

I2: User Research

Project Description

This project will support the needs and goals of roommates who share a living facility with each other. We are defining roommates as people who are living together in rental properties such as rooms, dorms, apartments, and other group quarters. More specifically, the roommates that we will focus on are those with differences in personality, behavior, lifestyle habits, routines, and organization skills. These differences could make living with each other a challenge, and thus may cause further conflict and frustration. The target users are roommates who are looking to reduce those challenges and want more harmonious living situations. Our scope of these users will primarily involve young adult roommates living in the Seattle area.

Potential User Interview

Main Interview Questions

- 1) Where do you currently live in?
- 2) What do you look for in a roommate?
- 3) How did you meet your roommate(s)?
- 4) Describe your relationship with your roommate(s).
- 5) How are you and your roommate's daily routines similar? How are they different?
- 6) What housework responsibilities do you share with your roommate(s)? How are they divided?
- 7) How do you split the cost of living with your roommate(s)?
- 8) How do you address personal beliefs/concerns with your roommate(s)?
- 9) What do you like least about your roommate(s)? The most?
- 10) How close are you and your roommate(s)?
- 11) How do you feel about bring guests over to your shared living space?
- 12) Describe a time when you and your roommate(s) argued over something.

Interview Transcript

The interviewee is 19 year old female undergraduate student at the University of Washington who grew up in Lynnwood, Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Where do you currently live in?

RESPONDENT: I live in the dorms of the University of Washington in Poplar Hall, but every now and then, I go back to Lynnwood. It's close enough so I can do that.

I: What do you look for in a roommate?

R: When I was initially checking, I wanted to make sure that we had kinda the same scheduling. Like, we all agreed on a certain bedtime or waking up time. Or just had some similar interests so that we wouldn't be clashing. To take an extreme example, a very liberal person and then a very conservative person living together. Those topics can arise so I just wanted somebody on my level.

I: And did you find success in finding a roommate that meets your needs?

R: I initially did! I found two roommates from Schools App who were really nice when we moved in together. We all had the same jive. I messaged a lot of people on Schools App and kinda interviewed them. I was pretty selective so I got these two people and we were good, but then one of them got sick and had to leave school for a quarter so a new person then replaced her. Because that was based on random selection where I had no say, I didn't get to have any power over who this person was or if I wanted them or not. So she came in, and I don't really like her.

I: How did you meet your roommates?

R: Initially, I was looking to be in a triple with three people in the dorm. I was on Schools App and found one of my roommates. The other one didn't have a profile on there, so I vibed with her on Instagram because I liked her Instagram feed. I was like, "Okay! I think this is gonna work."

I: Cool! Can you describe your relationship with your roommates?

R: Okay. So, with the roommates that I have now... One of my roommates I'm really close with, I'd consider her as one of my closest friends cause we kind of do everything together. We go out a lot and have inside jokes, so it feels like we're just friends living together more than roommates. With my other roommate, it feels like she doesn't even recognize my presence and she doesn't seem to respect me and understand that what she's doing is not nice. It's really hard with just hello's. I would say "Hi" and she wouldn't say "Hi" back. It's just a weird and uncomfortable relationship and it actually gives me a lot of anxiety.

I: So, how do you think that relationship between you and that roommate rose? What do you think caused this to happen?

R: I have no idea. It's the weirdest thing! When she first came in, we were all on good terms and we did things together like shopping and getting to know each other better. Even the neighbors were like a little family and everybody thought that a switch had flipped for her. She's really different now. I feel like it was only after two weeks of living together that she just became more isolated and reserved and didn't wanna do anything with the rest of us. We still continued to invite her to events and she never went. She just did her own thing, and never talked about herself. I don't know what happened. This tension just keeps on building.

I: Interesting. What are the similarities between you and your roommates' daily routine? That could include work, school, sleep or eating schedules.

R: With all of us, we all share the bathroom in the morning at a certain time. Sometimes, someone would wake up later. Eating habits are all over the place depending on the specific schedule. In terms of work, my friendlier roommate doesn't work. I work pretty minimal hours. The roommate I don't get along with works on the weekends, which is sort of my freedom.

I: What kinds of differences or scheduling conflicts do you have with your roommates?

R: The roommate I don't get along with gets up really early now because of 8:30 classes. She's pretty quiet, but not always. That's a big problem because our dorm doors are really loud. Me and my other roommate like to keep the doors open so we don't have that sound, but she [the first roommate] opens the doors like seven times. As far as sleeping goes, my friendlier roommate sleeps way later. The roommate I don't get along with goes to bed the earliest since she has early classes. We're not all in sync, but we all have our certain timeframes for everything.

I: What are the housework responsibilities you share with your roommates and how do you divide them?

R: We recently redid our cleaning schedule so I don't know how it'll go. In the past, we kinda assigned ourselves certain chores. We didn't stick to the specific chores, so when the weekend came around, which is when we clean, it would be whoever notices something dirty would just clean it. It was just varied. We now have a schedule where it's three chores per person done on the weekend. It's going to rotate now, cause I always got stuck cleaning the toilet and the shower. We're trying to make it more fair and even. We even wrote it up on a whiteboard in our dorm so that it's there. We're going to update the names and weeks as we shift on the schedule.

I: And how effective are your cleaning schedules in general?

R: Our old cleaning schedule was semi-effective. My biggest problem was one of the roommates just didn't clean well. When she did, it would be a terrible job so my other roommate and I would have to clean it again. She would also choose the mundane things and easy tasks. She kinda uses her work hours as an excuse but I often see her watching Netflix ten hours a day and never see her study. She just doesn't see cleanliness on the same scale as me and my other roommate.

