Case Study

# Supporting Design Degree Students

# Streamlining a Feared Process, by Embracing Process

Students in design degree programs are stressed, lost, and feel pressured to make decisions that will affect their entire careers.

The problem I approached with this project was: How might we support students in acheiving the best design degree experience for themselves? The experience that will lead them to a life filled with **passion, fulfillment, and great work**?

This project is a dive into a conceptual solution for supporting design degree students.
Research conducted at Sheridan College.
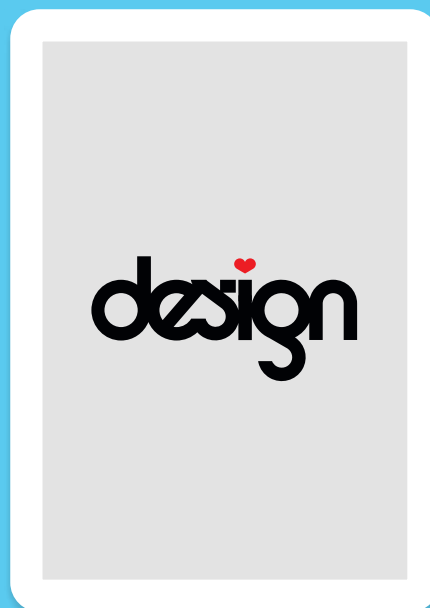
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# Redefining
# the Problem

My team and I didn't want to take the problem at a surface level and wanted to learn as much about the problem as possible. We went in with human-centered design and design thinking principles guiding us to explore the many facets and perspectives surrounding the problem.

From **stakeholder maps** to **user personas** we dove deep into the problem to truly understand our users and their challenges.
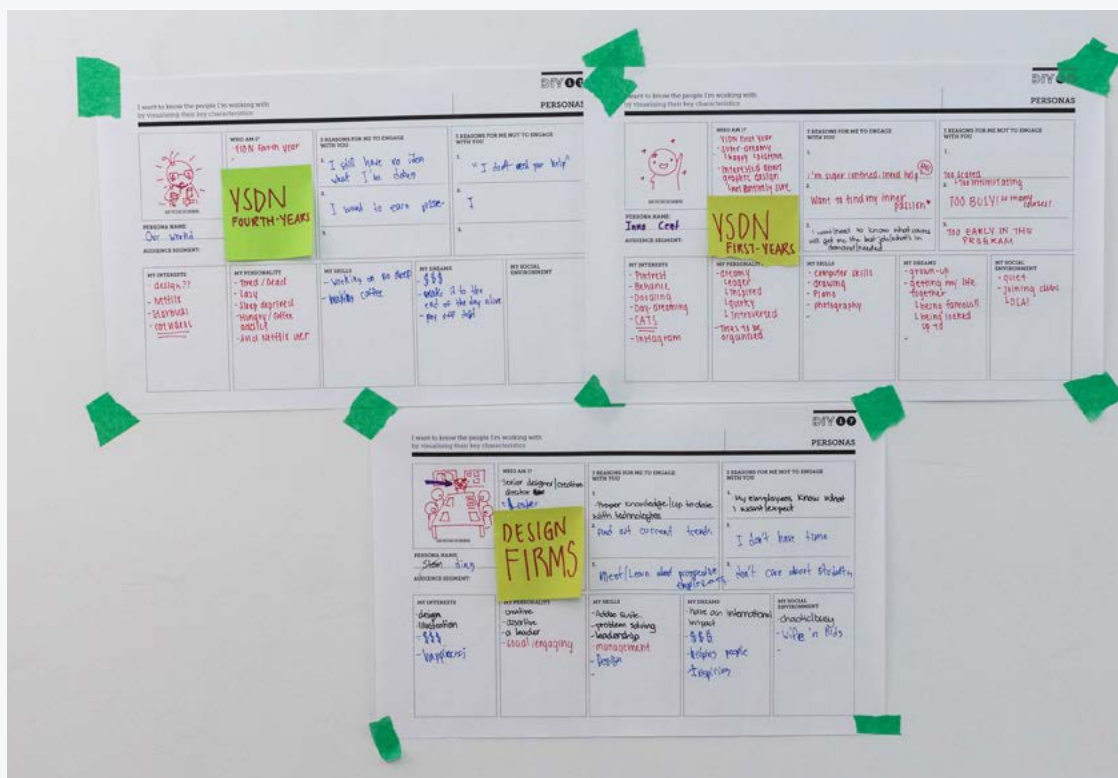
# Interviewing

