Project Personas and Journey Maps

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BCcampus Mental Health and Wellness Project

BCcampus
Learning. Doing. Leading.

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Introduction

As part of the Mental Wellness Project at BCcampus, we sought to create personas to help guide a starting point for who the project aims to satisfy and the possible areas that BCcampus, in collaboration with the working groups, can target to improve the mental wellness experience at BC post-secondary institutions.

Method

Two mental wellness working groups were consulted by an user experience designer as part of the persona and journey mapping creation process. The groups were asked to recount stories of the daily lives of students and instructors as well as the experiences during times of student distress and the response to the distress. Participants were asked to look back on real scenarios to identify what people did, what they said, and what aspects of the experience posed significant challenges (and why.)

Four artifacts were created as part of the process:
1. **Alignment map** – for discussion
2. **Empathy map** – to organize possible persona characteristics
3. **Persona** – to create a single functional identity
4. **Journey map** – to give a believable scenario to discuss and create a picture of what context our message will be received as part of this project

Alignment map

The alignment map was generated as an artifact of the group discussions. The map captures the activities of various participants in the mental wellness process (different type of students, instructors, and support staff), thoughts, feelings, concerns, and challenging aspects of both daily living and when distress arises.

The purpose of the map is to visualize the thoughts generated in the meeting and to be the foundation for the empathy and journey maps.
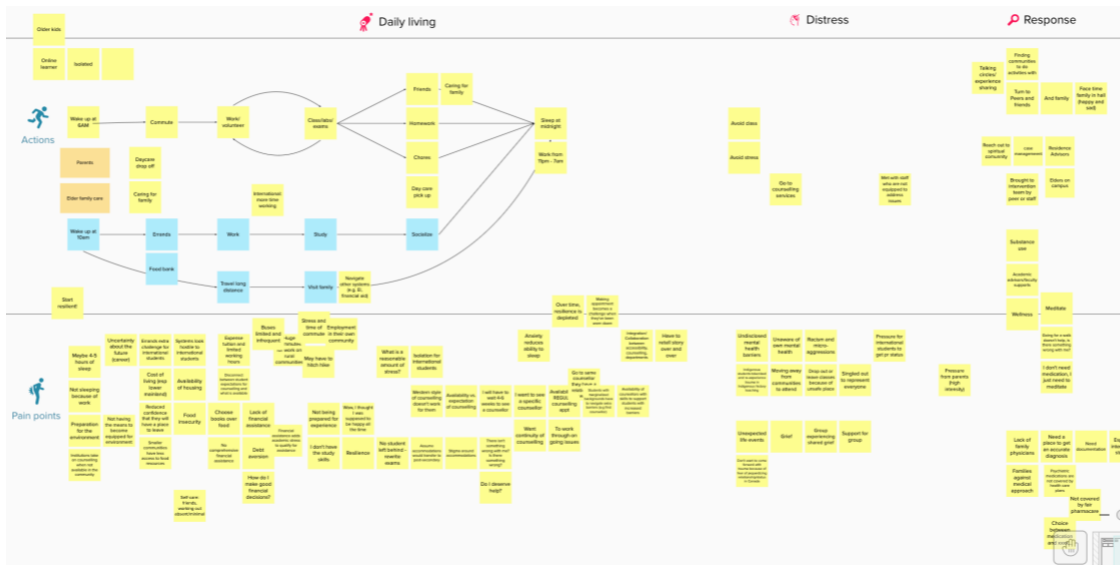
Example alignment diagram from the session which can be found on the [online MURAL board](#).

Empathy map

Stories that surfaced in the group and individual discussions were used to create empathy maps to help create a preliminary picture of the different experiences that people have. Items that group members have heard students and instructors say or seen them do were noted in the empathy map.

Example empathy diagram used to create a persona

Personas

Personas are fictional character generated from stories presented in sessions of real situations. They are not meant to cover all scenarios, possibilities, but to represent a potentially real

person who would participate in this journey. They are not a stereotype or generalization or all people who share groups (e.g. international students, undergraduate students, or men).

The purpose of a persona is to understand that we are solving real problems for real people with motivations outside mental wellness and academia. We should be asking ourselves "how can we make sure a solution will be effective for these people?"

Journey map

Each persona will have a journey map that represents what their journey through school and mental wellness looks like for this fictional person. The map includes some of the things they may be thinking throughout the process and what parts are particularly challenging. The map is generated from one of the stories lines surfaced in the group alignment diagram activity.

