

OpenIDEO Challenge: [How might we better prepare all learners for the needs of tomorrow by reimagining higher education?](#)

### Refinement Phase

#### Pick a Problem not a Major

#### Feedback:

There were far too many comments on the OpenIDEO format and through feedback discussions locally to include them all here. Some ideas / questions included:

#### **Questions and answers with OpenIDEO member Sarah Sexton-Frump**

- How could a student change their question if in their learning they find that actually there's a wholly different or more refined problem they want to solve?

*We fully anticipate students discovering and shifting their focus to a new or more refined problem. The idea is that they will still work on and be guided in finding multiple pathways to being part of the resolution team for the problem that is now their new focus. The skills and insights they developed in their first pursuit can be of value in their new one - enter the concept of translatable skills and multiple viewpoints. Advisors will assist in helping them with this application as needed.*

*As an example, a student originally wants to become /utilize their skills as an artist to fill the cultural gap in education. Now they have a new passion toward a medical field in the fight against cancer. One option is for them to see how their skills could be used as a medical illustrator to work with teaching or explanatory materials; or public relations in developing presentation information for medical trainings or patients or funders; or as an art therapist to assist patients in stress relief through art.*

- How do students who may / may not be academically ready for college-level thinking and reading/writing/math need to engage with this style of learning differently, if at all?

*We don't believe they will engage differently but may enter the process at a different step. The goal here is to discover the people of all sorts of titles, skills and abilities that contribute to overall solutions. For example: school cooks and custodians are not usually degreed and may not be ever seen in a classroom with students but are still critical members of the education team. They provide a learning environment that is fostering for students and nutrition for capable learning. Often they also serve as mentors and support systems to students who feel alienated from other groups.*

- Are there current schools that embrace this at some level that you might learn from? I'm thinking about colleges where you can design your own major (like Brown), or even high schools where you can design an independent study project in your senior year?

*Although not sure of independent major programs utilizing this approach currently, OpenIDEO member Silvia Pulino is using this method in advisement sessions and orientation classes this semester at John Cabot University in Rome. Here in Kentucky, we have been using this approach in working with high school leadership teams in multiple high schools with promising results (see prototypes).*

- How do you equip advisors to, well, advise in this mindset?

*Here you have hit on the key question. This is a paradigm shift although it requires a zero budget outlay. It is difficult to move people from the traditional to the innovative. With Google pushing this approach through their educational presentations and programming it is beginning to gain notice however. You can check out Jaime Casap's presentations on YouTube (see links in the primary post description. We are working on a multi-year progressive approach for a resource. The idea is to move away from pushing students to be narrowly focused on a single career or educational pursuit. The era of a person only having one job or career throughout their life is nearly a total thing of the past. In working with a student from early discussions on the concept of working with a team, they can look at who needs to fill the many seats at the solution table and the variety of abilities and skills they bring.*

*We have long counseled students to 'Find the Right Fit' in choosing a Higher Educational Institution however don't often use the student's strength and passions as a launch pad for 'finding the right fit' for their life through their educational pursuits.*

#### **Q & A and Comments from local discussion groups:**

This is a very interesting approach. How did you come up with it?

*It is a framework to shift approaching students to think about a long-term plan and develop a focus not an app or anything physical such as a school.*

*I do want to point out that the idea of working with students on 'What problem do you want to solve?' is not originally mine, I heard it proposed by Jaime Casap of Google, but it really shifted my conversations on how to take that idea as a prompt in working with students. It also aligned with an approach initiative we had been taking with a small group of high school students with impressive results. For example, a group of students worked with legislators to write a new bill introduced and passed in the state legislature based on giving a face and story to an issue facing children in kinship care.*

How will you get students to engage? They are so self-absorbed and short-sighted about long range issues.

*Young people can easily disengage and be oblivious to the concern around them and in a broader world. However, in probing the answer is often comments such as: 'why should we care when we are just kids. No one listens to us, we have no money, can't vote (in the US before age 18) and have no power or experience.'*

*We believe the first step is to give value to students' opinions at all ages – from early to lifelong learners. Sure, their passions will change, ours sure did as we matured. However, if they are given guidance and a structure to work with and the understanding that they can accomplish impact on their community and the world at large they will focus in. Confusion and frustration is normal at first when you change an approach.*

At what point do you start? Not all students are ready for deeper level thinking.

*Their engagement will not all be of the same level or at the same time but we have to start somewhere.*

*Most people have an understanding of the dire need for counseling/advising and working with students to find and develop their own focus and passion to impact change; to believe in their own value to help make a difference - now or in the future. I fully agree the cultural change needs to be from the very beginning. Big challenge! And, while that shift is happening, we need to also reframe or **reimagine** (as the challenge is worded) **how we are preparing students for the future through higher education with a focus through the lens of accessibility**. Working with students on focusing their passion is not a quick fix or a tech outreach but it is a launch pad for reframing our approach with students of any age level to assist them in developing a pathway that having that impact. Higher education is a channel to developing the knowledge, skills and networking needed.*

**Hasan Davis, Youth Advocate and former Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Justice (KY)**

I have been working with Youth Empowerment a long time. I think this would be a good framework for students to work with on gaining personal empowerment but also in working toward the understanding of personal strengths and transferable skills.

**Feedback discussion with meeting of College Access professionals highlighted the following:**

- I like the broadened view approach – less stressful and limiting for students of all ages.
- I think this provides a fresh perspective on how to approach career planning and college access with students.
- This is a way to foster community service and civic engagement at an earlier age.
- The question prompt not only can be a motivation for continued learning pursuits but also encourage lifelong problem solving and community concern and involvement on topics and issues even if it is not how the student is currently 'making a living'.

- In a recent survey of what students' value we discovered that 80% of students value the opportunity to share ideas and experiences over other incentives and learning modes. This approach encourages sharing many problem-solving teams including working professionals in the fields as well as current students of multiple ages.
- Students aren't often given 'permission' to think deeper. This approach provides them with an assumption that they have value to bring to the solution table but equal footing. This is massive in opening a student's willingness to explore new approaches and methods.
- The largest challenge in working with this approach is that it may take more individual time with students than the current 'narrowing' approach.