Collectively we interviewed a large range of people to uncover some of the **most important and eye opening** information to date. Through semi-structured interviews with design students spanning various years in our program we were exposed to a more *human perspective* on the issue.

The resources for checking progression and getting support are an overly complicated, confusing, incohesive and 'poorly designed' mess, and that was echoed throughout many of the interviews. A common trend was booking a meeting with faculty as the only glimmer of clarity amongst the confusion.

We put common thoughts into a list of themes. From these we derived our design principles, in order to address the themes.

We used these as our north star for the rest of the project, consistently checking in to make sure our progress was going in the right direction.

## Common Themes

- Confusion
- Intimidation
- Passion vs Demand
- Fear

## Design Principles

- Clarity
- Comfort
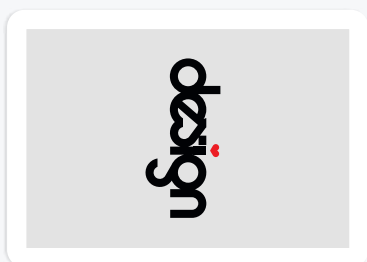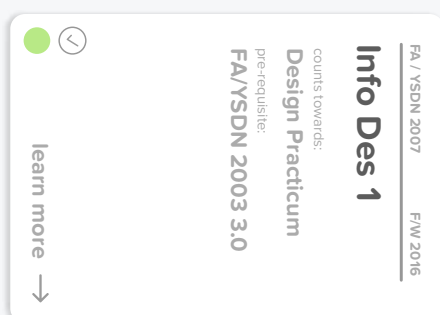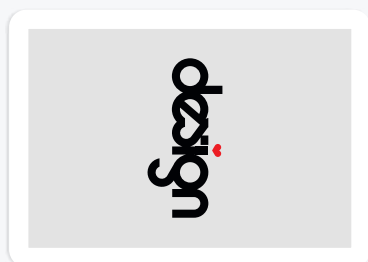- Confidence Inspiring
- Ease of use

# A Solution

Earlier in the process with thought a redesigned handbook would be enough, but as we went along we realized we needed more than that. We needed something more personable, and interactive. After many different ideas the one that resonated was an online design degree companion. A one-stop-shop for a design student, with a core design language driven by our design principles.

Here are a few fundamental ideas behind our solution and the design principles that would guide the design and execution of our app. There are three fundamental ideas.

The high-level solution:

## Give students a place to check & understand their degree progress.

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# A Friend

We wanted to create a companion app, and give the design an underlying positive and inspiring voice. I took this quite literally and created Penno, your design degree friend.

Optimal cuteness is the term I coined when describing the goal for designing Penno, and I think we succeeded. Penno was designed with the intent of comforting the user as well as motivating them and guiding them through the process. Penno is your confidant, your support line, and above all, your friend.

In the interface his emotions are used to communicate status without the use of words.

# Badges

Who doesn't like getting rewards? Design faculty encourages you to check your degree progress report in the confusing online portal, but conveying that information in a more exciting and clear way would ensure people know if they are on track. Badges represent certain course milestones throughout your design school career.

(simply a idea at this point, badges would have unique visuals in the full execution)

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# Courses & Cards

Organizing courses is challenging when you are trying to remember 15 different course codes and names, as well as trying to figure out what courses count towards what requirements. The companion introduces a new way to think about courses, by using a cards as a metaphor. Thinking of courses as cards not only allows for a more physical and substantial way of thinking but also allows the cards to be sorted in decks.

