

PROJECT 2: FOCUS GROUP

PROBLEM SPACE: Interaction after dark

SPECIFIC: International students' interaction at night

MEMBERS: Varun Khanduja, Matt Edwards, Xiyang Wang, Robert Begley

1. Team distribution and role assignments

During Sept.7 to Sept.20, we four HCI design students at Indiana University Bloomington-Varun Khanduja, Matt Edwards, Xiyang Wang and Robert Begley, have conducted a focus group mainly probing into the interactions of international students after dark. During the whole process of the project, we worked collaboratively. Based on a foundation of correct and smooth communication, each team member could not only understand the tasks well, but also carry on in the very direction without confliction with other teammates. Here are the team distribution details and role assignments of the focus group.

We had four meetings to discuss the problem space during the whole procedure. Before each team meeting, all the teammates would think of the topics that were going to be discussed and prepare for them. In order to be more effective, we discussed in a collaborative way and tried to figure out solutions that reached most of the team's agreement. Also, we defined the topics for the next meeting.

Every meeting of our team is recorded, so as to keep track of it and make a clear picture of every task.

Here's the agenda for every meeting:

Time	Main topics	Content for next meeting
09/08/2009 1 st meeting	Exploring into the problem space, defining the group of people we want to probe into; Defining the target people, roughly defining their shard characteristics; Deciding the date and time for the 1 st focus group, also of the next meeting	To make sure everything about the focus group; To prepare the questions and the whole procedure of focus group; To define role assignment for each member

09/10/2009	Making sure the time and place for the focus group: Informatics E. 001, Monday at 5:30pm, 45min; Deciding to order food and drink during focus group interview; Defining the chosen topic: International students' interaction after dark; Defining the questions we would use in focus group and the whole procedure; Deciding the role assignments and tools, also the time and place for next meeting	After focus group interview, to probe into this problem space; To define the writing task for each person
09/17/2009	Defining the writing report tasks: 1,2,3-Xiyang ; 4,5-Robert ; 6-Varun ; 7-Matt ; 9-each member ; 8-discussion between team members; Defining the next meeting: Sept.18 th 2009 at 11:00am in Info W room 001	To discuss about the whole report; To discuss about the results about the focus group; To come up the final version of the report
09/18/2009	Discussing about the whole report, making adjustments to possible parts; Discussing about the results of the focus group, producing the final version of the report	

Table 1. 1: Agenda of each meeting

Besides group meeting, we also did our discussion online. Our team had set up a Google group for the team's communication, documents sharing and discussion. Sometimes, problems could be figured out online without a face-to face meeting.

The following is another table to summarize the distribution about each member:

Member	Distribution
Varun Khanduja	Setting up Google group ; discussing; preparing and observing focus group; writing part 6 of the report
Matt Edwards	Discussing; preparing focus group, especially in introduction and questions; writing part 7 of the report
Xiyang Wang	Recording each meeting; discussing; preparing focus group; writing part 1-3 of the report
Robert Begley	Discussing; preparing focus group, especially in introduction and questions; writing part 4-5 of the report

Table 1. 2: Team distribution

Here's another table about the role assignment of each member:

Member	Role assignment of focus group
Matt Edwards	Moderator
Robert Begley	Assistant moderator
Xiyang Wang	Observer
Varun Khanduja	Observer

Table 1. 3: Role assignments

2. Focus Group

2.1 Objectives

From the focus group, we hope to probe into the night activities of international students, especially the technologies aspects of them. As new comers to Bloomington, Indiana, the interactions of the international students must have some unique aspects that are different from the local students. We hope to probe into the problem space-interaction after dark- from this angle, and find out the difference. Also, technology usage may be greatly changed among international students from daytime to nighttime. The other goal of our team is to find out what those changes are and the reasons behind them. So, we hope to learn such issues from our focus group.

2.2 Participants

In total, we've invited four international students to join our focus group, and each of them is from different departments of Indiana University Bloomington. Table 2.1 tells about the demographics of the participants and the shared characteristics among them.

