

RoomEase Research Plan

UX Research and Data Analytics

Midterm Assignment – Sophia Hettich



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1. Problem Statement

This research is for the Project UX Foundations course in the first semester of this year, which is part of the User Experience and User Interface Design and Development program at the New York Institute of Technology. The goal of this course is to create a product or service around the topic of empathy. My team has chosen to design an application for roommates who need help with their interpersonal communication and other potential problems around sharing a living space.

When living in a shared apartment, it is crucial for certain topics, such as responsibilities, sharing expenses and personal boundaries to be discussed to create a pleasant living environment for everyone. Not addressing arising issues from the start can lead to the accumulation of more and sometimes even bigger problems, potentially harming the physical, emotional and social aspects of living in a shared space with others.

Creating an App such as RoomEase is supposed to help ease those, often uncomfortable, conversations by guiding users through various living arrangements and offering structuring features. The aim of this research is to find out what the **most common problems** are, **how they can be solved** and how we might even **help prevent them happening** in the future.

The target audience in this research are people are living with roommates in their 20s and 30s. The persona can be found in in the Appendix.

2. Research Objectives

With my research objectives, I am trying to find out how people in the target audience are experiencing communal living and which reoccurring problems they have to face. I will also look into the factors which can help nurture good communication and healthy living environments. This includes finding out what can help increase frequent communication and mutual understanding between roommates.

To achieve these objectives, I will answer the following research questions:

- What are the most common roommate conflicts?
 - How do they arise?
 - How are they dealt with?
 - How could they be prevented?
- How do people communicate in shared living arrangements?
- What tools can help people tackle roommate conflicts (both communicative and technical tools)?
- How should people ideally communicate and handle shared living spaces?
 - Before a conflict
 - During a conflict

- After a conflict

3. Choice of Method

Data for this project will be collected through mostly qualitative research. The methodological approach taken in this project is a mixed methodology based on desk research and field work.

Desk Research

I chose to do desk research as the first research method, to get to a general understanding of different communication styles and approaches to shared living. I will also look at competitor products to understand where possible gaps are in the market and how our product could fill these. By doing desk research I will get an overview of the topic and be able to prepare myself for the interviews.

Questionnaire

Towards the beginning of my research, I will send out a questionnaire, so I can get some more general insight into the kind of problems people experience most often when living with roommates. This questionnaire will help me to find out which topics to focus on in my interviews. A Questionnaire is a good source for getting a lot of information. Most of the time the information might be a bit on the surface level, but good to see a general direction to go in, especially, because you can reach a lot of people with it. My questionnaire will be targeting the whole demographic of this project and contain nine multiple choice and five open-ended questions. I will create the survey in google forms.

Interviews

I chose interviewing, as my main research method, because, it will give me more detailed and personal information about the users and the deepest insights into the topic. By sharing experiences and opinions about roommates, the users can give me a better chance of empathizing with them. In my interviews I will focus on five people from the part of the target group that I know have had problems with roommates in the past, because I this group of people will have a lot of personal experience to draw from. The interviews will be conducted in person and voice recorded by me.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, I will also conduct **expert interviews** with two members of the NYIT counseling staff to hear the professional side of tackling interpersonal problems and learn about the ways through which people should communicate. This will give me a give me a different perspective of the topic and an understanding of what communication patterns we could use for our application. Due to the Experts being from the Long Island Campus, the interview will be conducted over Zoom. I will record the sessions to be able to watch them back and transcribe them.

Usability Testing

As my last research method, I chose moderated usability testing. This will be done one a competitor's product to test the user flow, see how they are interacting with it and if their design choices could be implemented into

our own project. The test will be moderated and conducted in person, so I can ask follow up questions, pick up on any non-verbal clues, as well as monitor their behavior. Doing usability testing in this way will give me a good level of depth and quality of insights as I'll be seeing the sessions being conducted live. The test will be conducted with only two people due to time constraints and conducted with the roommate chore manager *Dwell* on the persons own device, to ensure that any unfamiliarity can be led back to the application itself. The users testing *Dwell* are currently living in shared apartments. I will record their screen to see how they interact with the application and write down notes during the testing on their behavior.

4. Time Plan

Method	Week	Duration	Output
Desk Research	1	Approx. 1 week	Find out what are the most common roommate problems and who are our competitors.
Questionnaire	2	Approx. 1 week	Learn about people's general experiences with roommate narrow down the scope of the project.
Interviews	3	4 - 5 days	Find out specific roommate problems people have had. Find out how people have dealt with them.
Expert Interviews	4	2 days	Learn about how people communicate and how to avoid and resolve conflict.
Usability testing	4 / 5	2 days	See how people use the competitor's application to learn what to use/avoid in our design.