The purpose of the journey map is to help identify the areas of the journey that have the greatest opportunities area that can be addressed by the project. The diagram is meant to be a discussion point and to visualize problem areas.
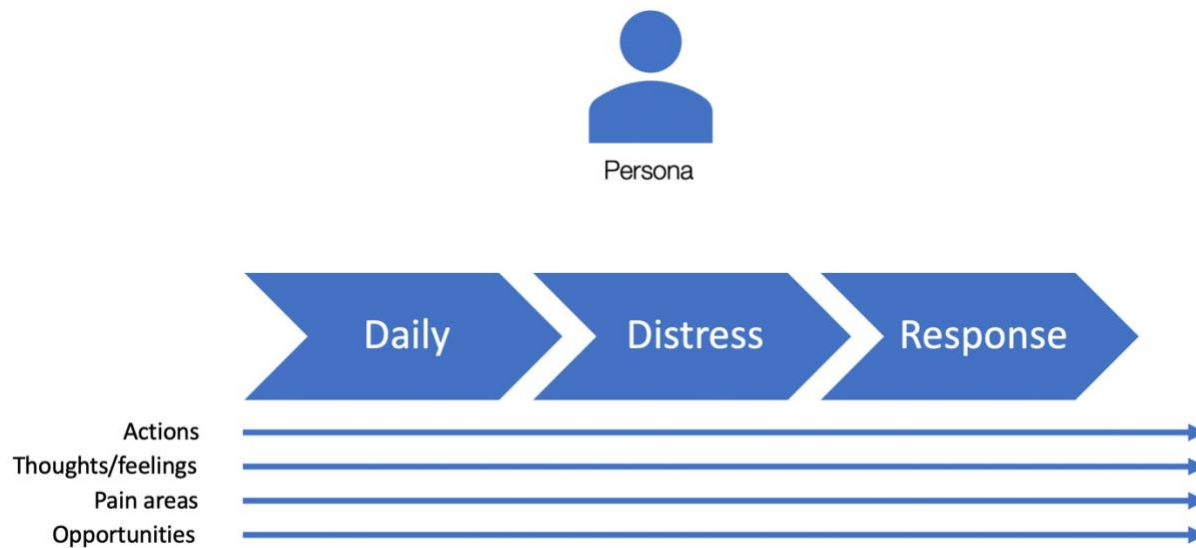
Types of information captured for each persona over the duration of the mental wellness journey.

Results

Personas and journey maps

See attached images

Student opportunity areas

Pain point	Details	Opportunities
Student has competing urgent priorities	Balancing grades/assignments to complete school and compete for positions and awards with work to pay for school and personal priorities such as family, medical needs, and relationships	Provide frameworks to reduce priorities or to improve balance. Caution: students are overly aware of this and are still expected to carry these priorities
Financial link to academic performance	High grades are required to maintain scholarships	
Link performance today to ability to achieve goal	"If I fail this exam, then I won't get the grade, then I won't get into medical school, then I can't be a doctor."	Share stories of "failure", are there opportunities to relieve the need for perfection while still being successful?
Schedule and mental space are too full to properly address basic needs	Schedule doesn't have room for flexibility, so the student is always on the go addressing what is imminently requiring attention (e.g. getting to work, getting to class, handing in the assignment) with little room to plan, reflect, and care for self.	Reduce workload of students while maintain the ability to assess learning.
Expectations and pressures outside academia	Student has expectations and pressures to maintain job, living situation, relationships, fitness, etc.	How might we consider external pressures when delivering coping techniques.
Chronic sleep deprivation	The extreme schedule, including early morning/late night work shifts and need to socialize/unwind after long days leads to short sleeping windows at night.	
Trying to survive, rather than survive situation	Students are in survival mode just trying to complete the next assignment, put food on the table for tonight, and pay bills due today with little time to plan ways to get ahead and thrive.	
Uncertainty about future	Students face uncertainty about whether they will be able to: find a meaningful career, secure housing for the next semester, pass courses, afford school next year, or maintain a relationship.	Can we create comfort around uncertainty? Can we provide ways to improve certainty?

