The Enhancement of Student Outreach to School Events

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Introduction

We considered several projects during our brainstorming sessions. We browsed the Internet for inspiring products and kickstarters, revisited projects from class, and shared projects we really enjoy; we focused on problems and projects that other members got excited about and took note of them for later, no ideas were shut down. There are many problems in our troubled world and we contemplated addressing the California drought, dining on campus, reserving various spaces on campus (e.g. study and conference rooms), and student health in the dorms and apartments. Post-brainstorm, in order to narrow our project into one singular idea, a poll was created on our Facebook page and by majority vote, we settled on a Student Event Insider (SEI) website redesign. Not only was this project feasible for the quarter, but also our group passionately agreed that this was a problem that should be addressed.

The website is not a complete failure, granted it does have a solid framework and it is decently usable. SEI was designed to be the central events information internet resource for students. It is managed by the Center for Student Involvement, whose goal is to encourage students to be involved in their campus outside of the classroom. The SEI website promotes entertainment, music, arts, fitness, job-fairs, seminars, volunteering, and other various events that are offered on campus. There is also a tab at the top that allows you to filter events by college,

weekend, all events, opportunities, or various categories. Students also have the option to subscribe to the SEI emails to have events sent directly to their university emails. Lastly, UCSD students and faculty have the option to submit an announcement through their UCSD login and have their event featured on the website.

Initially, we identified three major surrounding problems that contribute to the website's lack of success; the first being that it is missing a great number of events. UCSD hosts a plethora of social, educational, cultural, and pre-professional events but many of these events do not make Fit to the website.The second major problem is that the groups that host these events, such as Resident Advisors, Student Orgs, and Greek Life often promote their events within their own groups and do not expand to the wider student population. The various colleges each have their own method of informing their students of events and contact only those within their college. The colleges individual messages contributes to a general lack of consistency in event information. The final problem that came to the group's attention is that many students do not know that SEI exists.

These problems are what drove our Elevator Pitch. Our goal was to make events more accessible to students and we thought we could achieve this by making students feel as though the events are personalized to them. We received a lot of valuable feedback from our Elevator Pitch and used it to guide our next meeting. Some valuable feedback we received from multiple submissions was to consider those individuals that live off-campus, making the page a centralized hub of event information, and to push for something that goes beyond simply being a directory for events. Classmates also emphasized that they wanted to know who else was going to events, and most popular social media website on the internet, Facebook, does exactly that.

Interview Methods

1. Student Events Insider

To help gain insight into the problem of the Student Events Insider (SEI) page we interviewed Lori at the Center for Student Involvement. Lori's job is to give the final say on which events get posted on the SEI website, which is done purely through email and at the whim of the student organizations and clubs that wish to use the site. She shared several issues regarding her experience with SEI. The most prevalent issues that we discussed included the preference of many groups for Facebook over other "less social" websites, the lack of a centralized hub for all event posting at UCSD, and the desensitization of students to flyering and other common forms of advertising. Lori supported the idea of adding social features to the website, such as forums and image posting, in order to decrease student apathy and draw in a larger crowd of users. She also responded very positively to our idea of a tagging system to organize and personalize which events users see on the front page of the site, further suggesting that we could allow the website moderators to create new tags and add them to events that get posted.

2. Commuter Center Interview

Furthermore, we interviewed and voice recorded the ACTA--a funded Associated Student group at UCSD, which included the commuter board and transfer board representatives. These board members had created many events that reached out to transfers and commuters, which allowed those who just started the UCSD experience to be part of a social community. As we progressed into our conversation, the members indicated that they reached out to students

through face-to-face interactions, flyering inside classrooms, and advertisements on Triton TV featured in Price Center. However, Facebook was their main approach to get in contact with other students at UCSD, because it allowed students to easily message them if they had any questions or interest in their future events. Furthermore, they also mentioned that they mainly used the Facebook page "Free Food Brigade", which vastly increased the attendance of students at their events, especially at free food events. This led us to think of adding "free" and "food" as tags for events posted on the website and further assured that we should integrate Facebook into our website redesign.

