



TREEHOUSE INNOVATION CASE STUDY

West Coast University: Designing the future of education





Healthcare in the spotlight

West Coast University helps prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals for the world of work.

Never has the importance of a well-populated, highly skilled healthcare workforce been more in the spotlight than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire world saw how crucial it is that the right people with the right skills are in place to help patients in their hour of need.

WCU has existed for more than 100 years and has six campus locations across the US. It has a vital role to play in ensuring it helps meet the significant market need for top quality healthcare professionals.

People learning with WCU come from a range of backgrounds and enter education at varying stages of their lives and careers. Just like every other industry, economic, technological and environmental factors all have a huge impact on students' needs and expectations of their university experience.

To meet the needs of current students, and to ensure WCU attracts the brightest and best in the future, it needs to listen to what people want and adapt and innovate accordingly. This is about not only ensuring students pass their exams - although of course that is a priority - but that they're also ready to hit the ground running in the workplace.

WCU has a well established Innovation team which constantly scans the horizon for emerging technologies that might enhance the student learning experience. However, for this scale of project, they recognised that they needed additional expertise to help them. Treehouse Innovation was delighted to partner with WCU to use human-centred design to explore what the future of education could look like at WCU by 2024. This eight month transformation project took place between 2020 and 2021, and was therefore conducted entirely online.

Working as a joint team, we devised a plan to take an in-depth look at what WCU's community cares about, and then to use that human insight to drive innovation at WCU.

"This project was really poignant. It was the middle of the pandemic, when we were relying on healthcare professionals as so many were leaving the industry. There's a huge deficit in the number of healthcare professionals the globe needs versus how many trained professionals are available, and WCU genuinely care about getting people trained and skilled. There was something really wonderful about meeting people who would get home at midnight and then start studying for exams. It was humbling to see the energy students have to bring."



EL TONG
DESIGN COACH, TREEHOUSE INNOVATION





Building an innovation ecosystem

This project marked the beginning of an exciting journey for WCU. The university is developing the future of education, with an aim to have innovations in place by 2024.

Throughout this collaboration, we worked with WCU to use human centered design to help bring people from across the WCU community with them on this journey.

Together we started to build an innovation ecosystem, which, along with the design thinking skills and know-how the team developed during our time together, are supporting WCU as they take this work forward.



What we learned:

“Before we started this process, the team tended to naturally gravitate towards trying to find solutions to problems. Using human-centred design allowed them to take a big step back, and see how they could find ways to address bigger issues. This approach gave the WCU team a way to formalize what they knew to be true, uncover new insight and new unmet needs, and use that as a consensus building tool.”



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DESIGN COACH, TREEHOUSE INNOVATION

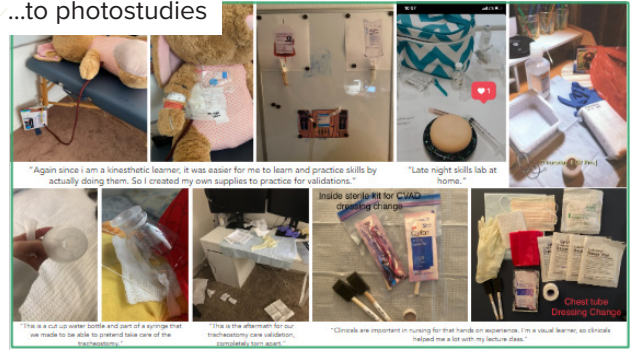


Our 8 month exploration of the WCU community - all conducted online

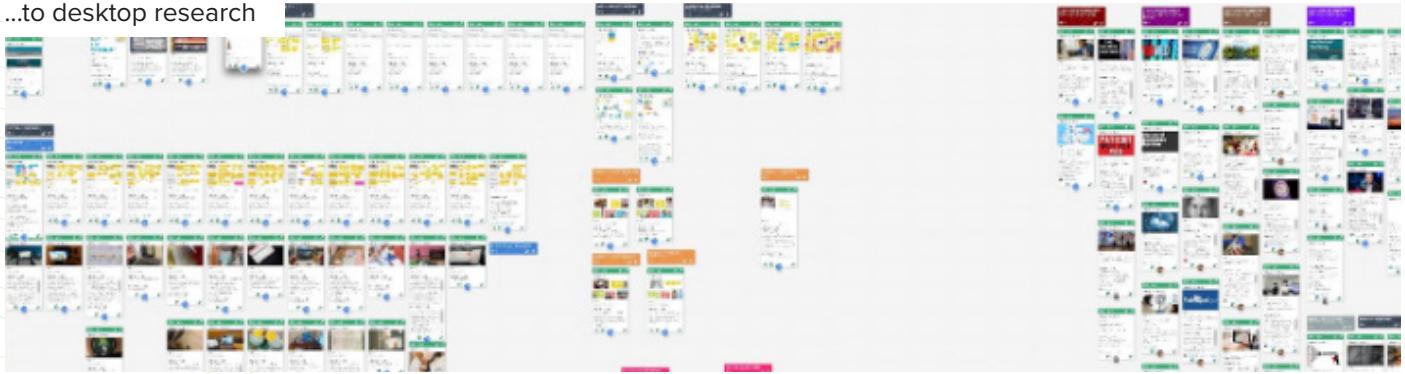
From virtual interviews...



...to photostudies



...to desktop research





Understanding the WCU community

For a transformational project of this scale, it was vital to get an in-depth understanding of what the people involved with WCU think and feel about it.