Participant	Nationality	Academic	Major	Shared characteristics
1	Chinese	1 st year Undergrad	Financial accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They come from other countries outside of US;• Compared to Bloomington, they all come from crowed places• Their native language is not English;• Bloomington is new to them, especially the study atmosphere and living area are different;• They're all Asian students;• They use technologies at night and interact after dark;• They all feel safe about do activities at night in Bloomington.
2	Chinese	2 nd year Grad	Law	
3	Taiwanese	2 nd year Grad	Bio-informatics	
4	Indian	1 st year Grad	Computer science	

Table 2. 1: Information and shared characteristics about the participants

Selection

There are several selection criteria we use for choosing the focus group:

- The participants must be international students of IUB

- The participants use technologies at night
- The participants interact with other people or system at night
- The participants don't know each other
- The participants' major are various or different

The main goal for our project is to try to focus on the international students' interaction at night. So the selection of international students is critical to the overall project, also it fits the theme of this project. Moreover, we try to make sure all our participants have a fair opportunity to express themselves. As English is not the first language of most of the international students, we avoid including local students in the focus group and try to create a comfortable atmosphere to all the participants.

Considering the topic we want to probe into-interaction and technologies, the participants must be used to using technologies and do some interaction at night. Thus, we can get the experience, feelings and comments from these students. And we believe such students could give us the most insight feedback to us. We don't want our participants to know each other, as a group knowing each other may deliver a same opinion towards something, but actually they may individually think in different ways. And we want to hear different voices towards a same question, thus it helps us to probe into the problem space much deeper. The participants are not necessarily the same, as they can come from different departments and have different background. We try to choose participants from different majors, because we want to know different aspects of how the participants think and how they react. People come from more or less the same major may have similar experience or opinion, so we choose students from various majors and try to know different versions of the stories behind them.

2.3 Topics

During our focus group we discussed four major topics including social topics, safety, academic, and recreational activities that involve technology being used in the nighttime. The discussion of social topics

included what technologies they used in order to establish and sustain social interaction after dark. Safety was an important issue in terms of how they felt about security while on campus and in town. Academic and recreational topics were just as important because it showed how the participants used the same technologies, but in two very different settings.

2.4 Questions

We decided to construct our questions in the form of three different categories, including a set of introduction questions, a set of main questions (the body), and a set of conclusion questions to help finish off the focus group. The questions we chose were:

- Please introduce yourself
- What kind of activities do you do at home?
- What kind of technology do you use?
- How does your technological use differ from here and where you are from?
- How does your social life differ from here and where you are from?
- How do you feel when you are outside on campus and in the town at night?
- What is your comfort level at night?
- Do you know of anything being done to help protect you while you are on campus?
- Is there anything you would like to see done to improve the security on campus?
- Is there any technology that you use to feel safe at night?
- How does your attitude about technology transition from day to night?
- How does your usage of technology transition from day to night?

Questions one through three make up the introduction set. We chose these questions because we wanted to have everyone introduce themselves in order to create a more comfortable environment. We asked them to say their name and where they were originally from. We did not want to ask them too many personal

questions because even though we wanted everyone to be able to get to know each other and to establish a comfortable environment, we felt that too much disclosure of personal information would make the participants feel more uncomfortable. Fortunately, throughout the flow of the focus group, age and other personal information came out naturally, which was really great and helpful throughout the process.

Questions two and three were asked in order to get an initial recording of what activities and technology they use before we asked them about their nighttime activities. We felt that if we asked them what they used specifically at night that they might not say something that would actually fall into nighttime use. The main questions consisted of questions four through ten. All of these questions related to technological use in the topics discussed in the focus group. We felt that by asking the introduction questions they would feel comfortable enough to divulge their perspectives when they were asked the main (body) questions. This worked really well because there was a comfortable environment that was created which was sustained throughout the rest of the duration of the focus group. Each participant was more than willing to share their opinions and thoughts on each of the questions.

Finally, there were the last two questions, eleven and twelve. These questions provided a more conclusive atmosphere to the focus group and we were able to get the most out of our participants, since by the end they were probably the most comfortable. We felt that these questions were good for wrapping up and adding a smooth ending to the focus group.