5. Insights

- Most common conflicts are based on different expectations.
- People tend to be avoidant at first but search for a conversation later.
- Most people communicate in person, but some would rather communicate over text / anonymously
- Apps like *Dwell* can be used to help structure a shared living situation to avoid issues around common conflict points, such as chores.
- Using I – statements when communicating your problems to others. Taking responsibility and accountability for your own feelings, without blaming or shaming the other person, you let them know what you need or what would make things better for you moving forward. I feel ____ when someone _____. It's better for me if someone _____.
- Compromise and negotiate your own expectations.
- Timing. Let the other person know that something is on your mind. Make sure they are emotionally and schedule wise ready to communicate.

- Always talk in person, face-to-face. This helps to avoid misunderstandings and understand each other's body language and tone while talking.
- Bring up issues soon to avoid them and your resentment building up over time.
- Communicate assertive but not aggressive.
- Regular emotional check-in that leads to an open dialog.

6. Appendix

Personas



Maggie Smith

Age: 23

Hobbies: Listening to music, going to concerts, painting, cooking, reading

Location: Upstate New York

Career/Professional background: masters student and waitress

Archetype:

The sage- loves to organize and mother her friends, has lots of good advice and enjoys hosting gatherings

Personality: caring and passionate, puts others first, introvert, people pleaser

Values: deep relationships, helping out when needed, a good night in

Attitudes: values a tidy household with mutual respect

Interests: cats, board games, becoming a psychologist

Lifestyles: trying to become more social, very academically focused so not much time for being too social outside of roommates

Goals: focused on studies, wants to travel, wants to become more social

Quotes: "There needs to be a balance between friendships and roommates I think people end up taking things too personally if they are friends first..."

"remind everyone that we all care about each other"

Challenges: puts other people's needs before her own too much of the time, juggling school life with social life

Communication preferences: face to face always, full honesty and transparency



John Jeff

Age: 19

Hobbies: Partying, fantasy football, baseball, open mics

Location: NYC

Career/Professional background: student

Archetype:

The jester- loves a good party, currently rushing a frat, extremely carefree and a bit irresponsible

Personality: makes people laugh, always cracking jokes, does not take things too seriously

Values: a good time, light hearted jokes

Attitudes: minds his own business, doesn't take things personally, have insane fomo so he tends to overindulge

Interests: cats, board games, becoming a psychologist, hanging out with his brothers and making the most of college

Lifestyles: very focused on social life and not his education as much

Goals: making it through frat rushing, graduating with honors, making more friends

Quotes: "I mean, I like to throw parties and stuff, but I'd never do it without asking my roommates first."

Challenges: always late, handing work in on time, oversleeping, balancing social life with school

Communication preferences: text, short and simple

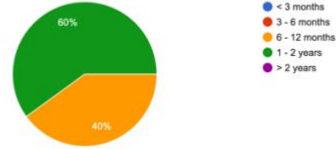
Questionnaire Setup and Results

Link to the survey: <https://forms.gle/rTge3VdjMDaTJVtMA>

Have you ever lived in a shared apartment?
5 Antworten



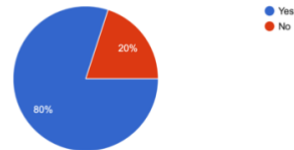
How long did you live there?
5 Antworten



How many roommates did you have?
5 Antworten



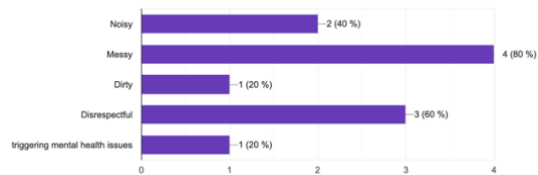
Did you know them before?
5 Antworten



Did you encounter problems with them?
5 Antworten



What kind of problems?
5 Antworten



If you can, please elaborate on the problem in the field below
5 Antworten

They sucked generally as people

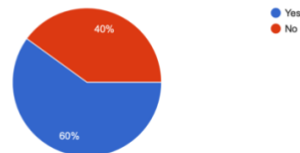
At times the kitchen was messy

one very messy roommate, who said dishes needed to "soak". two roommates with eating disorders who often made a very triggering environment for each other, and to me, who never suffered with something like that.

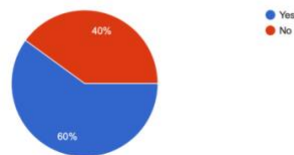
Roommate struggled with mental health issues, resulting in mood swings and aggressive / disrespectful behavior towards others in the house.

He had a bunch of mental illness and took it out on us.... Also the heating was broken so we couldn't agree on a set temp

Did you talk to this roommate about the problem?
5 Antworten



Did you talk to your other roommates about the issue?
5 Antworten



How did you end up solving the problem?
5 Antworten

They moved out and better people moved in

More of a problem with myself and learned to deal with it and help her by fixing up

we never did

The roommate would distance himself from others in the group after the high-stress times of conflict. Eventually he broke the lease and moved out because the living situation felt unsafe and uncomfortable for those living in the house.

