Milestone 2 Report

Introduction:

BetterU is a social app that revolves around the idea of creating a community where all of its members strive to achieve an improved state of mental health. The design choices that are implemented should reflect this idea, and much time should be delegated towards ensuring that the user gets the most out of his or her experience. As a result, we have come up with three criteria that have the greatest influence on the final product: the visuals/aesthetics, the functionalities, and the community. Using these three concepts, we have developed a design alternative for each one, starting from storyboards/sketches and eventually evolving into actual app screen designs. At the beginning of each design alternative, we have provided explanations regarding our goals for each one and the advantages/disadvantages that we discovered throughout the process. Within each design alternative, there are three sets of designs that show off what the user will see when navigating through the app. This includes the home screen, what the user sees when creating an account, and what the user sees when navigating to a guided meditation exercise. Each set of designs comes with a brief narrative explaining what options the user is presented with and the reasonings behind design choices. With all the information that we have gathered in this report, we hope to be able to utilize components from each alternative to create a final product that accomplishes the goals we created in the very beginning.
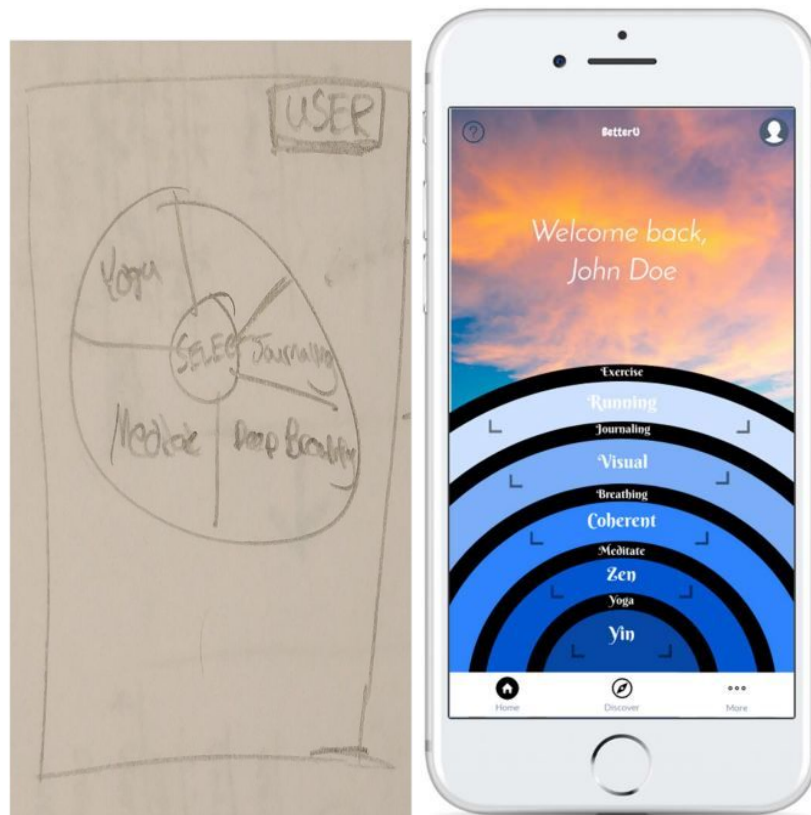
Design-Based/Aesthetics-Based Designs

In these storyboard mockups, we decided to focus on how we can draw our users in visually in order to generate morale for our app. Research shows that aesthetically pleasing designs strongly influence the user, even when users try to evaluate the underlying functionality of the system or app (Abishek 2017). Aesthetic designs also make users more loyal to the brand. They influence how people think and feel which is the exact goal of our app-- to influence positive emotions in our various users (UX Collective 2017). Even though the functionality may not be at the level that we desire, giving our users effective visual aid and attraction will draw more users into our apps. Users are more likely to be forgiving towards faulty functionality as long as the interface is visually pleasing and easy to navigate. Therefore, we developed these storyboards and prototypes keeping in mind how they may influence the popularity of our app. In developing these designs, we looked at apps with praiseworthy user interfaces such as Twitter, Facebook, and even Headspace. We analyzed and reflected on why we liked the designs and how the designs helped us navigate the app. Then, we modeled our prototypes in a similar fashion, but adapted them to fit the mission and goal of our app.

However, there are downsides to basing designs solely on visually-appealing interfaces. It is not uncommon for users to get lost in the interface and lose their sense of navigating the functionality. For example, in order to decrease visual clutter, some apps contain interfaces that are loaded with icons and less text. For a user who understands the meaning of these icons, the

app interface can be very useful because they are able to navigate the app without reading excessive text. However, for new users or users who are not as savvy with technology, they are left in the dark and clueless on how to work the app. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges with design-based interfaces are designing the interfaces in a way that the users can be visually attracted, but also stay informed on how to use the app.