# Interaction Metaphors

There are a couple of interaction metaphors in the solution that are key to the experience. Most importantly is how the course cards are treated. Here are a couple examples.
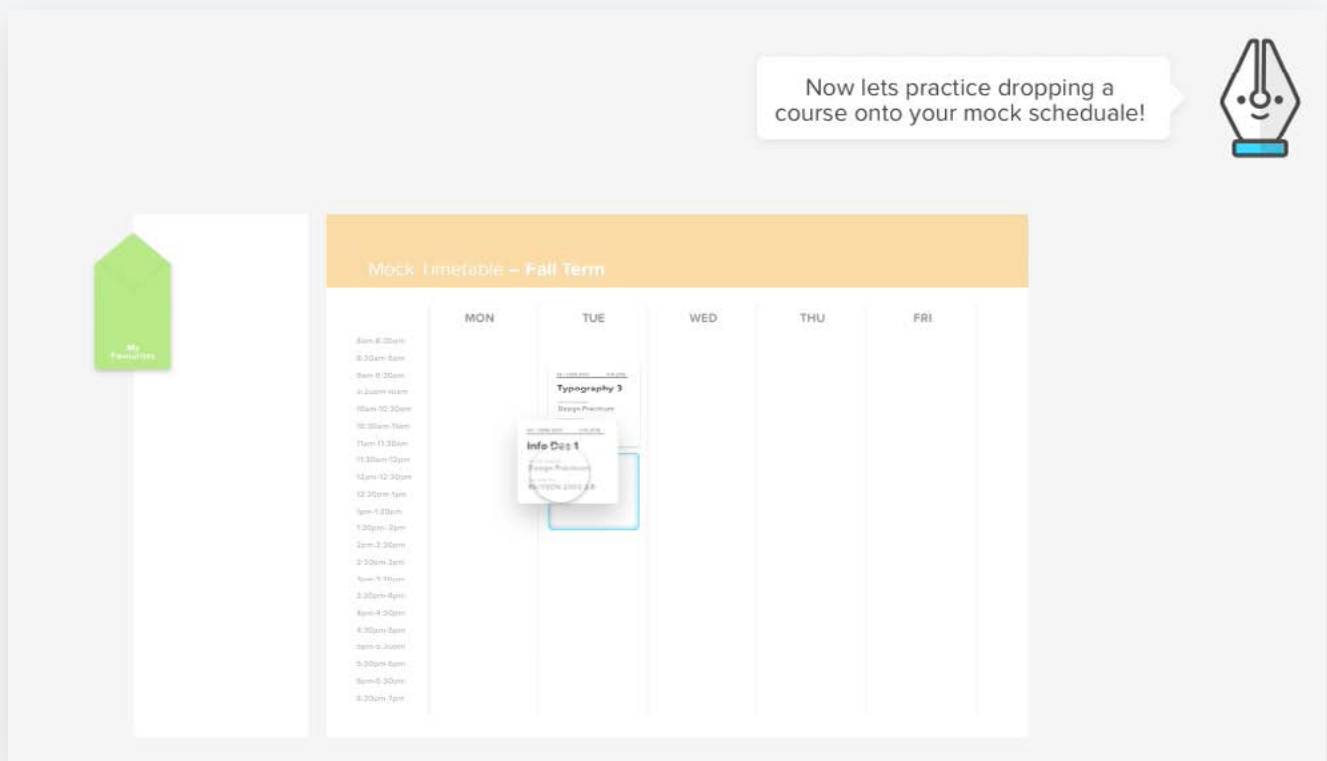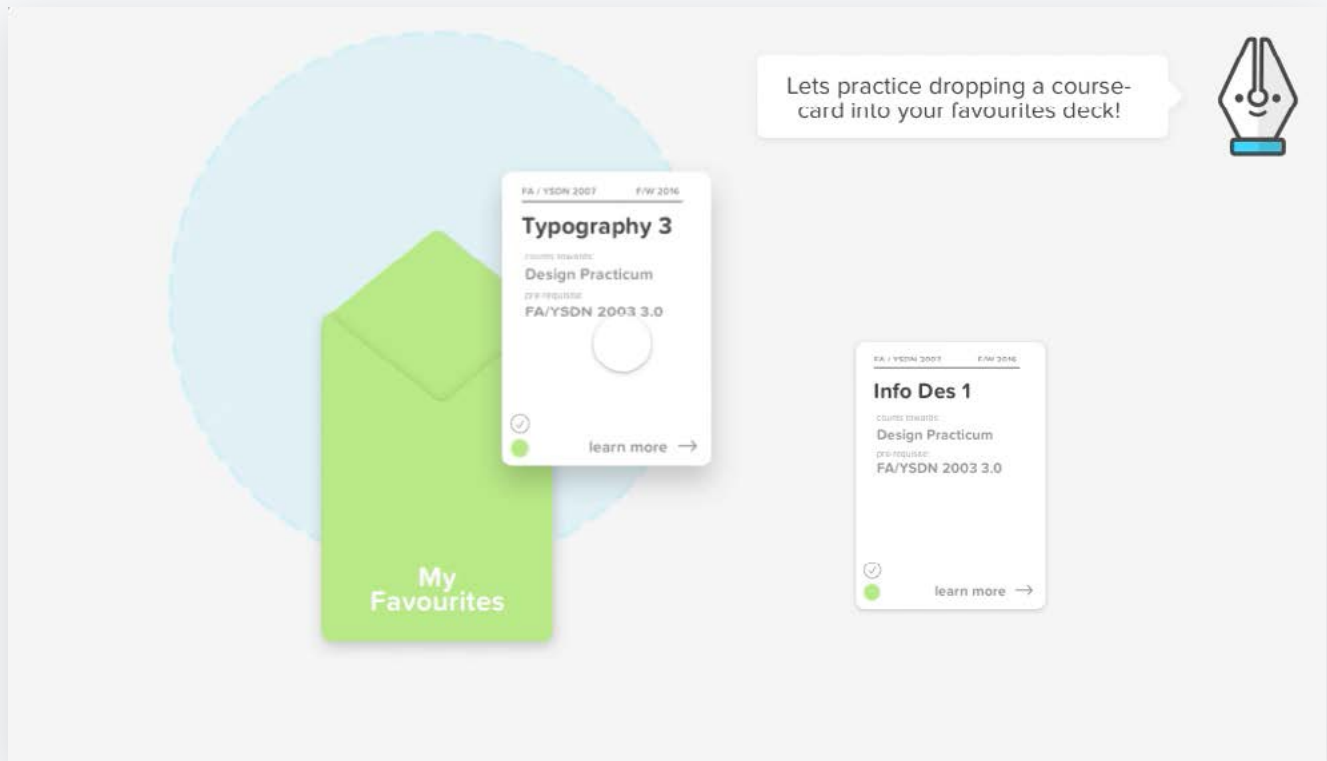
# Dashboard