He moved out

What was the most difficult or annoying part of dealing with this problem?
5 Antworten

Standing up for myself / speaking up

Just putting extra time to clean

personal health issues arose, general discomfort, and often cleaning up after a roommate often.

I felt the most difficult part was losing someone that I thought I was very close friends with. Being roommates with someone is different than having a friendship, as you can see all vulnerabilities/problems with the person.

Confronting the issue and finding a way for everyone to come together

Was there anything you wish you would have done differently?
5 Antworten

Confronted them earlier

Not really we were friends and I knew she was struggling and it wasn't permanent

cleaned up after them less / asking third party to intervene with health issues

The conflict was amongst a large group of people (6) who all had different personalities/perspectives on the issues we faced. As a group we varied in conflict management approaches, and so it was hard to act on the same page. While I really don't think it would've made a difference, I wished my roommates and I could have communicated more directly about problems as soon as they happened, rather than bottling and lashing out.

Addressed the problem sooner

What would have been helpful when dealing with the problem?

5 Antworten

Being aware of what their perspective was

More communication or attention on her part

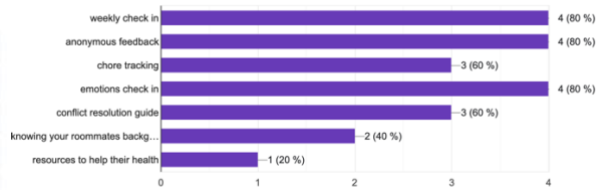
anonymous requests to clean up/distance when we cooked and had meals

A therapist 🇳🇱

Communication from the start

What types of communication tools/processes would have helped to fix or prevent these conflicts?

5 Antworten



Interview Plan

Hello Person XY,

Are you ok with me recording this session?

I won't show the recording to anyone, it is just for me to make a transcript from later, in case I forget something.

As you know, I am doing research about different experiences people have with roommates and general problems they have had when living in shared spaces.

First could you please state your current profession and age?

General living situation:

- Have you ever lived in a shared apartment?
- How long did you live there?
- How many roommates did you have?
- Did you know them before moving in?
- What was life in this shared apartment like?
 - Did you hang out with your roommates?
 - Did you have any rules put into place (e.g. when people stay over etc.?)

Roommate problems:

- Did you ever encounter problems with a roommate?
 - What kind of problems?
- Did you talk to them about it?
- Did you talk with your other roommates about the issue?
- How did you end up solving the problem?
- How did you feel while dealing with this issue/roommate?
 - What was the most difficult/annoying part?
- Was there anything you wish you would have done differently?

- What would have been helpful to you when dealing with the problem?

In your experience:

- What types of communication tools/processes could have helped you to fix or prevent these conflicts?
- What is your preferred method of conflict resolution?
- What are some things that cause roommate drama?

Expert Interview Plan

Hello Person XY,

Are you ok with me recording this session?

I won't show the recording to anyone, it is just for me to make a transcript from later, in case I forget something.

As I have mentioned in my email, I am doing research on communication and resolving conflict as part of a project for my graduate studies. This interview today will be about what how to deal with interpersonal conflicts when sharing a living space and how to communicate with others to resolve and avoid issues.

First of all, would you mind telling me about your background and your job here at NYIT?

- What mindset/expectations should you have before moving in to a shared apartment?
- What happens when different people live together in a shared space? What kind of dynamics can develop?
- How can roommates communicate when problems arise?
- How should they communicate to prevent conflicts from happening?
- What kind of communication tools are there that could be applied to shared living situations?

Give one concrete example for them to give advice on

I have just moved to a new apartment with 3 other roommates. I get along with all of them except one, a student 5 years younger than me, who seems to be very isolated and doesn't want to participate in group activities. I have also overheard multiple phone calls of him loudly arguing with his parents. There have been multiple instances where he didn't clean his dishes for days at a time and generally left a very dirty kitchen behind. I have asked him nicely to please clean his stuff, but he hasn't done anything. How can I approach him so he, one, cleans his dishes and the kitchen, and two, doesn't get too angry at me?

Usability Testing Setup

Hello Person XY,

Are you ok with me recording this session?

I won't show the recording to anyone, it is just for me to make a transcript from later, in case I forget something.

Today you are going to try out this application called Dwell, which is a chore tracker for roommates. I will give you a set of tasks to complete and I want you to talk to me about what you are doing and thinking throughout.

1. Create an account
2. Create Apartment group
3. Invite roommates
4. Add vacuuming once a week done by you to chore board
5. Add a five-dollar bill for trash bags paid by you to the bills
6. Leave a message on the whiteboard

Tell me about your experience.

- How did you like the App?
- Would you use it again?
- What was the best part?
- What part did you have most difficulty with?