1. **Homescreen**

(Homescreen for aesthetics-based design, from sketch to final design)

The idea behind this design alternative for the home screen was to create a warm atmosphere to welcome the user. Therefore, upon entering the app and logging in, the user is brought to a home screen with a picture of a warm skies. The top left button (the question mark) serves to aid the user when he or she has any questions by providing a list of FAQs with their answers. The top right button will take users to their profile, where they can edit settings or view their information. Perhaps the most prominent feature of this screen is the "wheel" of exercises. To bring about this wheel, users will simply slide their finger from the bottom of the screen to the top to cause the wheel to "bloom." This wheel provides the user with all the categories of exercises, such as yoga, meditation, and journaling, and the user is able to either tap the arrows or spin the wheel to discover specific activities within each category. Once the desired exercise is found, the user just has to tap it on the wheel, and he or she will be redirected to a screen that

will allow for the exercise to be performed. The inspiration of this wheel comes from the app "Simple Habit," which we studied back in Milestone 1. Its main screen contains its own wheel of activities. However, we felt that the app's wheel lacked depth and had the potential to be much more interactive, so we came up with our own version of this idea. Lastly, at the bottom of the home screen, one can notice a bar that allows the user to navigate between various screens.

This concept for the home screen has a few drawbacks that should be noted. As mentioned before, apps centered more heavily on design might cause the user to be lost. The wheel that we created has a high potential of causing this problem, especially if it is the user's first time using the app. In addition to this, this aesthetics-centered design is lacking in terms of functionality when compared to the designs mentioned later in this report. Lastly, we are unsure of the emotions that the color scheme will invoke upon the user, and this has a large effect on how the user will feel when using the app. Further testing will be done to ensure that the colors are changed if necessary.

Despite these negative aspects, we should not neglect the positives that this design portrays. The icons that are used are very intuitive, and the user should be able to easily figure out which one performs what function. In addition to this, this design draws the user in, perhaps intriguing him or her with a visual concept that was unseen prior to this experience. This will increase the chances of leaving an impression on the user, and this separates our app from the others on app stores. This design alternative accomplishes the goal that we set at the beginning of this milestone, and we will be able to draw inspiration from this in the future.

