Initial life at UF

BY - SAI BHAVANA NAMMI

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Executive summary

Problem covered:

In this project, we are addressing the problem of Initial setup and Onboarding Steps that the international students face when they first arrive to University of Florida. It has been one of the major concerns that has been identified from the data analysis done in the subsequent part of the project and thus, picked as the problem statement for this project.

Background information:

The problems that have been discussed in this project have been identified from the user interviews of three international students that were conducted to understand their pain points and hence, different themes were derived. Along with these user interviews, some real-world testing was also done from my side to understand these pain points a bit better. Using these as a starting point, I understood where and how I want my project to be focused upon and how I would like to have my solution interface to be designed.

Concise analysis:

In my project, every step was analyzed from the previous step so that there is no disconnect between the steps while designing my solution interface. I took references from the internet to see how some of the famous websites have been designed so that the users keep coming back to them. Along with this, I made sure that the pain points or the needs of the user are addressed in my solution in such a way that they also resolve the usability issues. The solution interface also addresses the UX factors that I found lacking in the resources that were referred to.

Main conclusion:

The project concludes with the design solution interface being designed for the user problems identified. They were designed keeping some of the guidelines discussed in the class along with the usability issues and UX factors being addressed in the solution interfaces. These solutions are one of the ways in which the problems can be solved. There exist many ways in which the interfaces can be designed which address the usability issues across the solutions.

Introduction

Travelling from your home country to a new place has always been a big step in anyone's life. Even if the person making this move has support in some form in the new place, they always end up finding themselves in a sticky position, where finding a solution and having resources to guide them is very important. Making such big moves are students who in pursuit of higher education are travelling across the continents to find a ground for themselves. This move comes with a share of difficulties that the students face.

This project is based on the higher theme where the problems faced by international students are addressed. International students travelling alone and arriving to UF for the first time discuss about their problems faced in various aspects of their new life, starting from setting up their home, utilities to finding their new classrooms, part-time jobs, etc.

The main objective of this project is to identify the main problems faced by the incoming international students and pick one of them to design a solution interface deemed fit in order to address the problem. It could belong to any one of the problems that these students struggle with.

Usability/UX Analysis

While trying to understand the problems faced by the international students when they first arrive to University of Florida there were some of the usability or UX issues that the users found while they were using the existing resources. Because of the resources being widespread, and not being consolidated in one place, the users were finding it difficult to use the information. They had to skip from one location to another to find connectivity among the information. This defeated the entire purpose of having usability as a factor in these resources.

Because of the decrease in usability of the resources, another factor that decreased along with it significantly was the effectiveness of them. Because the information that the students needed to get their queries solved was not clear and it reduced the purpose of trusting the sources.

Once, the factors like usability and effectiveness reduce in any application, then even the efficiency which is expected from the application gets tricky as well. The user expects their task to be completed in a specific time but if it takes more than the time, they are willing to spend even after understanding the design then the design failed to serve its purpose. In my testing, we saw some instances such as finding information about different housing options or the nearest banking options for their finances, the students were lost and had to navigate a lot to even get to some of the information that was related to their queries.

Because of the above issues, there were instances where the users and we forgot how the websites looked like after a point and had to struggle to navigate again to reach a specific point. This is what the memorability of an application means where the user can use the application even after coming back to it after some days. Last factor for usability that we considered was the utility of the resources as in how useful they were for the users, and we found out that many resources were outdated or not applicable to the incoming international students. This made the applications not so useful even if they were made at some exceptional quality.

What factors were considered in your interface?

In the simple interface that I designed to address these problems of usability. By making the initial opening page of the website simple, the user should not get confused with so many options. They should be able to see what options they have and how can they easily access them. This increases the usability of the application across, by the users. Along with the usability, making it memorable and reducing the number of redundant steps the user might have to perform were targeted and tried to work upon. Working on these factors allowed me to think and design in a way to improve the efficiency of the application as well.

How does your interface address these factors?

After carefully considering the usability factors from the interviews with our users and testing some of them myself, addressing some of these factors became the main goal of the design of the mockups that I came up with. Making them simple and easy to access is what I mainly tried to focus on. Making it simple allowed me to place the main elements such as tabs for easy navigability to different pages of the information. Keeping them constant in every page helps the user to go to another page, if necessary, which allows the users to remember where to go and come back to the application and not feel new even after not using for a long time. Highlighting the links, keeping the sub-topics in an easy viewable format in the webpages help the users to use the website more easily increasing its usability by the users.

