions about their future, they are expected to listen to the advice of the adults. Specifically, these high schoolers are ones who have signed up for a class [Friendtorship] that is at a college campus and have mentors who are currently in college. The exposure to college is emphasized to be an attainable possibility. Elder people are ignored due to the thought that since they are the older generation, “out of touch with the current times”. Since they are seen as people who have “lived their lives” the current society doesn’t see a need for them. These specific seniors are those who have graduated college and have made the decision to enroll in SALC and take classes not for credit, but for the goal of learning.

The attention of this work being focused on these two sets of students who are from two phases of the college experience. Even with the generational gaps between the two, there might be some common concerns, fears, expectations, or goals that the two might find. By connecting these two groups and starting a conversation, an exchange is created.

METHODS

Possible Complications

Some of the complications that might arise would be those that involve working with other people. Some meetings may be cancelled, want to change times at the last minute, or not respond at all. When it comes to recording the interviews, there could be technical difficulties that may happen with the equipment (camera, audio recorder, tripod, computer).

When working with the Friendtorship Class in creating a workshop, there are issues that might occur. I will be working with two students within that class for the presentation and workshop part of their grade. Issues with this could be communication between the three of us. This includes views of how the workshop should be conducted, collecting the materials, cost of the materials, and counting on the participation of the class.

ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Overview

All of these activities and interviews are to gain an understanding of where each participant stood in terms of their college stories. Every Senior Auditor had a different reason, story and background in regards to college and reasons why they went to college.

Artistic Process

This creative research was focused on collecting stories from these two generations. The purpose of the interviews was to prepare the Senior Auditors to think back to the time they were in high school and had to make the decision about whether or not to go to college. There were so many thought-filled responses and personal stories from these interviews, I wanted a way for these stories to be contained and given. This led me to the idea of decorating jars and writing out responses to various questions, similar to the interviews, and have the participants read other participant's response.

In order to fit within the requirements of the Friendtorship class, the two students I was working with, Ashley and Kelsie had other things they added to what I had proposed. We decided to add two more activities to the workshop to emphasize the theme of choice. We added photography and painting.

I sought for this project to create a conversation between two groups that normally wouldn't meet every day. These two groups have had two phases of the college experience and thoughts about the idea of college. Within this time of the workshop between the two groups, my goal was to capture these interviews in their sincerity. At the same time, I wanted to make sure the participants to have a piece of the project and conversation for them to take away.

Interview Process

Each in-person interview is from 30 minutes to 1 hour long. I started by sending the Senior Auditors who were interested in the project an email with a few standard questions:

Why did you decide to become an auditor?

What has your experience been like being an auditor?

What are your opinions on traditional students?

The next step was to schedule individual one-on-one interviews. I collected the contents of the interviews via video, audio-recording and note taking. These questions included:

What have your experiences been taking classes with traditional students?

What is your experience with other auditors?

Where did you go to high school?

Where did you go to college(s) and what degree did you earn?

What kind of student were you in high school? In college? Now as an auditor?

Why come back to college?

Was there a teacher/faculty member that influenced your decisions what college to go to?

What are some changes or challenges that you think current high school students face when it comes to decisions relating to college?

What is a piece of advice you would give to a current high school student deciding whether or not to go to college?

I decided on these specific questions because I wanted the participants to think about the decision of college. This before they enrolled, during and after they graduated. For the senior auditors, a lot of these questions are referencing the past and asking them to analyze their decisions that led them to their college-of-choice and the choice to return to college as an auditor. For the high school students, the questions focus on the past as to what led them to their current place in life, but also what they think the future will hold.

Documentation

Documentation of the interviews and the workshop developed differently for transcript and artistic purposes. With the Senior Auditors, I video-recorded, audio-recorded, and doodle-noted during the entirety of the 30 minute to 1 hour interviews. During and after the workshop I photographed, and video-recorded the Senior Auditors and the High Schoolers interactions, thoughts and process during the workshop. After the workshop, I took photos of the made jars. With the 2 Senior Auditors that were able to stay after the workshop, I asked them about their thoughts with the entire process, the workshop itself and to look through the responses of the various questions answered.

Why I decided to pick these mediums to record the interviews because I wanted to capture the entirety of the conversations with the video. I find artistic beauty in the candid human reaction, body language etc. The doodle note-taking was a way I could capture the most striking quotes that I personally heard in that moment. I also would be sketching the interviewees' faces as they were talking.