3. Resident Advisors

It was essential to interview Resident Advisors because not only do they work closely with students, but they also have experience in planning, advertising, and bringing students to events. Based on one of our original target populations of transfers, we decided the RAs from the Village, the on-campus transfer community, would be ideal to interview. We first interviewed MC (name abbreviated for confidentiality purposes) a two time RA who spent one year with Warren and her second year with the Village. Within her staff, MC is known for their high resident attendance at programs and vast knowledge of the university. During our interview, MC gave insightful knowledge as to the needs of transfer students. She explained that because transfers are older, they want programs that are quick, easy, and accessible; in addition, they are more likely to attend events that will benefit them professionally.

MC is also an active member of Kaibigang Pilipin, the UCSD Filipino cultural club, in which she was involved in the planning and hosting of events. She explained that food, especially free food, was a huge motivator for students to attend an event. MC used Facebook as

her primary publicity method. She stated that, when promoting your event, "it's important to keep the description events short and focus on the perks or people get bored" (MC Transcription) because students lead busy lifestyles and need quick information. In regards to Facebook, she said it was not necessary to self-promote these events with large turnouts because people bring their friends to events with them. Facebook is her primary advertizing resource in regards to RA events as well and even though not all residents have Facebook, she encourages them to bring their friends and roommates.

During our interview, MC was asked if she uses SEI to which she replied with a confused look. After showing her the website she confirmed that she had in fact seen it but did not know the name and had never used the site. She had no particular distaste for the site she simply learns about events from other means (e.g. word-of-mouth, Facebook, newsletters, etc) and has no real need for the site. Lastly, we asked what could be changed that would motivate her to use the site and she reaffirmed the data we received from previous interviews that the site was crowded with too much information. She also suggested that RAs need to know about this so that they can encourage their residents to use the site.

MC is not the only RA that does not use SEI; our own recently elected Associated Students President and current Village RA Dominick Suvonnasupa admitted to unsubscribing from the SEI emails in our interview. He claimed the email subscriptions were messy and over-full, and were therefore overwhelming to look through. His primary source of event knowledge was Facebook and the AS networks, such as their marketing department. As for his RA events, he relies on a resident listserve with their emails and door-to-door/word-of-mouth promotions to reach his residents. He warned that when trying to promote events it is important

to know what demographic one is trying to reach because "a lot of times when you try to reach everybody, you end up really reaching nobody" (DSTranscription). This later led to us to reflect on some feedback from Prof. Hollan post-elevator pitch that we should consider a target population.

4. Greek Member

Early on, we wanted to gain knowledge about the lives of students in specific organizations, including Greek. We were able to interview "HC," a sorority member, about her involvement and her attendance at events on campus and the way Greek events are planned. The biggest issue with organizing Greek events, according to HC, is working out dates so that they conflict with the fewest events hosted by other fraternities and sororities. The purpose for this is that many Greek events are philanthropies, and therefore try to get as much attendance as possible to boost donations; this causes nearly every weekend to be packed with often-conflicting events. The primary source of attendance at Greek events seems to be Greeks, as well as personal friends of Greeks. HC said further that the promotional members of the sorority will try to branch out invitations as far as possible, to try to gain the biggest possible presence. Parties and other small events, however, must be limited in their turnout so as to avoid becoming unruly, packed, or otherwise unmanageable. When asked how the presence of alcohol would affect attendance, HC responded saying that she personally did not mind, though she has friends who do not like to drink or be around alcohol in general. She did not believe it was a problem that could be remedied in terms of Greek socials, due to the high presence of alcohol in general, and the fact that it would not change as a result of opposition. HC liked the idea of a personalized app or webpage, which could help her find the clubs and events she does not hear

about from Greek life. She is not extremely involved in the planning of events within her sorority, which has a "social media chair" that handles all public relations, but she believed that Facebook integration with campus events would be a massive improvement.

