What is a diary study?

• Participants collect data about events in-situ, as they happen

• **Asynchronous feedback**
  – Researchers collect repeated
  – responses to a set of standard questions

• **Synchronous elicitation**
  – participants record/capture events in real time
  – Often then used to prompt interview or discussion
Key Decisions

• What data are you going to collect?
• How are you going to collect it?
  – Easy for participants
  – Valid and reliable
• How are you going to ensure participation?
  – Getting people to commit
  – Reminding them
  – Giving them incentives
• How are you going to analyze the results?
Data Collection Media

- **Survey-style forms**
  - online or paper

- **Photographs / Video**
  - digital or disposable film camera
  - mobile phone, cameraphone

- **Audio recording**
  - handheld recorder
  - mobile phone (calling in)

- **Other**
  - Texting
  - Twitter?
Types of diary studies

- **Unstructured**
  - participants report on everyday activities
  - elicits general themes

- **Structured**
  - participants report on specific activities, answers more specific questions

- **Activity Sampling**
  - what are you doing right now?

- **Problem Report**
  - participants identify bugs and problems
Cultural probes

• associative, interpretively ambiguous, inspirational, subversive

• And other types:
  technology probes, urban probes, mobile probes, domestic probes, value probes....... as packet of material artifacts...as empirical data collection...as participatory input into design...as motivating sensibility
Coordinating the study

• Keeping people on track
  – give periodic reminders
    • Texting several times a day?
  – provide feedback about level of detail in response
  – Give progressive incentives
  – Supply surprise incentives / little gifts

• Adapting to experience
  – start analyzing as soon as early results arrive
  – periodically re-evaluate the diary format
Disadvantages of diary studies

• Can be tiresome for participants (to say the least!)
  – Leading to drop outs and poor data
• Participants will require reminders
  – Effort on your part
• Can get very expensive for long durations
• Amount of data can be overwhelming
Diary study packet components

(1) Introductory letter
• About the study: goals, motivation, and sponsorship
• General requirements for participants
• Compensation and warning of any potential harms
• Permission/consent letter
• Thanks and appreciation for their effort!

(2) Specific instructions

(3) Diary form / key incident form

(4) Recording device camera, camera phone, stickers
Analysis

• Asynchronous feedback
  – Track patterns in content
    • Temporal
    • thematic

• Synchronous elicitation
  – Combine with interview analysis

• Image analysis
  – Look for semantic patterns in visual data