Focus Statement

This user interview is to learn about the problems faced by international students arriving at the University of Florida and help improve their experience. This could be possibly achieved by learning how to help international students get adjusted in the new community and campus, help them to find housing, means of transport and provide support as they find themselves in new surroundings. The researcher hopes to identify areas of struggles for the international students and look for ways to address those issues. At the end, the goal is to make University of Florida a place where students from all backgrounds find their ground and support in their upcoming journey.

Focus Setting

Focus setting determines the path that was followed throughout the project in terms of user interview plans, collecting the pain points, taking out themes and user needs using proper guideline described in the below sections.

Below is the table which shows the user interview goals along with the user interview guide -

Introduction	Hello, I am Sai Bhavana Nammi and today we're here to interview international students at UF as a part of an assignment where we'll be talking about what struggles they faced when they first arrived to UF. We will also be video recording these interviews so that they can be referred to later in the assignments. The records would be uploaded on YouTube and the records would be kept confidential post assignment. These interviews would be no longer than 15-20 minutes long. With this interview, you will be helping us in giving insight about what the international students struggle the most with. We are hoping to identify issues and find some ways to address them, so that the UF experience of the international students can be improved in the future.
Key demographic questions	Let's start this interview with some basic information. If you are comfortable to talk about this, I would like you to tell me a bit about yourself. If you don't mind answering the following questions then, 1. How old were you when you first arrived at UF? 2. Have you ever lived abroad before?? If yes, where did you stay, for how long and how was it? If not, have you ever travelled abroad before? 3. Did you travel all the way from your home country to UF all alone or did you have anyone accompanying you? 4. Which country do you come from? 5. Would you like to tell me a bit more about the specific place you come from a bit more and about your home country?
Warm-up questions (factual answers)	You mentioned about travelling alone/ with someone from your home country. So, I would like you to tell me a bit more about your journey and arrival to UF.

- 1. Before the classes began, how much time did you have in your hands to settle down in a new place?
- 2. With many of the important tasks being ticked off back in your country, housing would have been something you would have looked for. So, do you stay off campus or on campus? How far is your place from the campus?
- 3. How did you find the place that you are staying in currently? Did UF help you in way or was it all your personal efforts?
- 4. After you first arrived here, anything that caught your immediate attention, and it took some time for you to adjust to it?
- 5. How was it setting up your place to make it more homely and make it more welcoming?

Main questions (openended discussions)

It might have been a very big decision for you to come to a new county and study here, so naturally you might have had a lot of things and doubts going on in your mind before your very long journey. So,

- 1. What were your main concerns before arriving at UF?
- 2. Were there any unexpected issues that you faced at beginning of coming to UF? Did you feel that you were under-prepared or worried about how to resolve the issues?
- 3. Do you think any of the above issues could have been resolved by the university?
- 4. How did you cope up with the initial stress of moving to a new place, starting school in a new atmosphere?
- 5. How do you think UF could have helped you make your big transition smoother?

This pretty much sums everything that I wanted to ask you. But is there anything that you would specifically like to talk about, that you think I missed out asking. Please share if you have any such thoughts.

Design Probe(s)

While answering, if the user stops in between for more than 10 seconds, prompt them: "You can remember to think aloud."

If the user is still stuck about what to say for more than 30 seconds, prompt them: "Would you like to tell me what you are thinking about?"

If the user still can't figure out what to say and if it looks that no progress would be made for more than 90 seconds, complete the task, and move on to the next question: "Ok, thank you so much for giving the question a try. Let's move on to the next question."

From the data gathered from the interviews, I created a Data Analysis Plan as follows –

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN:

The main goal is to identify the most important themes from the interviews of the three international students that have been conducted. These interviews would be treated as qualitative with data coming from the video, audio and the transcript notes taken during the interviews.

The plan which I have decided to follow upon for the data analysis is as follows –

Step-1: Collection of data

All the data that would be further used in the assignment has been collected from the interviews that were taken. This was done by taking notes during the interviews as well as listening to the audios later to transcribe them for my analysis.

Step-2: Going through the data

From all the data I collected in my notes, I read them two to three times to understand what exactly each of the interviewee was trying to express. This helped me get the problems faced by the students.

Step-3: Finding similarities in the data

From all the problems identified above, I tried to look for similarities between the problems and tried to stack them in different categories.

Step-4: Categorize into themes

All the categorizations done in the above step helped me get general themes for each specific category. I revised my data, so that any missing problem can be categorized into the themes.