2. Guided Meditation
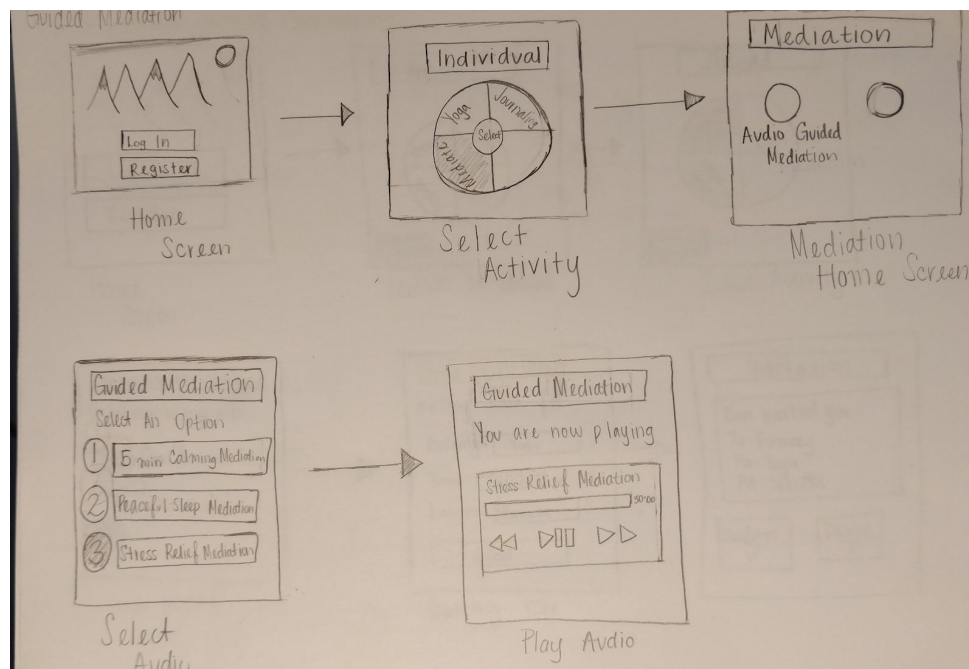
(Storyboard for performing a guided meditation exercise in design-based design)
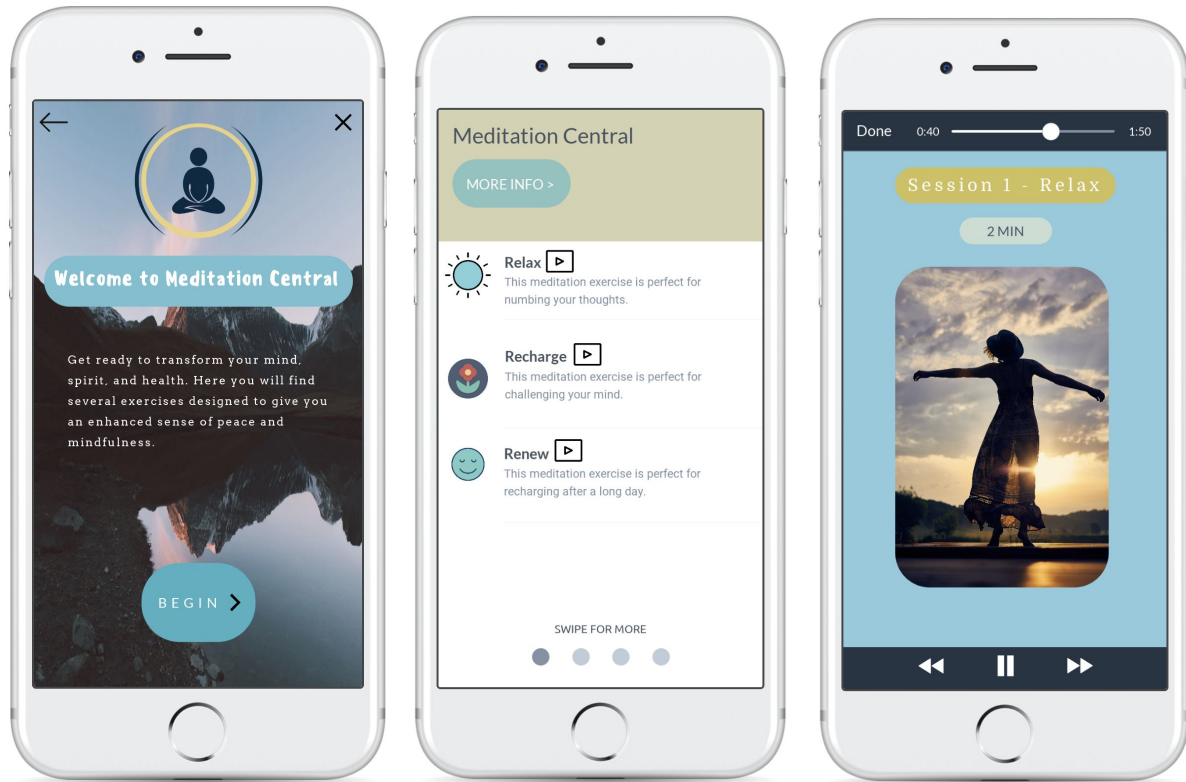
(Designs for performing a guided meditation exercise)

In the alternative design for performing a guided meditation, we realized that the functionality-based design was too reliant on icons and was not efficient in appealing to users visually and also giving them ample amount of information. We wanted to give our users more information about the type of meditations that they would choose. Every user who uses our app is not a returning user. The app should be intuitive enough for both new and returning users to understand. Therefore, we added a welcome screen for users who have not visited that part of our app before. The welcome screen provides users with a rundown of what they should expect in the meditation part of our app. Then, it provides a list of exercises with descriptions and icons to indicate that they are videos. Once the user clicks the video, they are given another visual aid along with text that indicates which video they selected. Rather than the user having to guess which video they are on, they are able to use the visual aid to come to that conclusion.

The strengths of this design are that it makes it easy for the user to follow along and get information on which exercise they want to partake in. The user will never be confused about the description of each exercise and it makes the app more intuitive for users to enjoy. However, the weaknesses of this design are that users may get overwhelmed by all of the images and icons and lose focus on the detail. Therefore, we need to find a more efficient way to balance both information and visual aid.