5. Student Org Officers

We also interviewed "SA", the public relations (PR) officer for a local a cappella group. SA had frequently used the SEI page to post and discover events on campus; she shared both her experience using SEI and the knowledge she has gained through her position as a PR officer. In terms of integrating social aspects into the site, she suggested giving accounts a first name only to add personalization but maintain anonymity. In terms of advertising, SA was a fan of saturating social media with tons of reminders that a certain event is imminent, so as to assure maximum public awareness; posters, flyers, and Facebook posts are all valid techniques for promoting our redesigned website. SA also commented on the presence of alcohol at events; she pointed out that she does not allow it to influence whether or not to go to an event, but that she would like to know beforehand so as to mentally prepare for unruly people. She also noted that many others who are more pro- or anti-alcohol will be more strongly affected by the awareness of it before an event, as shown in the graph below.

Drinks
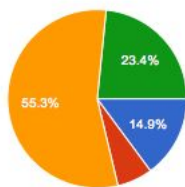
"I would rather alcohol not be served at social events I attend."	7	14.9%
"I am less likely to attend a social event knowing alcohol will be served."	3	6.4%
"I am indifferent to alcohol being served at social events I attend."	26	55.3%
"I am more likely to attend a social event knowing alcohol will be served."	11	23.4%
"I only attend social events that serve alcohol."	0	0%

This led us to think of a notification that could be placed next to certain events which would include an icon representing alcohol, to be added by the website's moderators.

6. Website Walkthrough

To get a hands-on analysis of the website, we interviewed and video recorded "IG" while he navigated the SEI website. His interaction with the site revealed that many of our own critiques were accurate, as they were reinforced by an unbiased observer. He concluded that many of the website's features required improvement, removal, or were not where they were needed. One example that was pointed out by IG was the clutter of the main page. There was an extra row of buttons at the bottom unnecessarily blocking part of the content from the user, as well as the carousel of events shown on the right side of the page which took up even more space. He also pointed out the need for a search feature, or at least a filtering system for events. In particular he wanted to be able to sort the events by date, venue, or general themes (e.g. sports, music, etc), as the categories provided were both arbitrary and unrelated. While looking at them, he bluntly stated "I'm not going to search by these categories." One aspect he did like about the site, but wanted more of, was the integration of Facebook for a more seamless connection to social media. Because most UCSD students use Facebook as the standard for finding and RSVPing for events, it was convenient and realistic in terms of what the general public wanted.

Survey Methods

Our survey was designed to collect small pieces of information from the general student body that could be utilized out of context to help assess student preferences and issues with regards to planning and going to events at UCSD. We found out what motivated students to go to events by asking questions assessing their likelihood of going to an event given certain

conditions (e.g. "Are you more likely to go to an event alone? With another person? With a small group? Or with a large group?"), the data collected from this question is displayed below.
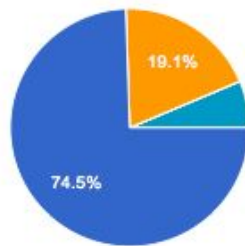
Friends
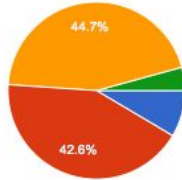
"I go to events regardless of whether or not I have someone to go with."	4	8.5%
"I am more likely to attend a social event with another person."	20	42.6%
"I am more likely to attend a social event with a small group (3-5 people)."	21	44.7%
"I am more likely to attend a social event with a large group (6+ people)."	2	4.3%

This question helped us understand that students tend to go to events with a person they already know or with a small group of people with whom they are familiar. Few people surveyed stated that they prefer to go to events alone or in large groups of six people or more. This data is part of what inspired the idea to offer ride sharing options to students. The idea was also strongly supported by Eric, one of the COGS102C teacher's assistant, who expressed to our group his own personal struggles with this issue when he was attending UCSD as an undergrad.

We also asked students how they prefer to hear about events to try and understand the resources that students were currently utilizing. About 75% of the students surveyed stated that their preferred resource for finding out about events is through Facebook. "Other students/friends" was the second most preferred resource accounting for less than 20% of those surveyed. The data collected here is what inspired us to integrate Facebook into our website instead of trying to create a standalone site. This would also reduce cost of implementation and maintenance of the site which is a concern that was addressed during our interview with Lori at the Center for Student Involvement.

How do you prefer to hear about events?