Affinity Diagram

Affinity Diagram is used to organize a large set of ideas into clusters depending on the similarities they show. The following affinity diagram is created from the information collected from the interviews conducted -



The above Miro board can be accessed using the following link as well - https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVPUCbHgo=/

User Personas

User personas help in understanding the users better because of the different details being represented in an easy-to-understand format. Since, all my users are primary users, I decided to stick to a similar format to show their persons. It shows basic information about my users, their personality and their wants and needs along with the frustrations they faced.







User Needs

From the user interviews, I was able to get the user to express their needs in simpler words so as to understand what their pain points are and what did they find difficult in their process of arriving to UF for the first time.

- 1. Parth, an international graduate student traveling to Gainesville to pursue his master's, needs to have initial information about his courses, professors, and his department so that he can register for his classes according to his interests and find classes easily on the first day of college.
- Prapti, an international student traveling to Gainesville for the first time to pursue her master's, needs to know about all the steps she must complete before registering for her classes and starting college so that she does not miss out on any important task that has to be performed by her for her onboarding in the university.
- 3. Layla, an international student traveling to Gainesville for the first time to study filmmaking, needs to know where she can find a bank nearest to her place of stay or in the university so that she does not have to struggle with her finances in the initial days of her arrival.

Scenarios

From the user interviews, I was able to generate user personas and their needs. Based on this information, I was able to create the following scenarios about my users.

Scenario 1 -

Parth, an international graduate student from India, after settling his visa, transportation, and housing, had a major responsibility of looking over his academic curriculum before starting his classes. Since, he did not know anyone among his friends who studied in UF, he was not sure whom to ask about accurate information. He decided to look up for information about his courses, professors. But it turned out to be very tricky for him as he was not able to get the information in one piece. This made him to search in different places, but he was not sure about the authenticity of the data. This created so much confusion

about the courses he would be taking in the semester. The college website with all information under different tabs gives access to the information Parth seeks at one place.

Scenario 2-

Prapti, an international student from India would be travelling to Gainesville for her master's degree. She and her family are all set for her first international travel. But they are a bit nervous about her travel, as she would be travelling alone form India to Gainesville. As a precautionary measure, she wants to be sure if she has done everything from her side before reaching the college and starting her classes. She reaches out to her friends to know if she is on the right path but all of them gave different answers. Out of confusion, she tried to look up on internet to cross-check her preparedness, but she did not find much information that could help her. Rather, she was confused at many stages at lack of proper information for onboarding of new students and the initial information they might need. The college website with proper guidance and the necessary steps in one place would help her to understand if she is missing any steps and if she needs to do something in addition to what she has already done.

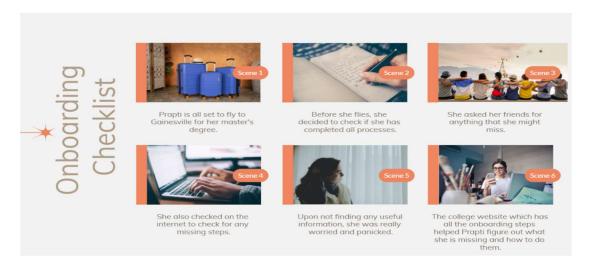
Scenario 3 -

Layla, an international student who out of her interest to learn more in the field of filmmaking decided to move to Gainesville from Seoul, South Korea to pursue her education. In Seoul, she used to live with her parents, so she did not have to do everything by herself. She had her parents' support in every step she had to take. So, the decision of moving to the United States was a very big one for her. Although, everything was somehow managed including her stay in Gainesville, she and her parents were very worried about her management of finances. So, she decided to search a bit about how banking system works and what she must do to get an account setup. But she found little support and since, it had to do with finances, she did not want to rely on any other unverified source of information. So, she had very little information on how she would manage her finances in the initial days. The college website along with information about academics, initial setup, etc providing information about such necessities would be of so much help to Layla in understanding how banking system works and how to setup her account and get going.

Storyboards

Storyboards are a visual representation of the user needs and the scenarios of the problems faced by them. The below storyboards explain the scenarios of my users and their user needs. These formats have been used to make them visually appealing and to present the stories in an easier way to understand.