Expert Interview Transcript

Expert Interview: Christine Alter

Christine Alter: I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 30 years' experience in the field of social work. And I currently am the Associate Director of the Counseling and Wellness Department here at New York Tech and in my role, I work one-on-one doing counseling with students as well as doing campus outreach programming for various different events and for different departments upon request. As well, we work together with the clubs to give some workshops and trainings, again, upon request. And I also supervise the peer health advisors, peer health educators who are student ambassadors, who are working with our department to try and decrease stigma around mental health across the campus, as well as they assist us with some of the programming that we do in the public spaces on campus.

Sophia Hettich: Sounds amazing, perfect. I'm going to first ask you some more general questions about living with people and those kinds of problems that roommates might have and then I'm going to give you one concrete scenario and you can comment on how one might or what advice you would give to a person

having those problems. So first of all, what kind of mindset or expectation should someone have when moving into a shared apartment? Should they come into that with having any expectations of what it might be like or?

C.A.: Well, I guess just like with any other relationship, the expectation that I would likely say people are going to be some opportunities where you're going to agree and sometimes where you're going to disagree. And there needs to be a lot of communication around how people feel, what kind of boundaries people might need to have, and just, you know, being open with communication. Yeah. Everybody feels safe. And when you're living with someone, there will be conflicts, and you're going to need to be willing to compromise and negotiate.

S.H.: Yeah, for sure. Would you say it would be smart to immediately come into that setting and immediately say, hey, look, those are my boundaries, those are the things I'm not okay with, or would you wait for maybe a situation to occur and then upon that kind of say, hey, I wasn't okay with X, Y, Z, maybe moving forward we could do something differently or?

C.A.: Well, I think the person has to start with knowing what their boundaries are before they can communicate them to others. So first you got to figure out what your boundaries are and then you have to be able to communicate them with your roommate and try to be honest and respond if a boundary is crossed. There are different kinds of categories to consider regarding boundaries. So, it could actually be physical boundaries, personal space. It could be emotional boundaries, whether or not you always feel comfortable sharing your feelings with somebody else. It could be digital boundaries, you know. Yeah. Whether you want your picture shared on somebody else's social media account. It could be, you know, a lot of it could be sharing your possessions, like who's bringing in the couch, who's bringing in the TV. When I have mayonnaise in the refrigerator, can you borrow that? If I loan you a book, when do I expect it back? If you use my milk for your coffee, are you going to replace it? Yeah, yeah. That kind of thing. And sometimes it can even be spirituality as, you know, if you don't share the same spiritual or even political beliefs, just making sure that you know what the other persons are and just like if somebody is you know maybe involved in praying or something like that at a certain time of day in their room just knowing that they're practicing their religion and not to disturb them during that time or maybe not have guests over during that time you just have to communicate be honest and be open.

S.H.: Yeah, yeah. How would you say roommates should ideally communicate when problems arise? Should it be like face-to-face? Should it be like actively approaching this person? Or would you say maybe, I don't know, messaging them first?

C.A.: I think it's a good idea before you approach someone, especially if you're going to discuss something of conflict, you have to let the person know so that there's an expectation. I have something important I

want to discuss with you would now be a good time. You can't just assume because something's on your mind and you're ready to communicate about it that the other person's in a place emotionally or even schedule-wise to sit down and be able to listen and respond. I think that timing is really important. It's never a good idea, in my opinion, to have a conversation over text because there can be a lot of miscommunications. You don't have body language. You don't have voice tone. You could, you know, people can read into things in a lot of negative ways. Maybe you can't see that someone's uncomfortable, or maybe when you're in person, you can notice that it's likely somebody didn't understand you correctly based upon the reaction that you see. And you could also see if someone's getting upset, and maybe you can not continue with your third complaint, because you would stop for a moment and just kind of say, what's going on with you? Where are you at with this? So I think that that's important.

S.H.: Yeah. So first, like, kind of letting them know, making them, like, or, like, getting them into the right mindset of, hey, we're, like, maybe we can discuss something, tell me if you have time, when you have time, and then, yeah, definitely doing it in person and kind of, yeah, looking at the surroundings, looking at the other person's body language, your own kind of body language, et cetera.

C.A.: Yeah. You have to, whenever you're going to communicate with someone, especially if it's around conflict, you have to be able to be calm and respectful, both you and the other person. So you want to make sure you're in a place where you're able to manage that emotion. And the other person, as well, is in a place where they have the time and the interest in managing their emotions. Sometimes we confront something when we're very upset and angry that we may say or do things that we regret. So it's important to have time and space before discussing a situation if you have very strong emotions in that moment. You also may want to think for a moment and reflect exactly what you want to say. Sometimes it's even helpful to write things down because you want to make sure the language that you use isn't blaming language. And that the tone that you use is going to demonstrate respect. You also want to make sure that you're in a good environment, so you have a private space. You don't want to have an audience around. You don't want to, like, bring it up with your boyfriend and maybe their parent in the room or something like that, or their friends, because that, because the environment really matters. You also want to make sure that you bring it up sooner rather than later if it's bothering you because if you wait, an issue could escalate. So you want to discuss concerns before they become major problems. If you can do that before you move in, that's awesome. I'm sure if you Google online, they have roommate questionnaires or lists of things that you could discuss and give opinions on. But you're not going to be able to cover every single situation. So, you know, it takes time to kind of figure out. And you have to build a relationship also, because maybe you're willing to compromise a little bit more at some time in the future when you know someone or when they've shown compromise towards you.