We embarked on an extensive empathy gathering exercise, speaking to people within the WCU community, including students, alumni, faculty, future employers and clinical partners. We also looked outside WCU for inspiration from the world of tech, medicine and education. All of this helped us build insights into what WCU's community might really value.

We looked deeply into what students need from their experience at WCU and mapped it into each step of their journey - from the moment they enroll on their course, all the way through to fulfilling their ambitions to become a healthcare professional in their chosen field.

Together with the innovation team, we used the insights we'd gathered to identify the seven core needs WCU students have that aren't currently being fully met, for which we could then start to design possible solutions.

In partnership with people from across the WCU community, we generated hundreds of ideas, longlisting 120 forward thinking ideas to address the opportunities we'd seen. We then developed prototypes for 15 ideas, finally recommending six for WCU's innovation team to take forward.

We developed prototypes that the team could then use to get stakeholder buy-in, as well as a playbook setting out what they need to do next with them, what else still needs testing, and what they could try based on the feedback we'd already received.



What we learned:

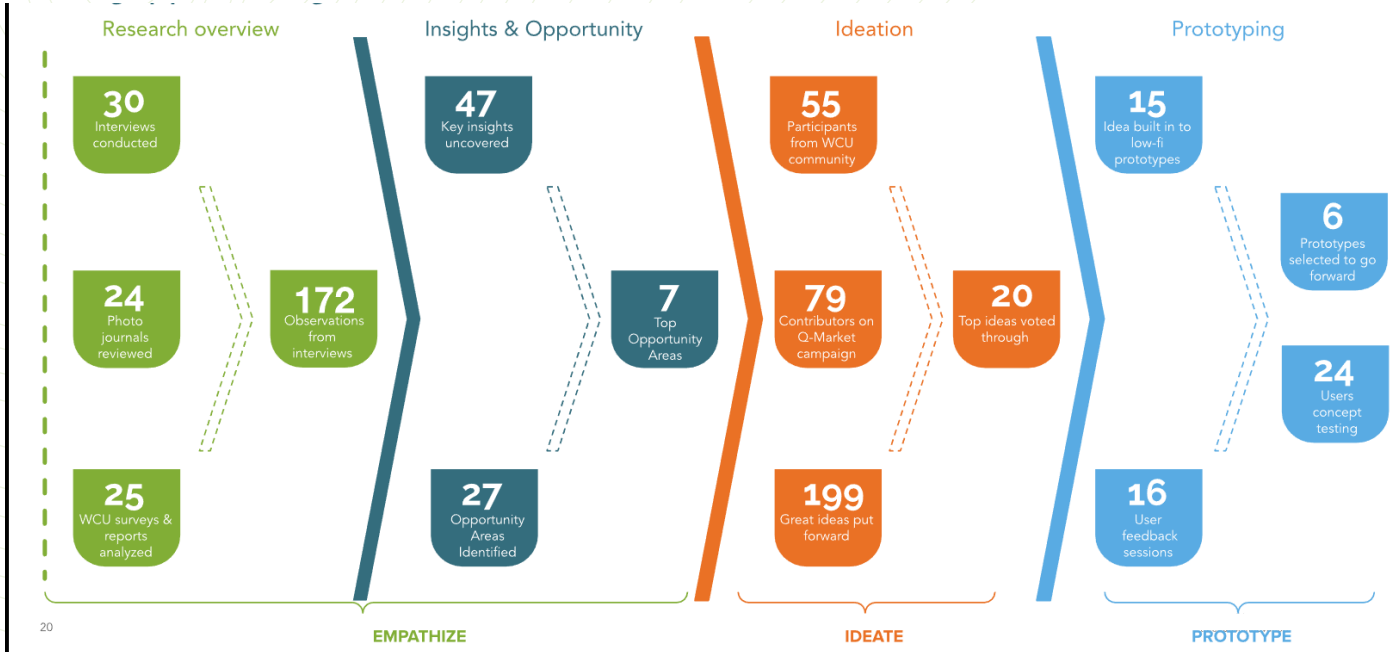
"We went really deep with this project and really got to know WCU and the people within it. We learned so much about the different factors that contribute to people's experiences. Students have a lot on their plates - they have huge amounts to learn and often busy home lives to navigate too. It was fascinating to get below the surface and understand the full range of students' needs, and then start to think about how WCU could innovate to better meet them."



EL TONG
DESIGN COACH, TREEHOUSE INNOVATION



The exploration in numbers





Where WCU is now

The team at WCU are moving forward with the six prototypes we jointly worked on. Bringing ideas of this scale to life takes time and patience, but the Innovation team at WCU have brought immense vision and energy to the task in hand. Working demonstrators for some of the ideas are already in place within their brand new Innovation Lab and being trialed for wider rollout.



“Treehouse is a great partner because you all are friendly and respectful (in addition to your skills of course). At the beginning of the project I was worried but now I see the approach and your recommendations as a differentiator. We are being a bit like Disney with imagineering.”



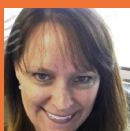
JEB EGBERT
CO-PRESIDENT AND CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER

“We can do this, right?! Really brilliant work excellently communicated, the finest piece of work I’ve seen in this kind of thing. Thank you very very much.”



DAVID PYLE
CEO

“Treehouse Innovation have really worked in true partnership with us. As well as using their expertise to help us find user insights and solutions, they’ve worked really hard to engage not just the innovation team, but the wider WCU community and key senior stakeholders, to ensure that we have participation, buy-in and knowledge transfer. We really appreciated their approach.”



DEBI GERGER
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION, RESEARCH &
DEVELOPMENT AT WEST COAST UNIVERSITY