OUTCOME

Interviews

During the interviews, like any conversation, it was common for the subject to get off track. The conversations naturally sparked other questions. With the Senior Auditors, some of the extra questions included; did your kids go to college? Any grandchildren in high school currently or in college? What

was something you wanted to be when you were younger? How involved in college were you? Did you consider yourself social in high school? In college?

The first interview was fun to do. I did not have a list of the questions in front of me, but had a general idea of what I wanted to ask. This allowed plenty of extra non-topical questions to happen which gave me a better and rounded understanding on my interviewee.

The second interview was a little more focused in that I had all of my questions written down, however, there were some technical difficulties and the audio was not recording. This particular interview was a little more downhearted. The story this interviewee had was unique compared to the other interviews in that they talked about a perspective of being pressured into going to college based on what their parents wanted.

The third interview was straight to the point and all questions were answered in short straight-to-the-point, only about 30 minutes. This specific interview didn't seem interested in going outside the realms of the questions and provided straight forward answers.

The fifth interview was over the phone. This interview was interesting because it was the first one that I didn't see my interviewee's face or visual reactions to any of the questions. Although this interview, there seemed to be a sense of comfort for the interviewee. They seemed more open to answering the questions and going into some personal details about their early high school and college life. Overall, each other interviews had unique background and different stories to share.

Workshop

The workshop opened with an ice-breaker that two Friendship students led talking about how different people in modern culture have succeeded without college, the various routes one took to get the job/work they have currently, and sharing personal stories about their choices about coming to college. The three Senior Auditors then introduced themselves with their names, college they graduated from and how long they have been a senior auditor at PSU and a short version of their stories in regards to how they made their decisions to come to Portland. The presentation was continued by Ashlie and Kelsie furthering on the idea of decision-making and college as a choice. We then separated the group into the workshop activities: decorating jars, painting, and photography. There was a Senior Auditor in each station. The participants chose their own activities and stuck with them for the duration of the workshop day. The last twenty minutes of the workshop was spent answering a questionnaire. The questions included:

What were/are your expectations of college?

What are the best memories from high school/college?

If you could give 1 sentence advice about college what would it be?

If you could give 1 sentence advice about the future what would it be?

If you could give 1 sentence about aging/getting older what would it be?

If you had to describe youth in 1 sentence what would it be?

What has been the most important decision you've made so far?

Where do you see yourself after high school graduation? Think about what you want your future to look like in 5 years, and 10 years.

What are alternatives to getting a college degree? Would an alternative to college help you achieve your goals?

Do you think college is a necessary step in your life? Why or why not?

These questionnaires were then cut into slips and placed inside the jars that were decorated. Photos were taken of the participants working at each workshop and of the products were made. After the workshop, I spoke with two of the Senior Auditors. I asked them general questions about their thoughts before coming into the workshop and what their thoughts were after the workshop. The senior auditors mentioned how much they enjoyed being around younger people and seeing how they displayed interest in the activities they picked. They read some slips of answers given to the questions above and gave their thoughts on it and who they think wrote it; current college student, high school student or Senior Auditor. Overall, this project was an enjoyable way to immerse different groups that are a part of PSU. The Senior Auditors that, although, is in the same learning environment, have different experiences and with that, a different point of view. Along with this, by working with the Friendtorship high schoolers that are still deciding on a mutual decision that Senior Auditors have made, there is an exchange of experiences and thoughts. By mixing these groups together in one room, there was an initial openness and space for both groups to talk and create.

TIMELINE

March 22nd - Email to be sent to people wanting to participate with documentation from previous project (throughout this time if people respond the first set of questions will be sent)

April 3rd–April 11th: Recording of the individual interviews

April 25th: Senior Auditor Group Meeting

June 6th: Friendtorship Class Workshop

July 15th: Sign-Up for Thesis Symposium

August 6th: Upload Draft

August 15th: Upload Slides

August 18th: Thesis Symposium Presentation

August 19th: Upload Final

BUDGET

Total: \$101

Decorations for Jars: \$33

Jars (43): \$16

Paint: \$32

Film for an already purchased Polaroid Camera: \$20

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Michelle Illuminato: Advisor

Alan DeLaTorre: Primary Contact at Institute on Aging

Lis Charman: Friendtorship Contact

Conrad Schumacher: Centennial High School Contact

Cheryl R.: Senior Auditor

Nancy C.: Senior Auditor

Fran A.: Senior Auditor

Linda M.: Senior Auditor

Georgia F.: Senior Auditor

Ashley & Kelsie: Workshop Co-Creators

Images