Facebook	35	74.5%
Student Events Insider	0	0%
Other students/ Friends	9	19.1%
Library Walk	0	0%
Flyers	0	0%
Other	3	6.4%

Another piece of information that we collected in our survey were preferences for names of certain tags that we created through a brainstorming session. We tried to get a feel for what terms were more appealing to students by polling their general interest in them. The data collected is presented below.

Which tags would you be interested in?
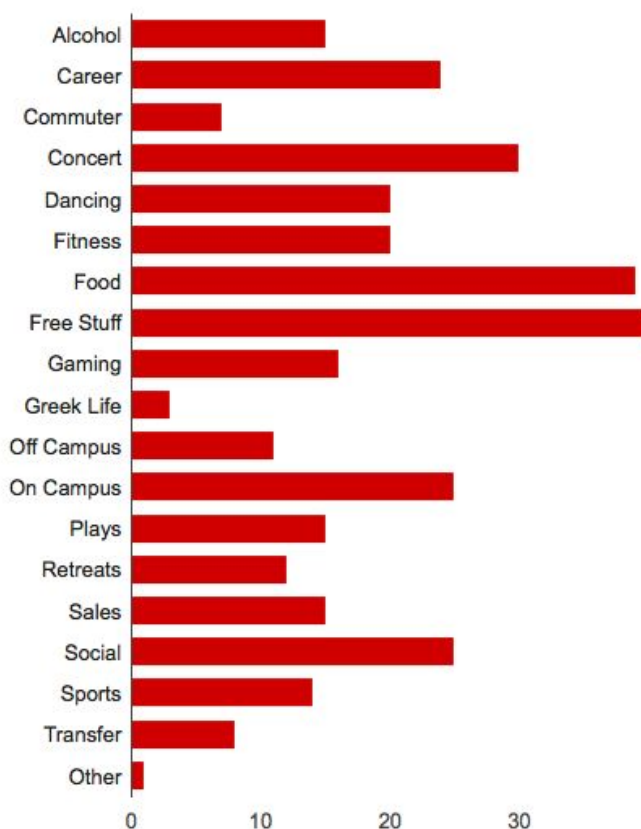
Alcohol	15	31.9%
Career	24	51.1%
Commuter	7	14.9%
Concert	30	63.8%
Dancing	20	42.6%
Fitness	20	42.6%
Food	39	83%
Free Stuff	40	85.1%
Gaming	16	34%
Greek Life	3	6.4%
Off Campus	11	23.4%
On Campus	25	53.2%
Plays	15	31.9%
Retreats	12	25.5%
Sales	15	31.9%
Social	25	53.2%
Sports	14	29.8%
Transfer	8	17%
Other	1	2.1%

Through this process we were better able to understand what terms may be too broad or too narrow to be used for tags. Due to the concern that new tags would eventually have to be created, we needed a solution to how the tags would be managed. When we discussed this concern with Lori, at the Center for Student Involvement, she had stated that their office could manage this system if it were to ever be employed.

Results: The Three Problems

As we were designing our web application, we kept in mind the three major problems that Students Events Insider had and came up with solutions in our redesign.

First, the lack of events on the page on the page is mostly due to the poor communication between SEI and other student organizations. Due to this, SEI allows student organizations to promote their events through their site through a lengthy submission form. This submission form discourages students from using SEI as a way of promoting their site as they have no incentive to fill out a lengthy form to a group that no one has heard about. This problem of lack of events can be addressed by giving student organizations an incentive to submit their events to our site. To give students organizations the proper motivation we created a reward system in collaboration with other student orgs, as well as making a name for our site. We will also find a way to simplify the submission form, while still getting the essential details of that event.

*Event submission form for SEI

Second, events are promoted within groups not throughout the school. As we have

mentioned earlier, student organizations have no incentive to use SEI and the lengthy submission

form discourages them from promoting their events through the site. This lack of communication

between both parties results in less promotion, hence a smaller attendance rate. To address this

problem, we wanted to give student organizations an incentive to collaborate with us by creating

a rewards program. This system will challenge students to participate in UCSD events in order to

earn achievements and compete with their fellow students. Achievements are tailored to the tags

they have picked to sort their events, and can be earned by linking their Facebook with Student

Pulse to share the event using Facebook's location tagging. This feature will push students to be

more active in campus events, and boost friendly competition between users of the site.

