

# Rutgers Continuing Studies Website

## Design Exploration - Executive Summary



User Experience Design I  
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Our group was asked to design a mobile solution with the purpose of recruiting students for continuing education programs, supporting them while they are enrolled, and maintaining a relationship throughout the process. My group, upon assessing the request, decided not to limit users to accessing this application on a mobile device, and design the product as a mobile friendly web application. We then went through multiple exercises to formulate an informed concept.

### 1. Contextual Inquiry

Members of the team split into groups of two and canvased specific areas to interview potential users. One group traveled to the Johnson and Johnson campus to interview employees who had obtained higher education degrees about their thoughts on continuing education. The other group went to Rutgers student centers on both Livingston and Busch campuses to informally interview graduate and undergraduates about their opinions on registering for classes, online class support, and other experiences they've had with the university.

The first group discovered that the two most important aspects of continuing education to working professionals aside from the programs themselves are time they spend searching for and enrolling in a class, and communication with their peers and instructors. The Rutgers campus interviews revealed that the most important issues to students were money, the design and functionality of the online support systems, and the process of registering for classes.

### 2. Personas

We created three personas, or profiles, of humans that we felt would be our core target audience:

1. **The professional** - This person has a full time job, is busy with their family life, and is considering going back to school to move up in their company or change careers.
2. **The undergrad** - This person is currently enrolled in college, is worried about accruing debt, and is more concerned with finding a job than continuing education.
3. **The graduate student** - This person is already enrolled in a graduate program, but may want to take more classes outside of the program depending on their personal goals.

### 3. Journey Mapping and Product Idea Development

Using the findings from our interviews and persona developments, we created a journey map of each user's anticipated experiences while using the application. We focused on the actions the user would take, and what opportunities we saw in each action to improve their experience from what is already in place.

These included:

Actions	Opportunity
<p><b>Before Enrolling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reviewing Classes/Professors</li> <li>-Checking Costs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Before Enrolling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Testimonials / Descriptions</li> <li>-Financial calculators and aid resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>During Enrollment Process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Registering</li> <li>-Paying for Classes</li> </ul>	<p><b>During Enrollment Process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“One Stop” registration</li> <li>-Financial payment portal upgrade</li> </ul>
<p><b>After Enrollment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Group Projects</li> <li>-Job Searching</li> </ul>	<p><b>After Enrollment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Improved support for group projects</li> <li>-Rutgers-exclusive job portal</li> </ul>

#### 4. IA/UX/Data and Design

Utilizing the process of “Design Studio”, our team sketched out concepts individually using pen and paper. We spent time critiquing each other’s ideas, filtering what we did and did not like from each concept. Breaking into teams of two, we repeated the process, discovering that each team had come up with two almost-identical solutions. We then polished and combined these into a definitive outline of the site’s features:

- I. Landing page
  - a. Options for users to define their needs and interests such as current educational or work status. These selections then bring the user to a page customized to feature programs and departments that aligned with their choices
  - b. A link to bypass these modifiers and see all available options
  - c. Option for user to create account or log in to existing account
- II. Course and program listing (personalized or not)
- III. Course or program detail page, containing
  - a. All classes needed to graduate or obtain certificate
  - b. All of the details for the class (instructor, dates and times, cost, credits, location, syllabus, etc.)
  - c. Link back to all courses
  - d. Links to financial tools, resources for aid, registration and application
  - e. Information about potential careers related to the course
  - f. Testimonials regarding classes, course, and professors
- IV. Registration
  - a. All course info available here as in course page
  - b. Improvements to current Rutgers’ registration (further analysis required)
- V. Financial section
  - a. Billing details, payment options, current balance and finance calculator
  - b. Links to financial aid and resources
- VI. “Not Sakai”
  - a. Improved support for group projects
  - b. Improved design and aesthetics
  - c. Overall usage and usability improvements that merge features of several current products (further analysis required)

#### 5. Prototype and User Testing

Due to time constraints we created a prototype that featured three of the six sections listed above: Landing page, course/program detail page and registration. Splitting into two groups again, we developed two sets of wireframes detailing two distinct ideas of how the user would log in and access these pages. We then observed and interviewed five participants as we walked them through the process of selecting relevant information about themselves, selecting a course and discovering its details, and finally registering for a particular class. We interviewed five people in total, 3 undergraduate students and 2 graduate students.

We began by A/B testing, asking the participant to follow the same path on each design, and sharing their thoughts on both. The participants were asked to answer questions about their interests on the home page, examine the results on the course page and discuss the available information there, and finally register for a class and share their thoughts on the process. After two participants provided generally the same feedback, we decided to move to test only on the second design, which ended up testing more positive than the first.

## 6. Findings

Our interviews led us to conclude that the course information page and registration page could use an equal amount of rework. For course registration, although we attempted to make available all of the information that we thought a prospective student would want to see, some of the information that should have been front and center was not, and vice versa. Registering for courses also had the same problem. Also, by adding all of this extra information, we had failed to make the process seem simpler, by overloading the student with information, and not having a clear direction of the steps they would need to take in order to complete the task. On the landing page, some students took issue with the wording that was being used in order to get the personalized information.

We also received positive feedback. Users seemed enthused about the idea of having course offerings and suggestions catered to what they identified on the home page. They also were pleased with the fact that we attempted to add as much information as possible on the course information page, particularly the modal window that included course reviews, professor information, and the syllabus and other course materials. Lastly they like the idea of having all of the information and actionable areas like finance and registration in one space. Rather than spread out over several different websites. Overall we learned that although our general concept is sound, we need to rethink the location of certain types of information, make the steps and path to complete the task more clear, and change the labeling and language on our landing page.

## 7. Heuristics

Lastly, we performed a predictive evaluation of the prototype using Jacob Nielson's 10 usability heuristics. We discovered 15 issues in thirty minutes, rating the issues from 0 to 4, 0 being not an issue, or something we did well, and 4 being an issue that must be resolved before we can move on. Of these 15 issues, 2 were rated at 3, 4 were rated at 2, 5 rated at 1, and 4 at 0. These issues greatly aligned with the issues we discovered during usability testing. Below are the top five problems, the heuristic they represent and how we intend to improve them.

### **3 - Users confused with wording and labels**

*Match between system and real world / Consistency and standards*

Improve language and labels on the home page and throughout the application.

### **3 - No clear way to navigate back through the system or change answers**

*User control and freedom / Visibility of Status*

Provide back buttons, breadcrumbs, and a way for user to change information entered on home page

### **2 - No way to see which courses you have registered for or picked already**

*Recognition rather than recall*

Show the user what options and classes or programs they picked or chosen throughout the experience

### **2 - Information provided too confusing, not in the right places, hard to find**

*Aesthetic and minimalist design*

Restructure the information and layout of the registration page

### **2 - No way for user to be sure how to proceed or what each link does**

*Help and documentation*

Add tooltips and other helper information throughout the course and registration pages

## 8. Conclusion

Our overall idea was well received. We are confident that with more time we would be able to create a robust product that suits the needs originally stated in the RFP. If given this time, we would conduct further interviews with a broader group of people, including professors. They are one group we neglected to focus on, and I believe they would be a strong source of information that would lead to the improvement of the application. For the prototype, we would make the changes in design and structure as noted, and create several different paths to learn about how users would organically use the system, instead of forcing them on a linear path. I would very much like to continue working on this project if given the chance, as the ideas behind this solution have proven to be strong. The details need much more time to iron out.