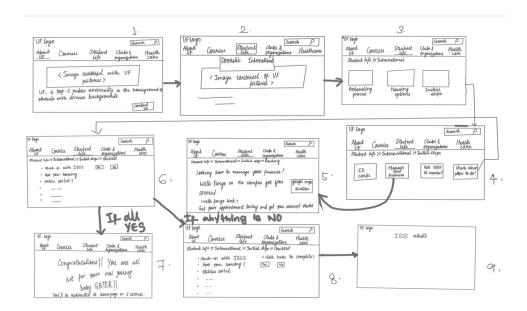




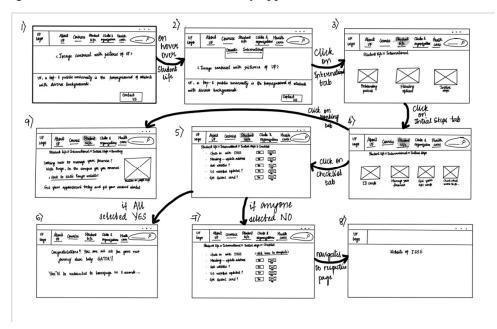
Brainstorming of design solutions

Keeping in mind about the user needs, personas and the scenarios which were gathered from the conducted interviews, I was able to generate the initial wireflow. Wireflows are a combination of wireframes and flowcharts and are very useful in showing the screens and flow of things where they remain dynamic.

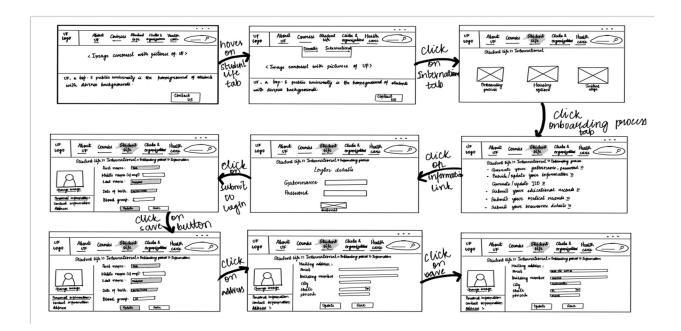
In the first wireflow, it was designed in a very trivial manner which showed overview of the design solution that I was thinking for the problem statement. It showed initial designs of the screens and the features they would have.



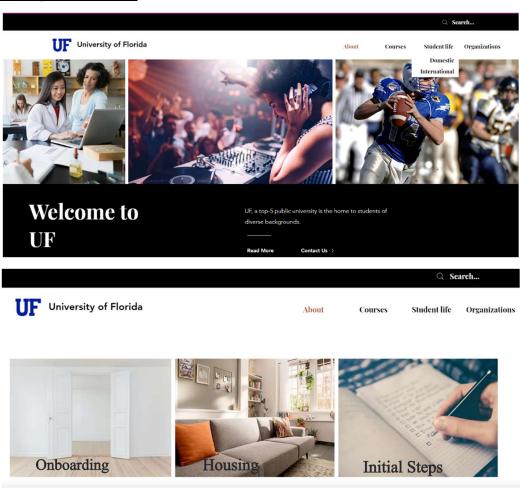
The below wireflow is a revised one of the previous wireflow. In this wireflow, the designs of the screens and the features have been improved to make them look better and make them easier to understand. Certain changes were made to the screens so that they appear more uniform and neater.

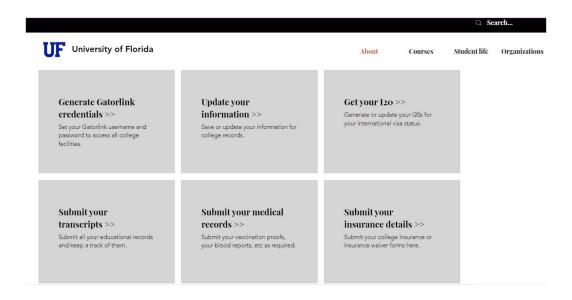


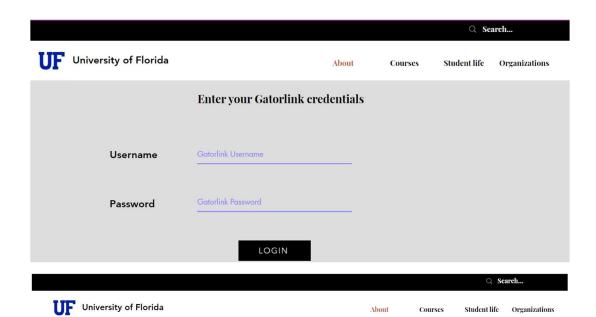
The below wireflow is a new one which shows different process from the above wireflows. The above wireflow show the steps for a tab titled as 'Initial Steps' and this wireflow shows steps for a different tab which is titled as 'Onboarding Process'. It shows what steps can be followed to get to a part of Updating information in my solution.



