

Emily Readey
I2: User Research
October 9, 2017

Project Description

We are conducting user research with immigrants that have been in the United States for more than a month to hear their stories and look for problems or inconveniences that they commonly face. Afterwards, we hope to address one of their problems through technology.

Insights

1. Some immigrants come here from a place of privilege so it is important to avoid generalizing and one-size-fits-all solutions.
2. For international students, part-time work is especially difficult in a variety of ways and it is often hard to find resources to help.
3. Finding a community in the United States is often very difficult, no matter what type of community someone is looking for or where they come from.
4. Immigrants and non-citizens often have to navigate a mess of legal information and paperwork, whether it be for coming here, working, going to school, or planning one's future.
5. Remaining connected to one's home can sometimes be a struggle because of time zones and travel expenses.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background.
2. When did you first come to USA, and if you don't mind sharing, why?
3. How has your experience here been so far?
4. Walk me through an average day in your life.
5. What are some inconveniences or problems you face with basic necessities?
6. Do you feel like you have a community here?
7. If yes, how would you describe your community?
8. If no, why do you feel like you don't have one?
9. Is there any part of coming to the USA that was particularly challenging?
10. What is your native language? Did you speak English before coming to America?
Tell me about any language barriers you faced.
11. What are some of the challenges you or others with a similar background have faced assimilating into American culture?
12. Do you own a smartphone?
13. What are your favourite apps?
14. Are you on social media?
15. What other kind of screen-based technology do you use?

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16. If you had to give some advice to new immigrants coming into America today, what would you tell them?

User Responses

I interviewed a 20-year-old male international student studying Economics. He grew up in Vietnam and Thailand and has been in the United States for a year.

Q: Tell me about your background.

A: I was born in Vietnam and then I moved to Bangkok in Thailand when I was eleven, I went to middle school there, my mom is Vietnamese and my dad is Thai. I have a sister currently in Bangkok.

Q: What was growing up in Bangkok like?

A: I went to an international school, so I was among a very diverse crowd which was a very unique experience. I had a lot of friends from the United States as well as the UK, so I guess that the culture shock wasn't that different. Life in Bangkok definitely has its differences from growing up in the United States.

Q: When did you first come to the United States and if you don't mind sharing, why?

A: I came to the United States to attend college which has always been my plan, I always wanted to because the education is better here and there's a lot more opportunities with education.

Q: How has your experience here been so far?

A: It's been pretty amazing and I have no complaints, I joined a fraternity here so I could find a lot of people with a similar background and who I share a lot in common with, obviously not everything because I'm an international student, but overall, I've been very happy.

Q: Describe an average day in your life.

A: I would wake up, go to class, have lunch at my fraternity, go to work at my part time job at the University of Washington med center, hang out with my friends, and go to sleep.

Q: What are some inconveniences or problems you have faced with basic necessities?

A: One inconvenience that I have come to notice is my ability to find work. Non-citizens, or international students such as myself, are only able to work on-campus, but there's a lot off-campus job opportunities that perhaps have better benefits or pay better, but I am kind of constricted to work on campus because I don't have a work visa.

Q: Can you not work anywhere outside of campus?

A: Yes. It has to be on campus or sponsored by UW.

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Q: When you first came here, did you have any other small inconveniences you noticed?

A: Yeah, I've noticed that being an international student sucks when it comes to small things like traveling, leaving the country I've always had to have certain documents with me. Also, coming here in the first place required a lot of paperwork and some interviews.

Q: Do you feel like you have a community here?

A: Yes, I've mentioned that I'm in a fraternity, which gives me a smaller community and brotherhood at the University of Washington. I'm fortunate to have found this in greek life.

Q: Do you feel like there was a barrier to you joining greek life due to you being an international student?

A: Yes. While I was rushing, I met almost no international students and I felt like an outsider in a typically American tradition. However, as I've spent more time here and gotten to know people better, it's not that much of a transition. Initially, I was deterred by it because I didn't know anyone in the greek system.

Q: Is there any part of coming to the USA that you found particularly challenging?

A: The paperwork was strenuous, there was a lot of documents and online questionnaires that I had to fill out. I feel like the culture change wasn't that different and coming to the United States was similar to how I thought it would be. One thing is I never understood sports.

Q: Do you feel like your experience is similar to other students coming from Bangkok?

A: No, I had a lot of experience with Western culture ahead of time, but many other people I knew experienced a lot of culture change.

Q: What is your native language? Did you speak English before coming to America? Tell me about any language barriers you faced.

A: My native tongue is actually Vietnamese, but I started learning English when I was five years old, so up until I came to America, English was my strongest language, followed by Thai and then Vietnamese. I think that case was very unique to me, because I know a lot of people who come here from abroad have a lot of struggles with the language coming here.

Q: Was it difficult to adjust to colloquialisms or slang here or the language being different than how you were taught?

A: That's interesting, I would say yes and no, I would say that some of the slang we definitely didn't have back home, but for grammar and sentence structure and stuff like that, I would say it was very similar. It's an interesting dynamic to come here and see how it's different.

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Q: What are some challenges you or other people with a similar background faced assimilating into American culture?

A: First, one situation I already mentioned is working. We have limitations we can do towards part time work. A lot of people wouldn't seek part time work because they want to dedicate their time to studies, but one challenge I faced was not finding enough part time work to pay off my expenses. Another challenge I particularly faced is deciding my future, whether I go back home or stay here. There's a certain procedure that a lot of people who want to stay here that have to go through that not a lot of people realize because when you're born here, you're given citizenship. A certain challenge is just planning out your future. Some people already know if they want to go back home or stay here, but many people have to think through this.

Q: Do you feel like you'll have to struggle through the process to become a citizen here?

A: It's definitely not a simple process. I think one of the challenges unique to our administration is the Trump administration and the issues he brings with immigration and citizenship. I definitely don't think it's going to be easy and there will be a lot of barriers and hoops I have to jump through to even be given citizenship. I think a lot of people in our generation feel the same way.

Q: Do you own a smartphone?

A: Yes I do.

Q: What are your favorite apps?

A: Instagram, twitter, facebook, Spotify, and snapchat.

Q: Are you on social media?

A: Yes I am.

Q: What other screen-based technology do you use?

A: I have a laptop and tv.

Q: If you had to give some advice to new immigrants coming into America today, what would you tell them?

A: From my own perspective, I would tell new immigrants to try and step out of their comfort zone, a lot of people I feel like didn't do that and I feel like they're kind of wasting the college experience. A lot of international students that come here feel like right when they get here, they already don't belong. They try to stay within their own group or within their own country and don't seem to be trying to meet new people from different backgrounds. Coming here, I came in with the mindset of already wanting to step out of my comfort zone and it was definitely one of the best decisions I could have made in college. I would say to step out of your comfort zone, branch out and try new things. You came to the United States for a reason, not just because you wanted a

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good education, but also to experience the culture here. Creating a network here is definitely a powerful tool.

Q: One final question I have for you- you talk about working here, but is there anything job-related you want to say about your experience working here?

A: Yeah so when I first got my job here, it was a referral, so thankfully that helped me get the job, but I acknowledge the fact that international students might find it a little more difficult to work here because they have to find a new job that perhaps might be their first. They won't have any referrals or points of contact because perhaps they don't know anyone here. However, I did notice a lot more paperwork I had to do just because I'm an international student. I'd say from the UW point of view, perhaps make it a little easier for international students to find jobs. There's not a lot of marketing that goes towards jobs for international students. However, making that more clear and obvious might help us.

References

No references were used at this stage of the project.