Finally, publicizing the site was a significant problem for SEI. We were searching for a

way to promote our name so that students would use our site more often. After seeing our survey

data, we came to the conclusion that Facebook would be a great way to promote our site, as almost all our survey participants said that they would prefer to hear about events through Facebook. In collaboration with other student organizations, we would ask them to put a link to our website in the facebook events page, as well as a watermark in the event picture.

Design Changes

1. Tags System

One goal of our project is to shape the SEI page into a much more personalized medium of event planning and tracking. To solve this issue, we decided to implement a "tags" system. This feature would allow students to filter what appears on their front page by subscribing to tags that carry specific interests (music, sports, entertainment, etc). Events will be tagged with whichever apply by the website moderators when they post the events, and groups can request certain tags when they submit an event for posting.

The first time users sign in to Student Pulse, they will be shown a large page of tags from which they can pick their first few. This page can be revisited at any time for the purpose of adding or deleting tags, but will only be visited *automatically* the first time. As students return to the front page, they will find a more relatable list of events, and thereby feel more "at home" at Student Pulse. Tags can also be temporarily turned on and off; this would allow users to sort by a specific tag, such as "music," and be able to view only events with a music tag.

This system of utilizing tags to sort and categorize events was inspired by part of Nate Bolt's presentation. In his talk he mentioned that in order to make searching for issues within Facebook's forums easier, he came up with the idea to use a feature which he called a "tag alert

system." This system would send him alerts of any new messages within the threads he had subscribed. He would be able to get notifications of new threads that he had previously not known about simply by subscribing to a tag or set of tags that were related to the topics being discussed within the threads. This way he would not have to actively search for content, but instead had content sent to him based on his preferences. When we thought of applying this feature to event searches we asked people through interviews and surveys if this would be a feature they would be interested in having on the site the responses were unanimous, yes.

This idea was strongly supported by Lori at the Center for Student Involvement, who advocated for a more streamlined structure for event posting and viewing. She believed our model would provide personalization and free up the clutter caused by the haphazard arrangement of random events across the front page. Our polls and interviews also suggest that the events page needs streamlining and that some kind of search or filter function can help to accomplish this. The tags system is a simpler and more personalized replacement for a search bar that can make users feel more involved and in control.

2. Achievement System
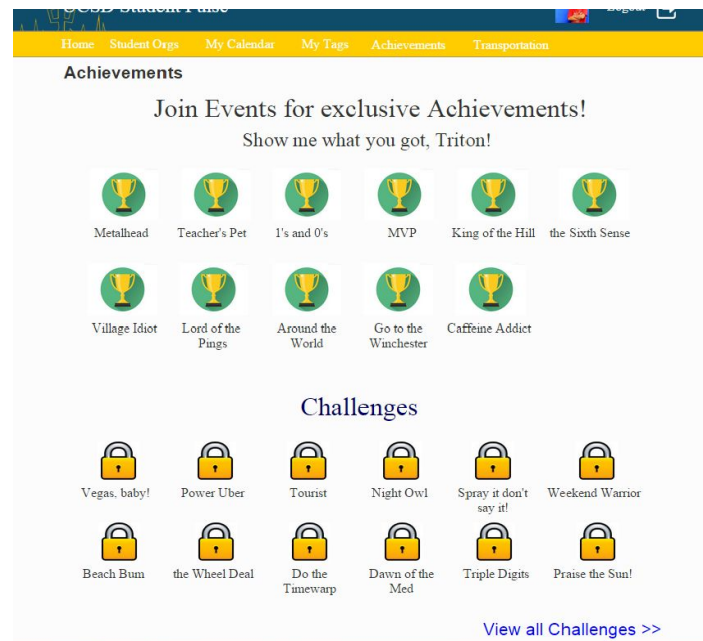
Our goal for the achievements system was to become a feature by which users of Student Pulse can compete as well as try for personal goals. Its central idea was that students can complete challenges by attending specific events, certain numbers of events, and so on. We entertained the ideas of a ranking system and a material rewards one, neither of which we have yet to put into action.