Belief that support isn't for them	Support is for more difficult or abnormal situations than their own. Perhaps, they don't feel they are the 'type' of person who should use the limited support.	How might we encourage people to seek support when issues seem trivial?
Binge coping	Using techniques in excess to relieve the pressure and stress of daily living by skipping classes, procrastinating, or using substances.	Provide alternate coping techniques that support priorities
Coping mechanisms or treatment result in more stress	Coping: Skipping class results in further anxiety toward academic performance. Treatment: medication costs increase anxiety around finances and health	Can we prepare students for medical costs? Provide alternate coping strategies that aren't time intensive.
Suitable support isn't available to everyone	Support isn't immediately available when a crisis is present. Support isn't suitable for the types of barrier this person faces (e.g. experience being marginalized)	How might we give students more support options when counselling isn't immediately available or isn't right for them
Tools that invalidate the student experience	Going to school isn't easy and we don't want to give the impression that they "just need to" manage their time better	How might we design a tool that will validate the student experience?
Students often feel counselling is the immediate solution	Students will jump right to mental health being the culprit of the situation and believe they need a counsellor for most challenges	How might we provide alternate solutions for the spectrum of mental wellness needs?
Counselling unfamiliarity	International students may not have counselling as a concept in their culture	How might we provide alternate solutions for the spectrum of mental wellness needs?

Instructor opportunity areas

Pain point	Details	Opportunities
Change in current student experience from previous student experience	Things are different than when instructors went to school. More students are working multiple jobs to get through school.	How might we help instructors empathize with the current student situation?
Multiple roles as an instructor	Instructors are very busy and have many roles including instructor, mentor, community outreach, subject matter expert, advisor, parent	How might we clarify mental wellness responsibilities into an existing role?
Learning is self-motivated	Learning is sought out by the person interested in learning and requires action and effort to find opportunities to learn	How might we make learning accessible or unavoidable?
Minimal training in class management	Instructors aren't all taught how to manage or teach a class	How might we integrate best practices in classroom management?
Clarity on role as instructor	People aren't sure what the expectation of the instructor is in the space of mental wellness prevention and response	How might we clarify mental wellness responsibilities into an existing role?
Heavy mental load balancing responsibilities	Responsibilities of teachers include pedagogy, teaching, research, scholarly contributions, and personal wellness	How might we reduce the mental load of implementing mental wellness best practices in the class?
Expectations to innovate/implement drastic changes in the classroom	Instructors looking to lead the classroom experience are expected to come up with solutions and seek out ideas on how to implement improvements to the classroom on their own	How might we reduce the need for instructors to think of novel solutions?
No clear contact person or support when a situation presents	Once distress displays in the classroom, instructors don't know who to call for immediate and on-going support	How might we provide a clear contact pathway?
Preparation	Didn't think it would happen so didn't prepare	How might we provide insight into the likelihood of mental unwellness affecting (or being hindered by) their class?
Need for ongoing support	No feedback or follow up support for instructor after an incident	How might we provide follow up support and success measures to instructors?

Unclear how to continue support for students	Instructors want skills to continually support students when a major incident happens and requires consideration going forward	
Emotional labour for faculty who are relied on	Women, people of colour are most often leaned into because of their lived experience	How might we respect the emotional labour of those with lived experience when clarifying roles?
Overstepping code of conduct	Instructors may overstep codes of conduct, provide in appropriate accommodations, or undermine accessibility centres and procedures when attempting to be helpful	How might we clarify roles so that instructors are providing appropriate solutions

Knowledge gaps

There are some areas where there is clear knowledge of what happens from the perspective of support and this working group such as what happens immediately when distress presents in the classroom and where the student ends up (final response by the instructor).

The areas where the least amount of knowledge of what happens and how it contributes to the point of distress include:

- What happens in a student's daily life right before distress displays? How is the student feeling and what triggers a situation?
- What coping/actions have led to this moment (e.g. procrastination, skipping class)?
- What are instructors doing now to consider mental wellness when design their courses?
- What happens and what are people feeling between when an incident presents and when a student ends up at the counselling centre or at home?

Lastly, although there is a lot of information of the kind of activities students do throughout the week, there is little information on how each component pushes a student toward distress.

Discussion

Most notable challenges for students are:
- time/effort in order to attend and 'survive' school
- mental load due to amount of uncertainty and external pressures
- availability of support who are trained to support different barriers

Most notable challenges for instructors are:
- mental load due to number of considerations for a course/career
- clarity in role
- clarity in what to do/who to contact if a specific situation arises

Next steps:
- Clarify knowledge gaps
- Identify further, more appropriate opportunities to each of the pain points
- Generate solutions to opportunity areas