

Incorporating Student Voices in Academic Futures

Academic Futures White Paper

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Framework and Methods

Who do we teach for? Who do we want to learn? If we want our students to gain the most out of their experience at CU, we need to ensure that their voices are heard. Incorporating student voices throughout the Academic Futures initiative benefits both the university and our students. During an early town hall meeting, a statement that framed the conversation was, “part of the goal of Academic Futures is to learn and discover how we will teach in the future, what practices to engage in, and what students need.” Accounting for their voices in this initiative shows students that CU cares about them and their experience on campus.

As facilitators continue to plan future sessions, it is vital to include the student perspective. Incorporating student voices into this initiative has the potential to find and address aspects of problems that would otherwise have been overlooked or unknown. One way to approach this idea is through the lens of [design thinking](#) principles which can help “to translate observations into insights and insights into products and services that will improve lives.”¹ This means that we design with project stakeholders in mind, showing empathy for those we are designing for. If we apply these same principles to the Academic Futures initiative and include student voices, we will ensure a much broader field of opportunity for improving their lives.

While reaching students for their input can be challenging, some effective methods include:

- Circulation of online surveys (with incentives such as gift card drawings)
- Flash surveys where student employees travel around campus with an iPad (or other device) for fast, easy data collection from students
- Holding informal focus groups (incentivized through food or a gift card reward)

This ultimately low-stakes work has the potential for high-impact results. Additionally, advertising across campus through various forums and channels (flyers, email, etc.), and highlighting the incentives for participating in data collection methods help generate a diverse, representative turnout of student input.

¹ Brown, Tim. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Motivation*. HarperCollins, 2009, New York, p. 49.

Students at the “future CU” will benefit from this student-centered aspect of the current visioning process. Bringing in the voice of the CU student works to continually inform and evolve our teaching and learning practices as an innovative, collaborative, and holistic university. Designing this large-scale initiative with student feedback as a key focus sets the standard for effectively including all voices in building a university of the future.

References

Brown, Tim. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Motivation*. HarperCollins, 2009, New York, pp. 39-63.

"Design Thinking." *IDEO U*, www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking.