



CASE STUDY: RATCLIFFE ART + DESIGN INCUBATOR

Igniting a shared conversation around sustainable entrepreneurship for artists and designers.

How a university incubator is building experimental virtual engagement for graduate students

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SOLUTION

Interactive survey



VERTICAL

Higher Education

Funded incubator program



CONSTRAINTS

- Limited resources
- Small budget
- Stakeholder approval
- Spring '21 rollout



AUDIENCE

Graduate students

- Working full time
- Completing degree
- Starting a business



OVERVIEW

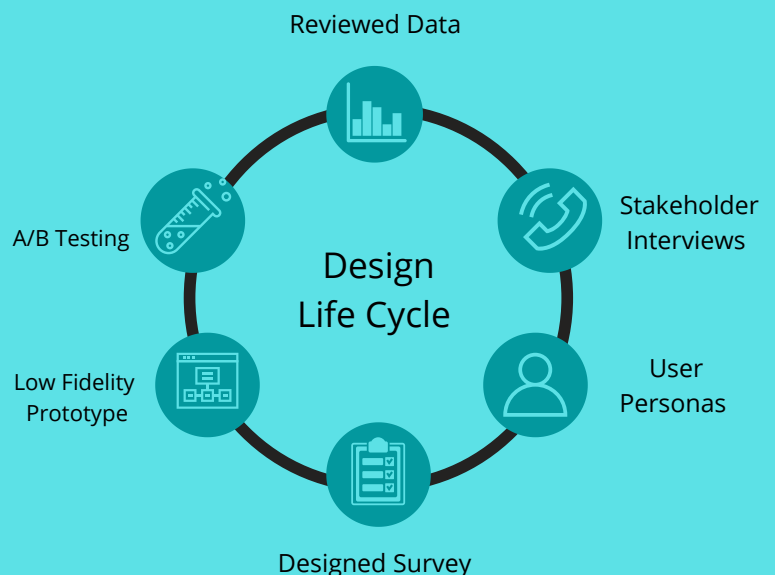
Ratcliffe Art + Design Incubator is an initiative aimed to promote and foster social entrepreneurship and innovation among upcoming FIU artists and designers. The incubator's one-to-two-year residency provides Ratcliffe fellows with essential tools to turn their ideas into profitable businesses.

THE CHALLENGE

Help create a virtual creative community that facilitates learner interaction and creation for Art + Design graduate students.

Like many institutions, the indefinite onset of COVID-19 impacted universities around the country. At Florida International University (FIU), located in North Miami, leadership quickly mobilized shifting all course work from in-person to virtual setups. Students, administrators and faculty embraced Canvas and Zoom as part of their daily workflow whether they were ready or not. But what about more experimental funded programs, like an incubator that was built with intention to be in-person, hands-on and cross-functional? How can we form insights into what was working, what was not, and where to make improvements to meet the future needs of students, faculty and mentors?

THE PROCESS





METHOD

Prototype to
Empathize



OBJECTIVES

Gain insights into

- Student motivations
- Course schedules
- Personal lives



PROTOTYPE

Key features

1. Articulate business idea
2. Rate prior skillsets
3. Input schedule
4. Rate behaviors
5. Share feelings



NEXT STEPS

- Stakeholder feedback
- Student focus group
- Individual interviews
- Prototype iteration
- Send survey



LEARNINGS

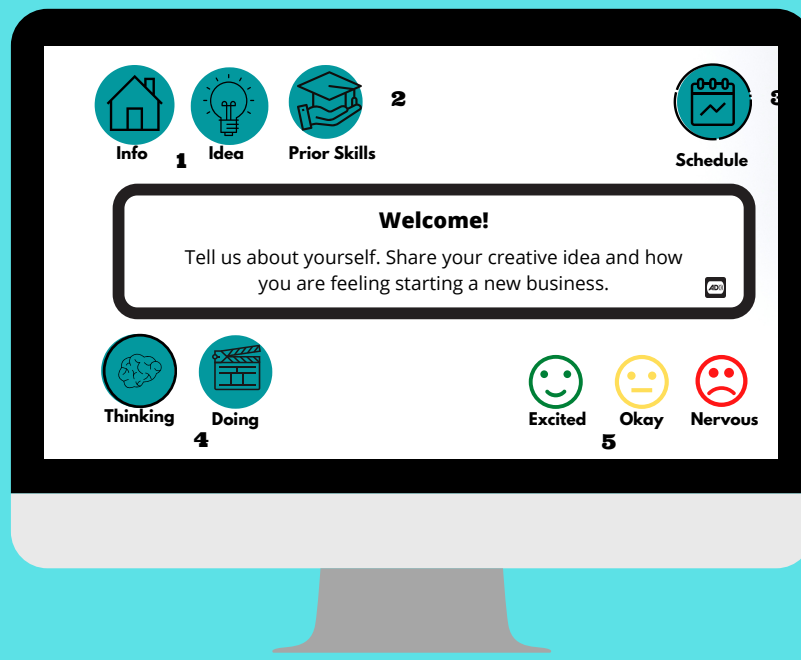
- Keep it simple
- Less is more
- Test, test and test!
- Empathy is a mindset and a tool

BUT FIRST, WE EMPATHIZE

Crunched for time and lacking resources, the consensus from administration was to review the enrollment data and meet the first-phase deadline by building a virtual communication tool. Typically, universities adopt a slow and steady approach redesigning a content strategy. Keeping in mind that I realized this is not a typical program. Students are awarded funds to start their business ideas and are expected to be fully engaged, whether on-campus or not. We needed to know more about the students, to meet them where they are, while ensuring a return on investment for the university.

RESEARCH

I was interested in gaining a deeper understanding into the students' motivations, schedules and lives to help factor in how to best measure individual success and facilitate a generative learning environment. To that end, I decided to prototype an interactive survey.



FAVORITE FEATURE

Students will be able to indicate how they are feeling by choosing the appropriate signifier using a Likert scale throughout the survey. This key feature will help anchor the student entrepreneur as well providing key information to mentors and facilitators in course approach.



TESTING ASSUMPTIONS

As for next steps, I am sharing the prototype model and survey questions for stakeholder feedback as well as sharing it with a volunteer student focus group. This focus group consists of second year incubator students. I am hoping to have more personal conversations around their challenges being a student entrepreneur and test some of my assumptions in the key features including the importance of including questions around their feelings, motivations and how their personal lives could impact a new business.