TAKING A
STUDENT-CENTERED
APPROACH

A design is successful if and only if it makes users better off. For this reason, students must always be at the center of the design process. In general, a student-centered approach involves three essential elements: empathy, collaboration, and creativity.

Empathy

Walk in students' shoes to understand their needs and behaviors better. Build empathy for students by thinking through the following questions:

• What do they need to do?
• What might they have or not have available to them?
• What questions might they have?
• What are they seeing and hearing?
• What might they be feeling?

Collaboration

Get commitment from staff members at all levels to focus on the experiences and needs of students and design solutions together. Whom will you need to collaborate with to be successful? Some examples are:

• Administrators
• Professors
• Directors
• The admissions staff
• The financial aid staff
• The student success staff
• Academic advisers
• The enrollment staff
• The registration staff

Creativity

The practice of design thinking encourages brainstorming and an action-oriented, hands-on approach to problem-solving. Some ways to spark creativity include:

• Think outside of the box and do not limit ideas when brainstorming; aim for volume over feasibility.
• Build on the ideas of others; use "and" instead of "but."
• Consider using markers and sticky notes to keep things visual.
• Create physical prototypes and test them with students or other staff members.

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