From these core components and design principles,
I created a dashboard interface for students.
Allowing them to check all relevant information in
an easy and simply digestible interface.
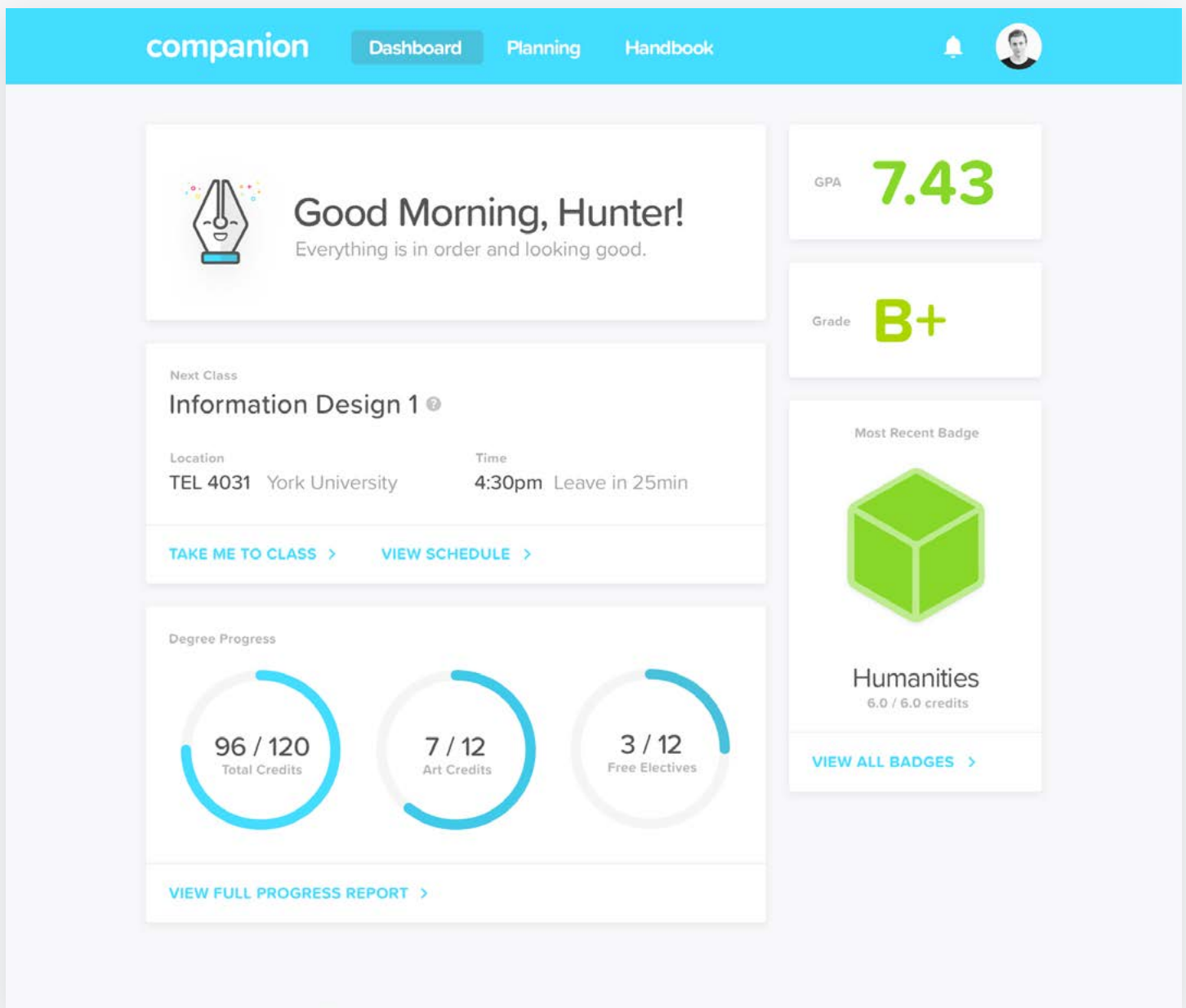
# Plan your future

