S3: Persona Expectations & Scenarios

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Project Description

At the University of Washington, there are well over 100 undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants teaching in the CSE 143 programming classes. It is evident that the contribution of these student TAs has a dramatic impact on the quality of instruction. As students who have been in these classes, members of our team feel as though there are areas where improvements could be made. Our team strives to find a solution that helps facilitate the process of gathering student and professor feedback. We hope that regular feedback to TAs will be a means to help them improve their teaching abilities.

Personas Expectations and Scenarios

(For the purpose of the scenarios, the order of the personas have been reversed.)

Sarah Saveron

Bio

Sarah comes from a low-income family in San Francisco where a good education was hard to come by. She has always been talented in math and sciences and received one of the highest undergraduate scholarships. Because of her lived experiences, she believes that education is the key to a more productive lifestyle and takes her academics very seriously. Sarah Saveron, a sophomore interested in information technology, whose goals are to explore informatics and learn basic Java programming.

Expectations
Interviews have been labeled based on the initials of the interviewers.
KZ (Kaitlyn Zhou), CI (Cedric Ith), AK (Allyson Kline), KC (Kristy Chen)

Expectation	Source
Sarah expects that her TA is able to explain complicated concepts in several different ways.	[KZ][CI] It is sometimes very difficult to understand programming concepts and TAs use mixed methods to help get the point across i.e. analogies, illustrations, and examples.

Sarah expects that her TA can be a resource outside of class time.	[KZ] [AK] [CI] [KC] Multiple students expressed the need to contact their TAs outside of lecture and section time. Office hours are critical for students who are confused over lecture material and homework assignments. Time conflicts with office hours are a concern.
Sarah expects her TA to be knowledgable.	[KC] [KZ] + Assumptions TAs at the University of Washington are usually graduate students who have a very in-depth understanding of the material. CSE is an exception as its TAs are usually undergraduates. It can be deduced from interview notes that some students don't feel the same level of credibility from their undergraduate TAs as they do graduate TAs.
Sarah expects that she has a way to give her instructor feedback.	[KZ] Students know that the course evaluation feedbacks forms occur at the end of each quarter. In certain classes there are mid-quarter evaluations besides this, there's no structured way to give instructors feedback.
Sarah expects all course materials to be located in one central location.	[Competitive Analysis] The University of Washington uses Canvas as its primary learning management system. Canvas is able to host calendars, files, grades, and discussions. However, not all departments and instructors use Canvas.

Scenario

Sarah wants to gain exposure to the field of data science and so signs up for CSE 142. She attends her 700-person lecture in Kane 130 and is already feeling unsure of her abilities. The class is meant for beginners, but Sarah who has never had any exposure before to programming, feels as though the class is very fast-paced. After just the first two lectures, she is already feeling overwhelmed.

Sarah shows up early to section hoping to ask her TA, Tom, some questions before class begins. To her disappointment, Tom shows up right as class begins and immediately starts teaching section. Tom reviews the week's lecture slides and contributes very little additional explanations. To Sarah, everyone else in the class seems to understand the material as no one is asking questions. Normally, she is an out-going individual and would speak up but given her current environment, she feels uncomfortable speaking up and would rather just email Tom when she is home. At home, it takes a long time for Sarah to even locate Tom's email address. Instead of having a centralized location for documents, Sarah is forced to navigate several discussion posts and department websites. She considers going to Tom's office hours from 6:00-7:00pm to discuss her concerns for this class but lives off-campus, making these hours inconvenient to her. Sarah, who takes her opportunity to study as a privilege, is frustrated with the way her class is currently being taught.

She logs onto our app as a way to address her issues. She is able to provide feedback to Tom through number ratings as well as free-responses to suggest improvements. She hopes her responses will help Tom become more aware of the needs of his students, allowing him to improve as an educator. Sarah knows that Tom is reading this feedback, as after the first week she sees dramatic changes in the way Tom is leading section. His office hours have been changed and more documents were moved to a single website. Sarah continues to use this app throughout the quarter, giving her a way to raise concerns in an effective, professional and

anonymous way. She hopes that this not only improves her own learning experience but that Tom can benefit from her feedback as well.