I: Okay, and do you guys typically cook together?

R: If we do cook, me and my nicer roommate would cook together. A lot of times we'll cook on our own for ourselves.

I: How do you and your roommates deal with the cost of living? That could include paying for rent, and buying household goods or groceries.

R: So, for the cost of living, since we live in the dorms we cover our own costs separately. With other things like toilet paper or Clorox wipes, we try to buy that when we run low. We're trying to make a point this quarter to have a certain roommate buy them because she has a higher meal plan. We don't really have a system. Food is miscellaneous, where we sometimes buy food to share but also keep some to ourselves.

I: When you're heading out to buy things, do you communicate with your roommates about what they need?

R: Yes. One roommate always asks if we need anything when she's going to the store. I try to ask, but sometimes I forget or I don't think anyone needs anything. I never hear my other roommate ask. If somebody's sick, there's always the offer of buying medicine.

I: And do you typically have a way to pay each other back?

R: Well, if my roommate were to buy me something, I would offer to buy her a meal another time to kind of even it out... Even if it's not really the same price. It's still the same idea of gratitude. Before, we used to all have Level 1 dining plans before we got a new roommate. But our new roommate has a Level 2 account and she never buys toilet paper. It did feel unfair in that way.

I: Does your new roommate share other things then?

R: No. She buys food for herself and writes her name all over what's hers. We do have a communal food area that me and my other roommate contribute to. The new roommate does take from that area, but it's weird how she's not willing to share her food with us.

I: Do you believe that your new roommate is aware of these inequalities?

R: I don't think so. She just doesn't seem to understand or adjust to what my needs are.

I: Okay. How do you address personal beliefs and concerns with your roommates, such as religious beliefs, certain diets or allergies?

R: We addressed our allergies upfront in the beginning. One roommate's allergic to peanut butter so we don't have any peanut products. But there was this one time when our other roommate brought in trail mix and forgot about her peanut allergy. The other roommate doesn't consume dairy, and I try to stay away from meat. As far as religious differences go, we're all pretty tolerable of each other. We're all on birth control, so we set up our alarms at 10 o'clock to take it at the same time. But I feel like differences aren't really a big deal.

I: Going back to diets and allergies, how do you remind each other about them?

R: Yeah, my roommate will mention that she's allergies to peanuts every so often. With my other roommate, she's only stated once that she doesn't drink regular milk, but if you look in the fridge it's pretty obvious. It's just kind of a mental tab.

I: Okay, so we're going to move on now to the more relationship-based questions. What do you like the most about your roommates?

R: For my first roommate, I like that she's really considerate and always thinking about others. Again, she's always offering food, medicine, what she can do... She's always considerate about being quiet and being apologetic if she bugs you. It's just that she has a lot of empathy. And then with my other roommate, is even though we have our differences I'd ask her to do certain things – for example, if her perfume bugs me, she makes an effort to spray it somewhere else. She used to have her alarm super loud in the morning, but I asked her to keep it down so now she has it at a quieter setting. I appreciate that she takes some criticism and works with it. It's made living a little bit more bearable.

I: And what do you like the least about your roommates?

R: With one roommate, I guess I'm concerned about her safety because she sometimes goes out late and spontaneously. I don't know where she always is. I kind of don't like how she puts herself in those situations because it's dangerous and I don't want to lose her as a friend. And then with my other roommate, what bugs me is how she doesn't think about

other people. It's just so bizarre that she doesn't say "Hi" to me and she's also made hurtful comments about my career. She doesn't think about the impact of her words or what she does.

I: How close are you and your roommates? Is there an uneven dynamic between the three of you?

R: Sometimes I feel like one roommate is third wheeling. There's definitely a roommate that I'm closer friends with. We'll hang out in the dorm, but we'll also grab lunch outside or go to art museums. The other roommate just doesn't wanna hang out with us when we invite her. She doesn't wanna share anything about herself.

I: How do you feel about bringing guests over to your shared living space?

R: I guess when we first lived with our old roommate, we felt like we were more comfortable inviting people over. When we got our new roommate, we stopped inviting people to our dorm as often cause we didn't wanna bug her, but we didn't know if we were bugging her. She doesn't communicate with us with things like, "Hey, I'm studying. Can you take it somewhere else?" so it's hard to gage that. She's never personally brought anyone into our dorm either besides her parents when she moved in.

I: Alright. Describe a time when you and your roommates argued about something.

R: Okay, so with the roommate that I'm closer to, this was during fall quarter. This was like the only fight we ever had. We had gone out with a larger group, where I was partnered up with her but she ended up leaving me for another guy. I was more worried about her safety so I tried texting her all night to find out where she was. I was really scared, and when she got back I was sorta mad and gave her a huge talk about her safety. But we talked it out and that I was just looking out for her. With the other roommate, one of my most recent fights was last week when I asked her for her class schedule. She blew up at me and said, "Why do you need my schedule? You micromanage everything." And I explained to her that I wanted to know when I'd have the dorm to myself. She then started saying that she couldn't wait to move out and both of us were just really upset.

I: And going back to when you mentioned that you like to have the dorm to yourself sometimes, how do you communicate with your roommates about that?

R: Yeah, all three of us are in a group chat. We use Snapchat because I have an iPhone and my two roommates have Androids. Snapchat's just an easier way to do it. If we need to message each other one-on-one, we do that. For example, one of my roommates would let us know if she has her boyfriend in the room until a specific time. But typically, whenever

I'm saying things in the group chat such as, "I'm napping from two to three", one roommate gives a thumbs-up but the other doesn't respond even though she's read it.