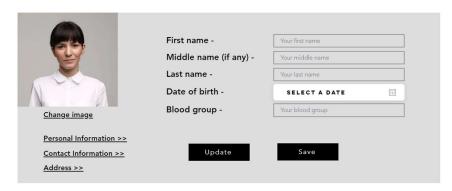
Final design solution







Your information

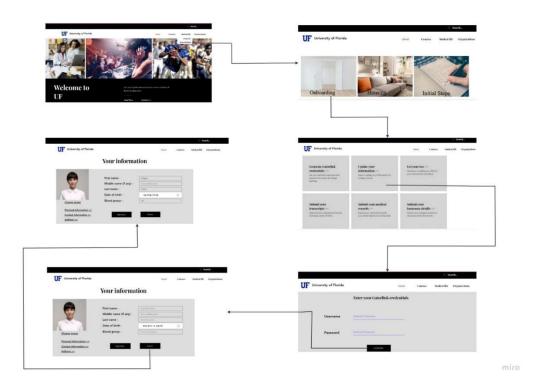




Your information



The flow between the mockup screens



Miro board link which shows the links between the different screens of the mockup - https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVPNyZX4c=/?share_link_id=906828553834

In the above mockup screens, we can see the following activities happening -

1. An international student who is our primary user would open the website, where he can see necessary information about the university along with options to navigate across different tabs. Upon hovering over Student Life, they get the option to go to facilities offered for international students.

- 2. Under the international criteria, they can see various options to choose according to the queries they would have or the tasks they want to complete on the website.
- 3. I have taken the example of Onboarding Process, where the student will have different options to choose such as to generate their gatorlink credentials, to update their information, etc.
- 4. Once they select their option, they will be directed to the login page where they would have the option to login to proceed further or generate their gatorlink credentials if they do not have one.
- 5. We have used the example of Updating their information where they can enter all the general information about themselves and save or update it as required using the text-fields, buttons, date-picker, etc.

Rationale for design decisions

From the above sections, the usability/UX factors play an important factor in designing the interface right from the wireframes up to the mockups. To keep it simple and clean, I chose a very minimal color scheme for my mockups and tried to keep it very light on the information. But I chose to use some images to make it more visually appealing and give a sense of the important activities that happen in the university.

Along with this, a user generally tries to search for information and to make it more accessible, the search tab was placed on the right most corner where the user tends to go to search, as a force of habit over the years. Along with that, to make the navigation easy for the users, I used the tabbed options on the top so that the different options, the user can get information from, is easily visible.

To make it more memorable for the user, the portion of the search tab along with the tabbed menu on the top stays the same on all pages so that the user can see these clearly and knows where to go if he wants to perform an action like Search on the new page. In the next page, images have been used to show the options that are available so that it is easy for the user to identify and understand from the images about what they can expect from the next pages. Similarly, a structured format of the available options makes it visually appealing and easy to read from. This is the thought process I followed in the next screen to show the steps for the Onboarding Process.

In the upcoming screens, I tried to implement a structed format of the form where the user has easy to enter text fields to login or to update or save their information in the application. The placeholder texts, easy to read buttons and labels make it easy to understand about what is being expected from the user about entering the data in the respective fields. Using a date picker instead of a normal text field helps minimize the error of entering the wrong date formats and makes it easy to enter the date in the correct format.

Similarly, all the buttons should have proper titles on them so that it is clear for the users to understand what action would be performed by clicking any button. Similarly, the hyperlinks that have been mocked on the screens have been underlined and arrows like structure '>>' have been used to indicate that they are clickable, and they would navigate the user to a new location.

Such design rationales and thought processes helped me come up with my wire flows and mockup screens for my interface of the application that I would like to use as solution for the international students coming to UF for the first time.

CEN 5728 User Experience Design Participant Acknowledgment Form

Submitted by: Sai Bhavana Nammi

Participants: By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have participated in a focus group or user test for the above group related to the above course on the date indicated below. In addition, you acknowledge that you are aware that you are bound by UF's honor policy in signing this form to indicate that you have actually participated in a focus group or user test for the class as required.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date of Participation	Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date of Participation
PARTH SHAH	fandr.	9-18-2022			
T PAVAN KUMAR	Pavankamas	9-18-2022			
PRAPTI AKOLKAR	graphi Dualkani.	9-18-2022			

Group Members: please initial below to indicate that your group members acknowledge that you are aware that you are bound by UF's honor policy in students signing this form only if they have actually participated in a focus group or user test for the class as required.						
(group	SBN					
members'						
initials)						