Tom McGill

Bio

Tom is originally from Spokane, Washington where he came from a family of educators. Tom has recently developed an interest in the intersection of technology and education. He hopes to eventually teach student in marginalized and unprivileged communities computer programming. He hopes that his TA position will allow him to gain hands-on experience with being a teacher, meanwhile providing his students with an excellent learning opportunity. Tom McGill, a junior majoring in computer science, whose goals are to provide his students with a rich learning experience and to grow as an educator.

Expectations
Interviews have been labeled based on the initials of the interviewers.
KZ (Kaitlyn Zhou), CI (Cedric Ith), AK (Allyson Kline), KC (Kristy Chen)

Expectation	Source
Tom expects to receive TA training	[KZ] [AK] [CI] [KC] For most TAs, their current UW TA position is their first teaching experience. Interviewees have expressed various levels of job preparation, ranging from zero to adequate TA experience.
Tom expects that the professor will be able to provide him feedback on his teaching abilities.	[KZ] Professors do not normally sit in on sections and provide critical feedback. However, the sporadic and periodic feedback that is given, is very appreciated.
Tom expects student feedback to be a very useful tool.	[KZ][CI] Course evaluations are filled in by most students at the end of the quarter but the reviews differ in quality. Most TAs read these feedbacks but don't find them to be very useful.
Tom expects his tools to allow him to easily store files and communicate with his students.	[Competitive Analysis] + [KC][CI] Being able to store files and communicate with students is a priority for many TAs. It has been experienced by interviewees that there are too many platforms being used to grade and communicate. Pulling together resources could be a time-saver for TAs.
Tom expects that his students are willing to voice any classroom concerns.	[KZ] + [Assumption] Some TAs have said that student feedback is very useful. However, it's very likely that most students are hesitant about voicing their complaints to someone who has influence on their grade.

Scenario

After taking the introductory programming classes, Tom applies to be a TA for CSE 142. Although he comes from a family of educators, Tom himself has never received any formal training on how to teach or lead a section. After his initial TA orientation, he receives no

additional instructions on how to teach. Tom thought that being a teaching assistant would give him the training to learn about education but in reality, he is left to figure out a lot of things on his own.

Tom teaches a 8:30 am section and expects that his students will most likely arrive late or just not show up at all. When section does start, he helps explain "for loops" and variables in the way he was taught. The class is not very responsive to the discussion prompts and asks few questions. He assumes this is because it's an early section and everyone is just tired. It isn't until Tom checks his emails that he realizes that his students are not understanding the concept of "for loops" at all. He receives several of the same questions and is confused as to why students did not ask for more explanations or visit him during office hours. Tom wants to be a supportive TA for his students but is confused as to how he can improve.

Tom logs onto our app and sees the several feedback comments left for him. He is dissatisfied with the ratings he receives but understands the justifications. He realizes that the way he taught "for-loops" was just a repeated version of what was explained in lecture. He also receives feedback that his office hours are too late in the day, making it inconvenient for some students to attend. Students are either at work, participating in clubs, or have gone home. Tom originally thought that having late office hours would avoid time conflicts but it seems like that was a poor decision. With this newly found feedback, Tom is able to immediately adjust the way he's teaching. He brainstorms ways to explain concepts using examples, illustrations, and analogies. He's also moved his office hours to an earlier time to accommodate more students. He even asked his professor to sit in on a section and use the app to give feedback on his teaching abilities instead of having to meet in person. Instead of having to wait until the end of the quarter to receive this sort of feedback, he is able to make changes within the first week of school. Already, he knows that this feedback tool will be the key to allowing him to improve as an educator.