DIGITAL BADGE PROTOTYPE FEEDBACK

The notes below are edited and summarized from conversations between Cooper Hewitt staff and high school participants in Hive organizations, and representatives from AICAD schools and Hive organizations. Conversations happened in person or via phone between January-February 2015.

Our outreach and conversations with high school youth, AICAD representatives, and Hive organizations resulted in valuable feedback and insights into the perception of our project and the opportunities for potential implementation or growth. Along the way we discovered some recurring themes and agreement between the groups. Some of the most interesting things we learned are summarized below as Big Ideas, additional thoughts and feedback are summarized by group.

BIG IDEAS

- Concern is not just about getting the kids into school but about how can they succeed and stay. This concern was raised both by Hive member organizations as well as by AICAD representatives. Both are looking at ways to provide additional support and resources and suggested badges that follow through the first year of college as one way to support students. Initially we imagined badges as a way to scaffold up through the college admission process, but now we are investigating what ways we can continue to support students in the transition between the last year of high school and the first year of college.

- Students and AICAD representatives were both very invested in the clout of the organization providing the badges, and their involvement in the submission process. Instead of students managing and submitting digital badges on their own, both parties suggested that students submit a request to Cooper Hewitt for their earned badges to be sent to particular schools for review. This exchange of information mimics the protocol for submitting recommendation letters for college applications. This suggestion counters our initial model, in which students would manage their own digital badges as they earn them through the program and submit them directly to colleges during their application process.

- Students and Hive educators (especially those related to college guidance work) noted that applications to art and design schools are especially complicated and highly irregular. AICAD schools are not included in the common application and each one has slightly different application requirements requiring additional time and a significant amount of preparation (such as specific number or type of portfolio requirements and additional drawings or project components assigned by the school. Most students’ high school are already under resourced for most of our students (esp. those coming from Title I schools) and even when they have advisors most are not familiar with this more challenging portfolio application process and cannot provide substantial (or sometime
accurate) guidance for students wishing to apply. This feedback caused us to redouble our efforts in focusing on the process and steps necessary to complete the application process and ensuring that the content and structure of the badges served as something instructional for students and the mentors or advisors working with them.

**HIVE**

Administrators and educators from Groundswell, Urban Arts Partnership, Reelworks, Parsons the New School, MOUSE, YMCA of Greater New York, American Museum of Natural History, and Dream Yards provided feedback and offered suggestions via a roundtable meeting on January 8, 2015 as well as by phone and in person meetings.

- Concerns were raised regarding how we might address parents directly and speak to them about the college application process.
- Programmers at DreamYard, Mouse, Urban Arts Partnership, and Groundswell among others are supportive of our initiative to connect badges to college applications and many are working on digital badging initiatives of their own. They see a real need for this kind of program since current support structures are lacking.
- Hive organizations are offering college and career preparation courses in a variety of formats and flexibility or adaptability in the badges format is key for the system to be useful across the Hive.
- Continuity of programming and validation methods is of concern for organizations, so that the badges retain their value and are meaningful to reviewers in these colleges.

**AICAD**

Representatives from Columbus College of Art and Design, Parsons The New School for Design, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Cornish College of the Arts were contacted and provided feedback via conference call.

- Most art and design schools offer pre-college programs, but the majority of the ones that we learned about do not offer any special consideration or even certification when applying for an undergraduate program. The burden is on the student to explain program content and skills gained.
- The value of a badge as part of the application process is very fluid at this point. Some schools have suggested they can counts as points in a scholarship matrix (determining which students are offered scholarships), other schools are interested in badges as a way of “testing out” of college and career prep requirements in their programs, and a few schools have suggested badges that act as equivalency for specialized art/design courses that students might not have access to in high school.
- Some schools have tentatively agreed to review badges in addition to normal portfolio requirements, but details of the submission and review process are still being determined.
• Several of the schools we spoke with recognize the rigidity of the portfolio process and in some cases, its inability for the portfolio to capture the full breadth of student knowledge. Some schools are looking at broadening materials accepted on applications to help students who do not have access to traditional arts resources.

• At least three schools we spoke with are actively engaged in efforts to serve underserved and rural populations in order to improve their skills and increase their success on applications. Potential connections and supports through badges were discussed.

STUDENTS

Forty-two students from Groundswell, Reelworks, and MOUSE Corps took part in focus group discussions led by DesignPrep Staff. The students learned about our project and goals and offered critical insights and suggestions.

• Students liked the concept of digital badges because it demonstrates skills that you can’t necessarily show on your college application or in a quick 20 minute interview. Badges can show more than just numbers like on your test scores and grades and highlights work done outside of school, and can separate them from students who are not involved in extracurricular programs.

• Like that it is used for art and design because the badges can “show what I want to do when I’m older and what I’m passionate about, my school work cannot do that”

• A couple of students thought that it was good in theory but that high end schools would not be interested.

• Students wanted to know if badges could complete or replace one or more of the steps of the application process.

• Several students felt that badges could have extra weight by highlighting ways you give back to the community and felt badges should be awarded to students for projects that have a social impact which could actually make the institution look good for accepting them. Students want badges for their internships and volunteer work in addition to education programs.

• Personalize the badge to each student’s accomplishments to make them stand out and show their unique traits (if I designed a cool project and sold it to a company that should get a badge of some sort). Students would also like to have badges note regular attendance, strong communication skills and leadership.

• Provide different levels within each badge to show how well you do a certain task or skill

• Besides schools and applications vast majority of students thought that jobs or internships should recognize the badges and want badges to be displayed on LinkedIn. Wanted to know if there was another way to display the badges besides a website. Can they print the badges out to put in a hardcopy portfolio or with a resume?

• One student was “all for the idea” as the college application is the best time to “brag and show off some of your experience and qualifications.”

• Students suggested that the written submission process to earn a badge should be like writing an artist statement since this is something that colleges are looking for already.