S.H.: Yeah, yeah. I guess, what would you say, apart from of course being like respectful to the other person's boundaries, whatever they might be, how else could I prevent, you know, those kind of small

conflicts from happening, like a different understanding of what is a clean space or those kinds of things, how would you approach that? Or how can I... yeah, what kind of structures could be put in place to prevent such conflicts from even happening in the first place?

C.A.: Well, I mean, it's really just about being as descriptive as you can because to different, as you said, like being clean can mean something different to everybody else. So, you know, it's about being open and curious and asking questions. So, what would your expectations be around cleanliness? Does that mean everything goes in the dishwasher? Does that mean you take out the garbage every day? What does that mean? Is the countertops washed down every time that you cook a meal? Or is it at the end of the day? That's the kind of thing that you may need to make compromises and negotiate around. Different people have different, you know, expectations. A bathroom would be a big, a biggie. You know, some people are more tolerant of, you know, different things and it depends on your previous experiences of how you grew up. So you need to be pretty honest about it. If there's any pets involved, that's also about the expectations. How often will the litter box be changed or you know who'll be taking the dog out or what happens if the dog has an accident like those kinds of things. Maybe you can make a chore chart but you know you have to be flexible. If you're super clean and your roommate is not it's probably not going to be a great match unless you're willing to compromise. Maybe they'll try and be more mindful of putting their things away and maybe you'll try and be a little bit more compromising in recognizing that I'll keep my room as clean as I want, but when I'm talking about a public space that I'm sharing, I recognize that, you know, sometimes my roommate's socks might be on the floor or they may have eaten cookies and gotten like crumbs all over the carpeting and they may not whip out the vacuum right away because people are just at different levels with that. So you want to match those things as best you can but it's never going to be perfect. So you really have to learn to compromise.

S.H.: Compromise, yeah. Yeah, for sure. What kind of tools for good communication are there that you maybe even teach people about that could be applied to those like shared living situations, like any sort of guidelines or rules or actual, I don't know, exercises you could do to ensure there's good communication, like a healthy, nurturing living environment?

C.A.: Well, I guess you want to always try to communicate as early as possible careful about the language that you use and also Be assertive but not too aggressive so Communication can be passive and passive means you don't say anything. So that's not really communication Yeah, maybe you show with your body language that you're upset or maybe you talk behind somebody's back about them because you're upset with them. So, that would be like passive-aggressive communication. Neither of those are healthy. Bossing people around or demanding that things are done in your way and, you know, yelling or throwing things or, you know, being spiteful or vengeful, that's aggressive. So that's not healthy communication either. The gold standard for communication would be being assertive. Admission for assertive means being calm and respectful, but letting people know what you need or what you want. Again, that starts with, you know,

you knowing what you need or what you want. So part of that is knowing thyself, and then being able to communicate in a calm and respectful way. One of the techniques that people use is called an I-statement. So the I-statement is where you take accountability and responsibility for your feelings. And without blaming or shaming the other person, you let them know what you need or what would make things better for you moving forward. With a polite request if this is something you can keep in mind. So there's a bit of a formula around that where it's just kind of like, I feel blank when someone blanks. It's better for me if someone blanks. Yeah. You know, I feel uncomfortable when your boyfriend sleeps, when someone's, someone else is in the apartment late at night because I'm in my pajamas and I just You know don't feel comfortable around people of the opposite sex in my pajamas it would be really helpful if I had like a heads up and then I Wouldn't put my pajamas on until like later in the day I don't want to be in my pajamas in the in the lounge and then a visitor comes over. You know so that might be an example again. It's not pointing fingers at anyone. It's really just saying what I need or what I want and taking responsibility for my feelings.

S.H.: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so now were getting to the example and I want to know how you would react if someone came to you with this problem. I have just moved to a new apartment with three other roommates. I get along with all of them except one, a student five years younger than me, who seems to be very isolated and doesn't want to participate in group activities. I have also overheard multiple phone calls of him loudly arguing with his parents, seemingly throwing things around out of anger. There have been multiple instances where he didn't clean his dishes for days at a time and generally left a very dirty kitchen behind. Let's say, I have asked him nicely to please clean his stuff, but he hasn't done anything. How can I approach him so he, one, cleans his dishes and the kitchen, and two, doesn't get too angry at me?