Students can earn achievements by attending campus or even off-campus events. Our initial idea for its implementation was through a location sharing app that tied in with the website, but this became too complicated of a challenge. As a way to create both a social and familiar atmosphere within the site, we decided on the idea of Facebook location sharing. This would allow students to use their Facebook accounts to post about the events they're attending as well as make a record that they did attend; this record would allow them to earn whichever achievements are tied in with joining that event. The achievements would appear in a page that

users can access in the top bar of options on Student Pulse; this page would allow them to view their most recent unlocked achievements, as well as the most recently added ones that are associated with the tags they have chosen.

Interviews and polls alike show that students want to see a UCSD events page that has more ties with social media. The achievements system can help students work harder at attending campus events, and its link with Facebook will give Student Pulse a more "current" vibe that will increase popularity.

3. Calendar Page

During our first prototype shipment, students found it difficult to organize what and when events were happening. After receiving this feedback, we included a calendar page that organized events neatly for students. As noted earlier from our survey data, many students prefer to hear about events or be reminded through Facebook. So we made our interactive calendar linked with Facebook. Events are hyperlinked to the Facebook event page and clicking RSVP will join the Facebook event page for you. This way, one would not need to recheck our website every time they forget when or where an event is. They will be constantly reminded as they browse through Facebook (assuming they have clicked RSVP or joined the event page).

Another change we made that was not included in our first prototype was the addition of the list of events when clicking on that specific day. We received feedback from students that indicated that clustered events may confuse students if there are too many events on a specific day. To solve this problem we added a dropdown list that will display all the events on that day in an organized fashion.

4. Transportation

Since the establishment of UCSD the campus has been a big promoter of green energy. From solar panels or electric powered carts, UCSD has made every effort to create an environmentally friendly campus for all staff and students. However, such effort created a drawback for the community. One of the efforts to implement green energy was to build limited parking, inconvenient road layout, and high parking fees. In doing so, UCSD has tried to dissuade students from using their cars for transportation and pressured many students to live close to campus and use public transportation. These issues were strongly reflected amongst the data from the interviews we gathered.

One of the many issues that we came across from our interview was the problem of getting on and off the UCSD campus at various times. This problem entails both weekday and weekends. Despite having a shuttle on the weekdays, events on the weekends typically do not provide much transportation for the attendees. This problem persists for off campus events as well, due to the inconvenience of having car at UCSD. As a result many students choose not to have one. Consequently, many students rely on carpooling to get to their destinations. Thus we decided to incorporate a feature that would promote the student community to share rides and be more efficient amongst the drivers and passengers to share information to each other.

One of our previous idea was to implement a log or forum to allow students to advertise and search for carpools for each destination and events. However, such implementation triggered numerous obstacles we had to face, such problems as security issue and credibility, despite having a login page, the log would be vulnerable to fraud and suspicious activities that may be invisible on the surface. The second issue was the credibility of both riders and drivers possible integration with facebook when contacting or listing contact in regards of rides, the information becomes public and may result in similarly conspicuous activity. As a result would create many issues with the university and students.

We thus implemented a transportation page to give information and alternative methods for all students around the UCSD community. we decided to implement a third party sponsorship because companies such as uber and lyft has sponsored UCSD's concert event and provided safe transportation for students on and off campus. The resourcefulness of drivers in these companies has shown to be an idea option that provides both reliability and safety for all the students.

In the same regards by allowing a third party to help UCSD and advertise on the UCSD website, the cost of advertisement can not only benefit the companies but the school as well by conclusive increase the revenue generated from these events. We also included links to the transportation website for UCSD. By doing so we allow students more alternative method that the campus provide to get around.