Ensure your time in school is as productive as possible by planning it well.

## Manage your course decks.

View and manage your course planning in organized decks.

VIEW COURSE DECKS >

## Plan your next schedule.

Build mock schedules to help you plan out your school week.

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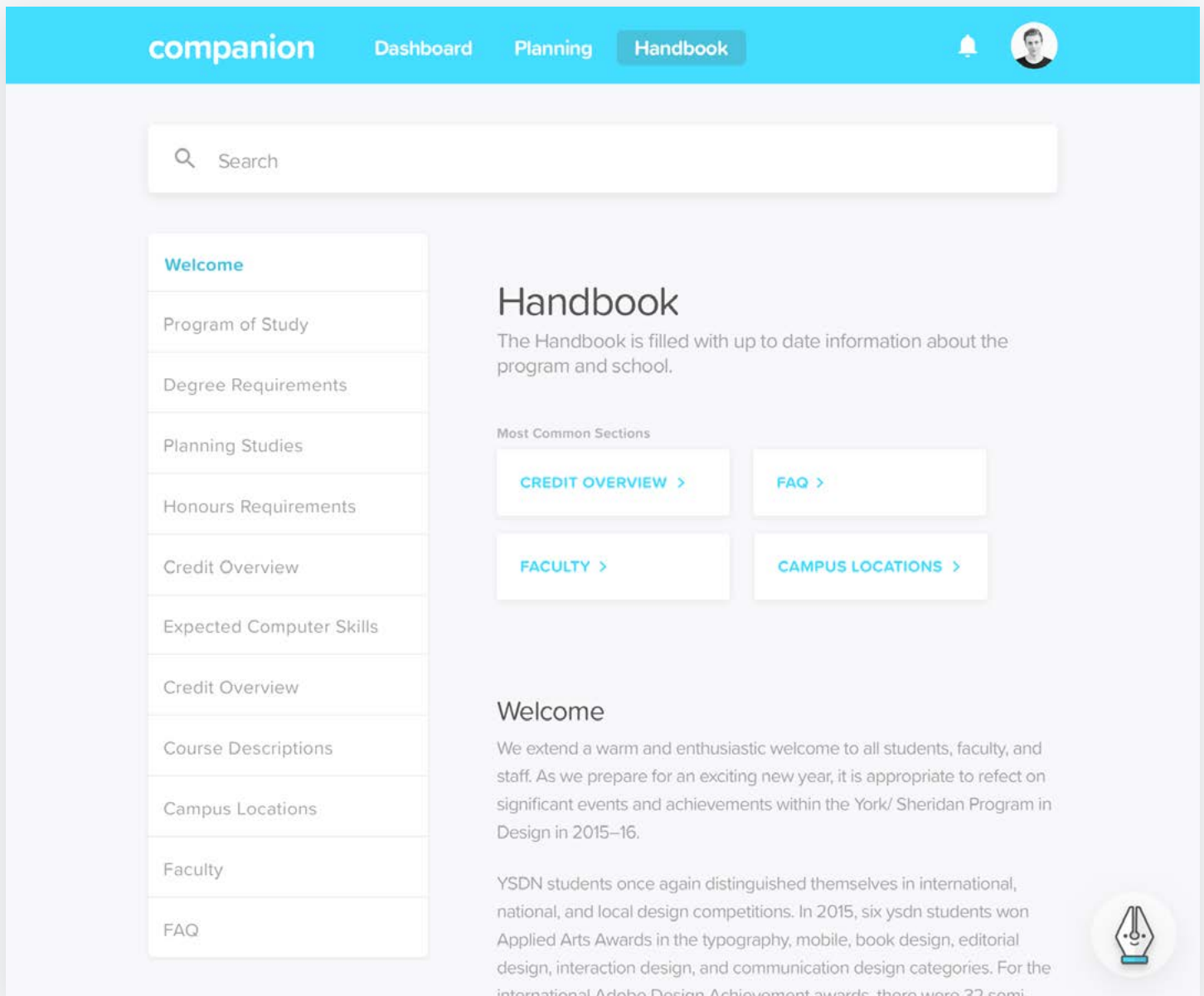TEL 4031 · Practicum

**Information Design 1**
TEL 4032 · Practicum

GO TO SCHEDULE BUILDER >

## Need something specific?

The Handbook is filled with up to date information about the program in a friendly and searchable format.

GO TO HANDBOOK >

## Interactive Handbook

Through our research we found that a lot of important information was buried deep in university websites or handbooks. By pulling the most important information forward and allowing for search, we hoped to reduce stress.

# Conclusion

The biggest challenge of this project was trying to discover the core problem as to why students felt so lost in their journies throughout design school. We had many ideas, whether it being external pressures, social pressures, etc. In the end we knew to overcome this we had to ask the students themselves. This ended up giving us incredibly valuble insights.

Each design student has with a **unique voice and passion**, and by streamlining their design degree experience I can hope to help each one reach their potential.