C.A.: I guess that's when you really would have wanted to have those conversations before the person moved in, about chores and expectations for common areas, because what you could do then is refer to those and say, remember when we talked about keeping common areas clean? Part of that is you know, making sure we wash our dishes. I wouldn't approach the person alone. It's nice if you life with that many people I'd be nice to have you know, a check-in, once a month or once a week depending on what that situation was. This way it wasn't like you were attacking that one person, it could be like open dialog. And you could also kind of say, I noticed that you, you know it seems like you might be struggling. If you ever need something, you can always come and talk to me. We're here, as roommates, to also support each other. And if it was someone within the school, did you know that the school has free and confidential counseling, through the office of counselling and wellness? If you have an interest, there is an email, where you can reach out, so just want to make sure, you knew about those supports.

S.H.: Yeah, yeah for sure.

C.A.: I think you've got to be careful and you want to do it at a time where you want to check in with the person, of course not when they're angry. You know, not when they're throwing things in they're room, you know, to knock on their door and be like you're throwing things around, but I noticed you didn't clean up the crumbs from the kitchen, so you want to pick the timing would be important and the language would be important.

S.H.: Yeah. One last question. So with the previous research I've been doing, like interviewing people who are currently or have been living in shared apartments, a lot of them mention that they would love it if there was some sort of system or application that would allow them to anonymously write someone: so this kind of, well it doesn't go against the face-to-face communication necessarily, but it's definitely a different approach. What is your opinion on sending those anonymous texts, or giving anonymous hints to someone?

C.A.: (shakes head aggressively) Yeah, I don't think that's a good idea, because you know it could not be received in a positive way and make people feel like, who said that?

S.H.: Yeah a bit hostile.

C.A.: Yeah it could feel like people are judging them, people are talking about them behind their back. An who is it? Right? So personally, I think that people need to take accountability for how they feel and that if something is said in a calm and respectful way, something that is, you know, reasonable, then it needs to be communicated in a face-to-face basis, so you can have that give or take based upon body language. Make sure that its understood correctly. If someone just gets a letter, you know you don't know what their previous life experience has been, or how their going to interpret it and if you don't even know who its from, then it could possibly make them feel on edge, if there are several roommates. You know is this from, which roommate is this? Its much easier to establish some kind of general communication, through a roommate night, where you have an opportunity just to review where everyone's at and hows everyone doing. Also, ask that person, is there anything, that's been bothering you? Anything that we can do? Or that I can do to make some things better? So a anonymous letter seems like it would not get a great response. It would come across as blaming to me and judgmental. I think that its not easy to communicate, but the more you avoid it, the worse you get at it. So while everybody likes to text in this generation, its not great, because you're really avoiding practicing having better communication skills, which are not only going to be important in roommates situations, but they're important in a workplace situation, or in any relationship that youre going to have as you move forward.

Expert Interview: Alexandra Lo Re

Alexandra Lo Re: Sure. So my name is Alexandra. By degree and license, I'm a licensed clinical social worker, which means that I've been through the required schooling and exams and clinical field work to start to work with people and do therapy with them, do counseling with them. And I've been at NYIT for about five and a half years now doing work in the counseling center, working with students, helping them

navigate the challenges that college brings, stress, struggles with depression, anxiety, running events for students to promote awareness for topics like we just had an alcohol awareness event today which was pretty fun. So just being a presence on campus for students and help them with their mental health needs.

Sophia Hettich: Amazing. I'm first going to ask you some general questions and then I'm going to give you one example of and kind of ask on your advice if a person came to you with this kind of problem how you would or what you would tell them to do or react. Okay, first of all, what kind of mindset or expectation should people have when moving into a shared apartment?

A.L.R.: I think a very open mindset is going to be key here. For a lot of people, this might be the first time that they have to share a space with someone else, especially something as intimate as a bedroom and a bathroom. So I think that knowing that it might go a little different than you expect and sort of be open to that is going to be very important, managing expectations. If we come in with the idea of, I need to, you know, this is the way things are done, right? This is the way the room needs to look at all times, or these are the sort of behaviors that we do in the room, or don't do, then it can be a little difficult for everyone with such a rigid mindset. But if you come in with a little more open and say, you know, this is what's really important to me, how can I communicate this to my roommates? How can we, you know, how are we going to approach conflict or those awkward moments. That's really key.

S.H.: Yeah, because what would you say are kind of the dynamics that can develop in those shared spaces when people live together that are like different characters and different backgrounds?

A.L.R.: Different everything, right? Different habits, like what, even as little as what time do you get up or go to bed or do you study in the room or do you study in the library because if I want to study in the room, that means my roommate probably can't watch TV or listen to music or have friends over. And that can be really, really tough. Just little things, right? When we live with people, we can be best friends with them outside, but then we become roommates with them and all of a sudden all their little quirks start to build and start to get a little irritating. And so learning how to navigate that and deal with that and just sort of appreciate that everybody has their sort of humanness about them, which is, you know, we're all human, we're all flawed, we all do things that are not so fun or endearing. That comes up a lot.

S.H.: Yeah, because how would you say can roommates communicate when those sort of problems arise? How should they address them?