5. Prototype Walkthrough

Once our prototype was set up, we conducted several video recorded interviews. One of these was with "AR," who did the website walkthrough as an unbiased and relatively uninformed observer. His reaction was mostly positive, and he supported many of the changes we made to the original SEI site. He particularly enjoyed picking out tags for his interests and seeing their effects on the main page, as he had very little past experience with websites that allow for personalization. He also agreed with the setup of the main page and the ease with which he could choose an event and immediately visit its Facebook page to RSVP; he supported it by concluding that integrating existing media is a great idea, as opposed to trying to make the website itself social. Knowing he could use his Facebook made him more invested in using the site (Prototype Walkthrough). AR also liked the achievements page, and thought their names were funny and intriguing. However, he wanted an option to view all achievements on a separate page rather than to have one page full of every possible achievement. The calendar was also subject to his critique, as he believed it should have a direct link to the "My Calendar" page, and that the clickable days with events should be better distinguished from the rest. On the My Calendar page, he also seemed to prefer a drop-down menu of the months, rather than forward and backward buttons; he asked at one point whether they were actually clickable or not, and

suggested we don't make them clickable so as to streamline the page. The subject also had a few small issues with the tag system, which he said didn't make clear the option to choose multiple tags at once. He was hesitant to choose the "Alcohol" tag as well, sounding worried that it might make him seem like an alcoholic; this may be a personal issue rather than a design one, but it's worth noting.

We also interviewed LG, who is involved in UCSD sports community. As she went through the website, she was very positive about our Facebook integration in our redesigning of the webpage and "My Calendar" page, which allowed the calendar to feel more personal to her as a user. While she was viewing the web-page, she noted that the "Preferences" bar was confusing for her because she operates a Mac System and "Preferences" in that system allows a user to customize the cosmetic layout of her screen. This led her to think that she can customize the page. On her recommendation, we changed the "Preferences" to "My Tags," because it was consistent with the "My Calendar" name. In addition, she also mentioned that the badges on the Achievement page should have theme associated images instead of trophies because this would be more interesting and encourage student interest in this area. Unfortunately we did not have time to change the images of the trophies before the completion of this class but we noted this as the next step for moving forward. She mentioned that this site might be of particular interest to the Athletics Department, particularly the Tritons Athlete Council because they require their athletes to attend so many athletic events outside their sport. The current system for doing this though is disorganized and the Achievements system could fulfill that need.

In the interview with VL, we gained a different insight from the prototype that we constructed. One of the concern with the website VL mentioned was that would there be an

overlap of event times between both facebook and student event page. Another point that was

mention is that VL would like to see a set of tags that would reflect dislikes on a separate system

to compliment the existing tags system. Despite these preference, VL favored the simplistic

design as well as the intuitive functionality of the prototype. VL also mentioned the way the

buttons were lay out was very instinctive.

Discussion

Through the course of the project we came across many issues needing to be addressed,

but only few important enough to warrant a need for improvement. Our research leads us to a

few significant findings of issues that many students were having with the current system. The

first was that few knew of the existence of the current SEI website and those who did were not

satisfied with its functionality, or lack thereof. This leads us to think of ways of integrating

systems more frequently utilized, such as Facebook, into the website directly to avoid having to

navigate too many pages. The more associated event listings are with the Facebook community,

the more likely students are to viewing that event listing and possibly going. Though this

solution was highly supported by the data we collected, it was not a full solution.

The next issue we took on to resolve was finding a better way to sift through all the

events available. We found that students were not satisfied with the sorting options available to

them and the lack of a search function. Our solution to this was to create an option to allow

students to search for events, but one that would not be financially burdening or take an

extraneous amount effort to implement. This led us to the development of the "tags system" that

would allow users to filter events based on categorical tags that were pre-made and are

consistent. The tags would be managed by Lori, at the Center for Student Involvement as per her recommendation, or someone of equal authority.

The group strongly agrees that this project continues to have potential beyond, and this was belief was validated through our contextual interviews. Every individual that we asked to test our prototype agreed that this would be a website they would enjoy using and that this could seriously benefit UCSD's social involvement. Our next step is to make the suggested associated images for the Achievements. After, we would like to bring this to the Athletic Department to gauge their interest in the achievement system and ask what further changes could be made to meet their needs. Lastly, we will bring this back to Lori as per promised. We have put a significant amount of work into this project, but we know that there is still more work to be done if we wish to see the publication of this site.