2.5 Procedures

Conduct of the focus group

The following are features for the conduct of our focus group:

- The organizing team members had a 30 minute pre-focus group meeting starting at 5:00 p.m. The moderators used the time to rehearse the script for the conduct of the focus group.

- The note taker and the observer used the time to make sure the room was comfortable for the participants. The table was surrounded with 4 chairs for the participants. The tables were assigned name cards. The observer and note-taker were seated at some distance from the participant's in order to avoid distraction to the participants.
- Directions to the room were laid out in the info- west lobby as some of the focus group participants were new to the informatics building; participants were also escorted to the room in case they need to be guided to the room.
- The Pizza was laid out in the center of the table along with drinks in order to make the participants more comfortable about the environment.
- The introduction to the focus group involved introduction about the topic as well as general discussion about the focus group. The participants were given a general set of guidelines as well as the consent forms which explained the focus group as well as certain points of importance to participants.
- Video recordings were started.
- The focus group started with the moderators talking about the topic of discussion and thereby kick starting the 45 minutes discussion.
- The 2 moderators controlled the discussion during the focus group and the observer and the note taker didn't intervene during the focus group.
- The focus group concluded with the participant being thanked about their participation by the organizing team.

Conclusion

The following were some of the points which were kept in mind while concluding the focus group:

- The team wanted to express its heartfelt gratitude towards the participants for their time to be a part of this study.
- Our group offered rides to the participants of the study as it was late in evening and to help the participants reach to some other place in case of prior engagements.
- The participants were also offered to have more Pizza if they felt hungry.
- Some of the participants were curious about the purpose of this focus group and the conducting group tried explaining them about the possible results of this focus group and how this can help us narrow down a specific topic for future research.

Physical layout

The physical layout consisted of the following features:

- A room in the informatics west-001.
- The room was a mini-conference room.
- A rounded table.
- Participants were facing each other.
- The moderators of the focus group were having their backs towards the white board and thus facing the participants.
- The observer and note-taker were at the other end of the table at some distance to the moderators as well as the participants.
- The pizza was placed at the center of the table at reachable distance to the participants.
- The recording equipments were placed on the side of the cabinets in the room and were not immediately facing the participants.
- The name tags helped the participants to sit at allotted seats.

- 9 chairs with adjustable height and pull backs were provided. The chairs of the participants were closely placed with 2 facing each other.

Comment

The positioning of the team conducting the focus group was very important for the group to increase the level of interaction during the focus group. The moderators were facing the participants to facilitate the interaction between them and gaining more possible insights from the focus group. The observer and the note taker were placed at some distance from the participants in order to make them more comfortable as well as avoid distractions.

The pizza was placed in the center in order for the focus group participants to have food within their hands reach and thereby increasing the interaction by giving more relaxed environment.

The camera was placed at the cabinet in order for the participants not to be too much bothered by our video recording.

The rounded table was chosen in order to encourage more face to face interaction with the participants as well as the moderators.

The chairs had a pull back as well adjustable height; this was observed during the focus group to be of comfort to the participants as the participants were seen leaning on their chairs and thus showing their relaxed nature, thus encouraging more comfortable interaction during the focus group.

We didn't decide to take a bigger conference room for the conduct of the focus group in the form of room 232 Informatics west as the room was very well equipped with technology savvy equipments which could have been distraction for the participants and also would have made them feel about the research being very top-notch and thereby could have skewed the data to certain level as the participants would have had a sense of competition during the conduct of the focus group.

The moderators also made sure that they were very good listeners to the comments and discussion during the focus group and thus was very helpful in smooth conduct of the focus group.

2.6 Group dynamics

The group was friendly and engaged, and the members' body language suggested relaxation. They were leaned back in their chairs, spread out, hands on arm rests. They maintained great eye contact, and appeared to be interested in the subject to the point that they more or less ignored the pizza we provided after the discussion had started. They were extremely courteous concerning letting everyone have a chance to speak.

There were times when Participant 2 would need to be asked for his view on the topic, but when prompted, he was willing to share his perspective, on at least one subject going on for quite some time. Participant 4 may have been the most talkative of the group, which may have been related to his strong grasp of the language, but he also came across as an extremely social person. But he did not attempt to dominate the conversation, although he was often the first person to offer his view. Participants 1 and 3 were thoughtful with their insights and only rarely needed to be asked for their input.