A.L.R.: I think the tendency for a lot of students or a lot of people tends to be avoidance because it can be very awkward. We don't really know how to bring up something like this. We don't want to offend people. We don't want to call attention to the awkwardness, we don't really know how to do it. But the problem with avoiding it is that it really does just build resentment over time. And if we try and sweep it under the

rug, nothing is going to change, and it's just going to annoy us more and more. So I find it much more effective to approach somebody in a very, very non-judgmental manner in a very safe space, not when you're rushing off the class or whatnot. And just say, you know, this is sort of what's going on, this is the behavior that's happening in the room, this is how I feel about it, this is how it's affecting me, how can we sort of come to an agreement about how we're going to compromise on this. This compromise is key, especially when living with other people. I find it was really important in situations where you're talking about dynamics between two people. Yeah. Using I statements. So a lot of times people have a tendency of saying you know when when you do this it bothers me or when you do this it annoys me. Yeah. Whereas which which puts the other person on the defensive immediately right now you're doing something wrong, I'm telling you this, and you need to fix your behavior. Whereas if we approach it from an I statement, which is, I get frustrated when XYZ happens, then it becomes more of a problem solving. Okay, this is sort of the problem we have to confront together. Now, how can we work together to solve the problem as a team?

S.H.: Yeah, yeah. So you're mentioning the I statement, which I guess is kind of like a tool on how to communicate with others. Are there any other tools that could be applied to those kind of situations or that you would recommend?

A.L.R.: Again, I think it just goes back to being flexible and having sort of maybe tempered expectations. You know, maybe we have to also change our own behavior a little bit, right? Become a little less rigid in that way. Maybe we do need to study a little bit more at the library to give our roommates space when needed or appropriate or whatever is going on. But the constant communication I think is key because when we communicate, we don't let things build up to that resentment level.

S.H.: Yeah, yeah. And how would you approach those situations to prevent conflicts from happening. So how can I approach someone to, or like stating my kind of habits or how I like the cleanliness of my room, et cetera. Like how can I approach that from the beginning to prevent conflicts, but also not to seem to, I don't know, very much like this is how I want things done. How can I find like the pathway?

A.L.R.: Well, I know that a lot of, because I was also, I was trained to be an RA in college, and I know that RAs, and most college campuses, really the emphasis is on getting sort of like, I don't want to say rules, but sort of policies discussed and established right away. You know, what's important to us, right? What's important to me, what's important to you, like the first week of moving in together with someone sitting down and being like, you know, what really bothers you or, you know, what are your sort of deal breaker is? How do you like to keep the room? Like, does it bother you if the beds aren't made? Are you a night owl? Are you a morning person? Whose job is it going to be to, if it's like a bigger suite, you know, whose job is it going to be to maybe clean the bathroom, right? If we don't, if we have to clean the bathroom on our own. So really getting that out and discussed right out of the gate is going to be really important. And

going back to it all the time, you know, sitting down and just going, oh, remember a month ago we sort of talked about how we would both agree to make our bed every morning, so that was really important to us. And I know it gets very busy and hectic, but maybe we need to sort of revisit those policies that we both agreed on. And it sounds silly, but when we say a lot of times we may have to sign things like the whole green agreements. And just by the act of physically signing something, we do feel more accountable for it. Yeah, written down and we can see them on paper. And then we sign the paper, the contract. It does have more power than just two people saying, oh, yeah, we'll make our bed every day. Yeah, we'll make our bed every day. Okay, that sounds good. There's more of a contract when we sign things.

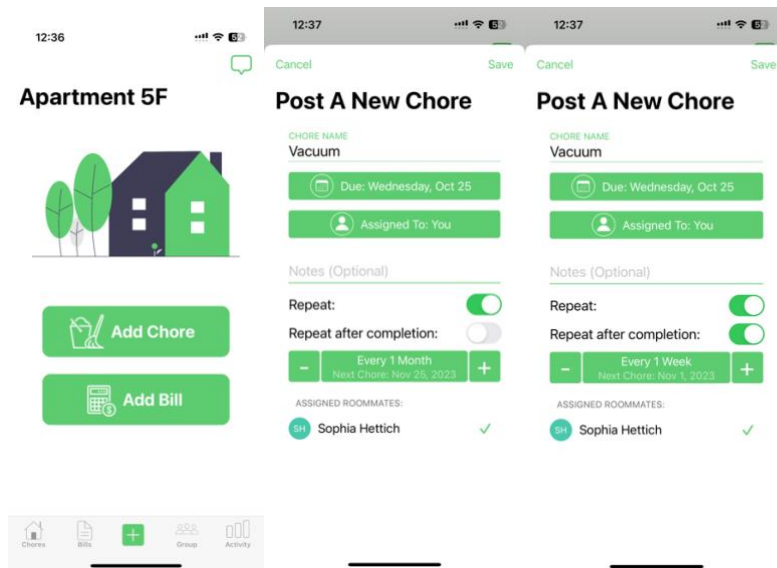
S.H.: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Okay, great. I think I'll jump into the example. So yeah, let's just say I've just moved into a new apartment with three other roommates. I get along with all of them except one who is a student five years younger than me. They seem to be very isolated and don't really want to participate in any group activities. I've also overheard multiple phone calls of them loudly arguing with what seem to be their parents. There have been multiple instances where they didn't clean their dishes for days at a time and generally left the kitchen behind and I've asked them nicely to please clean their stuff but nothing's been done. How can I approach them so one they clean their dishes and two they don't get too angry at me or like the situation doesn't escalate?