The tone of the discussion, we decided, was orderly. They were quite calm and friendly, responsive, and willing to laugh. They respected each other and were patient while waiting for their turn. There were unique views and common views, but the unique views were given air and not marginalized. Participant 1, for instance, felt safer at night than during the day, when fewer people were crowding the streets and there was less traffic. This was not the common view, but it was discussed in equal to the other viewpoints because we and the other discussion participants were interested in why that was. Participant 2, at one point, discussed that he is still not entirely comfortable on campus at night due to his lack of familiarity, but the participants that had been here longer said they were very comfortable here. In this particular circumstance, Participant 2 was given a lot of room to discuss his issues, and the other participants seemed to want to assure him that his

discomfort would pass.

2.7 Results

What we have found out about the focus group include the following points:

- **Safety isn't the major concern as we thought about.**

At first, we thought safety was a big issue for the international students. But after the focus group, we found that it might not be that crucial as we thought. Some participant said that he felt quite safe at night because there was less traffic and people. Other also pointed out that he felt safe as it was much quieter at night.

- **Most of them rely on technologies, especially the social community network for communication.**

All the participants said a lot about the usage of Facebook, Youtube, BBS and other social communities. They felt comfortable communicating with others online and also felt it was easier to get to know people. One pointed out that he liked to watch TV online and saw the video on Youtube, and this was a way for him to relax and interact with the internet communities. One of the technologies that mentioned a lot was the cell-phone. They all used cell-phones to contact people and even called back to their home countries. Skype, and other forms of VOIP technology, were also discussed for calling home as an inexpensive alternative.

- **They may want to go to parties, but finding information about social activities is difficult for them.**

Finding information was sometimes hard for the focus group. One person said he heard a lot that IUB was a party school, but he could not find out where the parties were. Other said he always hangs out with Asian students. What we found out was that these people wanted to join the local parties, but they felt blocked about the information and they felt it was a bit difficult to join the

local students.

Such useful information gives us several directions about the potential design:

- Awareness amongst the international students about the technology available around the campus
- Awareness about the events around the city was a desire for the international students
- Encouraging more cross cultural meetings was felt as a desire

3. Team reflections

Overall, we believe we did a great job with the focus group project. Xiying thinks the group did well in the focus group project and communicated smoothly among team members. She thinks we could work better on time management for the next project, as she thinks the time of meeting sometimes seemed to last too long. However, she likes to work in this amazing group and she values the chance of doing projects with other people who are not Chinese. Matt felt good about the introduction and making everyone comfortable, but he felt that he led some of the questions too much. Robert felt that he could have spoke up more during the focus group and helped with moderating a lot more. However, he also felt good about the group of people chosen and how they respected each other's opinions during the focus group. Varun felt he should have been more attentive about the body language of participants. As a whole, we think that our focus group was very well done. However, as a whole, we think we could work on some more time management in terms of being more prepared for something like this.

4. Appendix: Consent form

Indians University Bloomington
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Interactions after dark, focusing on the usage of technologies

Investigators: Varun Khanduja, Matt Edwards, Xiyang Wang, Robert Begley
Funding Source: Informatics and Computing, School of IUB

Study Contact telephone number: 812-369-9568
Study Contact email: wangxy@indiana.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
Study the interactions with technologies in the evening, specifying in international student.

How many people will take part in this study?
4 International students have agreed to be a part of the study.

How long will your part in this study last?
Your participation in this focus group will last approximately 45min-60min.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
This is a discussion about the usage of technology by International students after dark. You will not be recorded or videotaped. The focus group discussion will be recorded. Your comments will be captured in a transcript for analysis.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?
Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in this research study.

How will your privacy be protected?
Every effort will be taken to protect your identity as a participant in this study. You will be given a code number. The list which matches names and code numbers will be kept in a locked file.

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focus group tape has been transcribed, the tape will be destroyed, and the list of names and numbers will also be destroyed.

What if you have questions about this study?
You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

Participant's Agreement:
I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant _____
Printed Name of Research Participant _____

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent _____

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent _____ Date _____

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