A.L.R.: I think this is sort of where the person-centered approach really has to take priority. I mean from a mental health perspective, it sounds like there is something maybe underlying going on with this roommate if she's isolating, not participating in group activities, arguing, leaving a mess in the kitchen. I think that coming from a very sensitive point of view and saying, first of all, before anything, I just want to check in on you. I just want to see how you're doing. I want to make sure you're okay. I want you to know that we are here for you if you need to talk or need help or support. What can we do to help you and support you?" Just allowing her that time and space to maybe say, yeah, you're right. I'm struggling. I'm not doing well. I'm overwhelmed and tired and have no energy and my anxiety is through the roof. And then talking about how to get her the supports that are needed And then going into the behaviors, you know What can we do to help you? Make sure that like the kitchen is clean after you use it and what can we do to help make sure that you're able to? sort of Perform your activities of daily living right those ADL switch If a person can't perform them, it usually is a sign of a bigger problem.

Usability Testing Screenshots and Notes

Usability Test #1

Screenshots:



Interviewer: How did you like the App?

Tester: I liked it a lot. I have never used an app like this to manage chores and stuff, so it was fun to test it out.

I: Would you use it again?

T: Yes I would. I think Ill actually ask my my roommates later today if they want to use it, I think it would help us a lot to save time and not message each other over text constantly.

I: What was the best part?

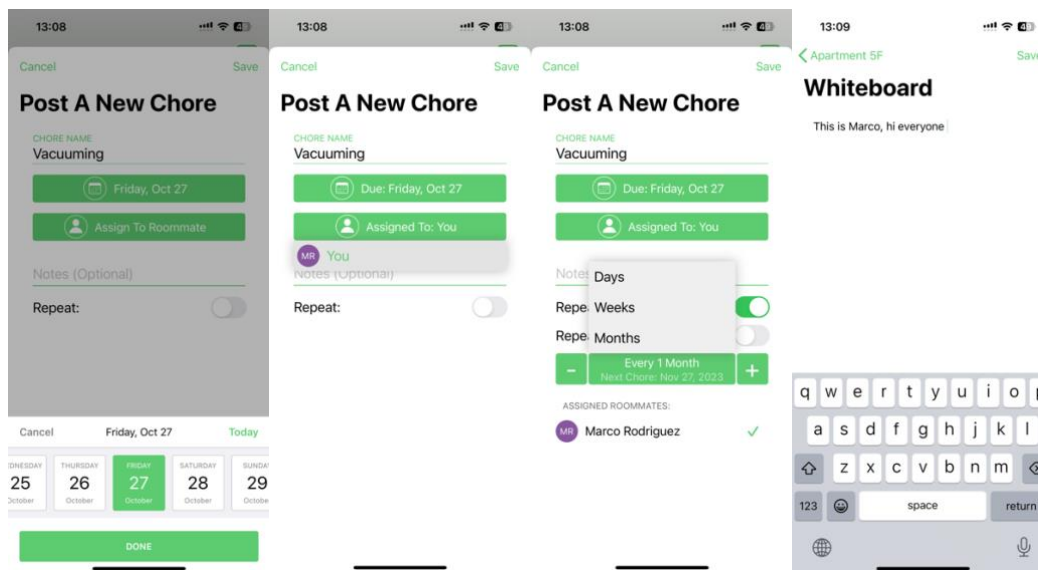
T: I liked how you can be very specific with the chores, setting up the time and date and assigning it to someone. Also having the option of repeating it is handy.

I: What part did you have most difficulty with?

T: Finding the Whiteboard to leave a message. I didn't like that function in general to be honest. I think a normal chat would have been much. More convenient. I wouldn't want to use the whiteboard again.

Usability Test #2

Screenshots:



Interviewer: How did you like the App?

Tester: It was okay. The design wasn't super clear. Or actually, it felt a bit repetitive. There was a lot of going back and forth as you saw.

I: Would you use it again?

T: Maybe. If my roommates like it sure.

I: What was the best part?

T: The chore board was pretty nice. We always have a lot of chores that need to be done and divided. Right now we have a paper version hanging in our kitchen, but a digital version might be more convenient.

I: What part did you have most difficulty with?

T: Knowing where I can find the bills and the chores was difficult. Also I could find the whiteboard because it quite was hidden.