3. **Creating an Account**
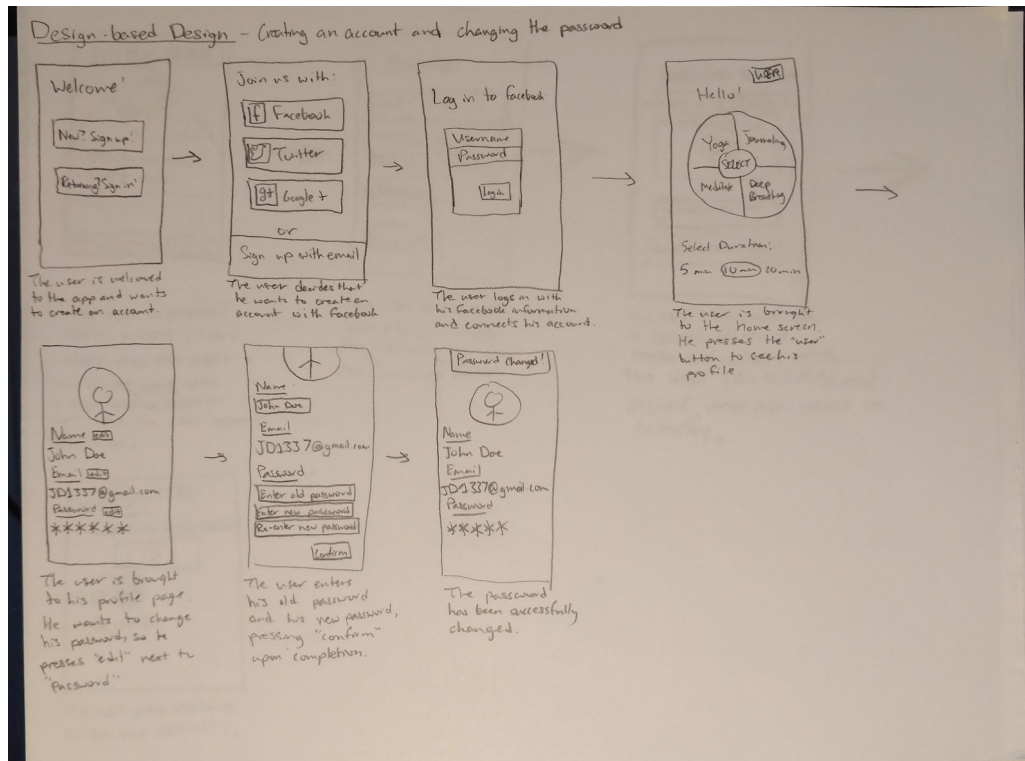
(Storyboard for creating an account in aesthetics-based design)
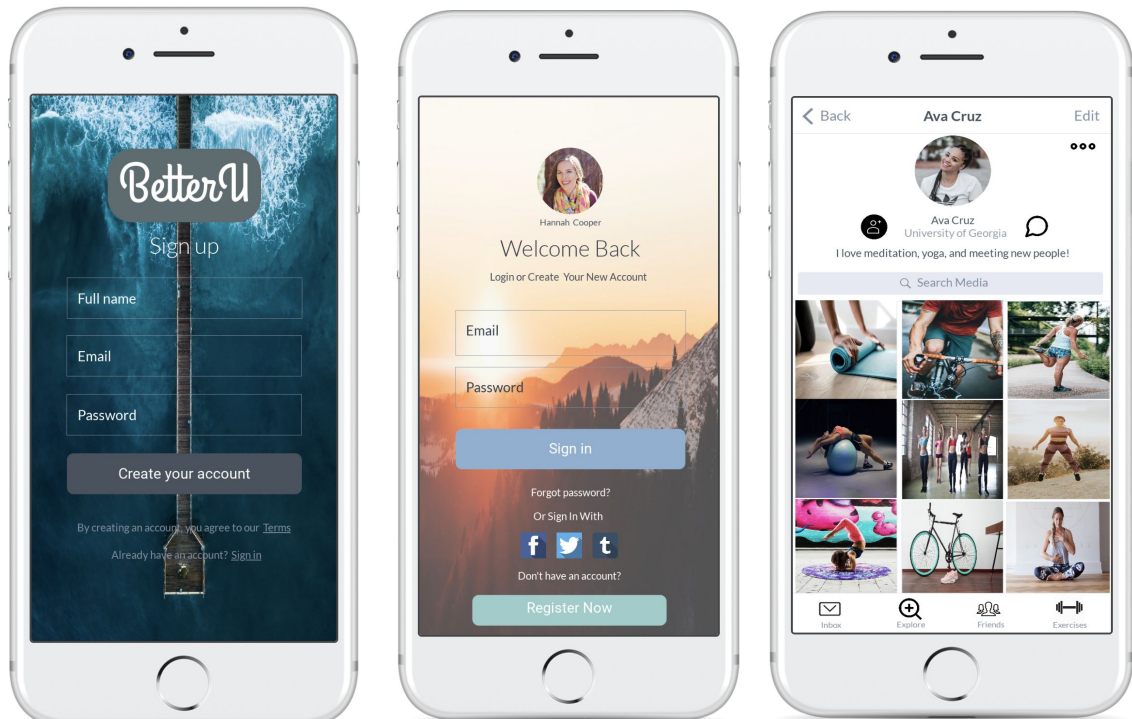
(Design-based design for creating an account)

In the design-based design for creating an account, we decided to emphasize aesthetics in the background in order to establish a "mood" for the app. To accomplish this, we all decided on

a color scheme for the app and came up with muted colors such as a muted orange and a muted blue. These colors are also known to be calming and relaxing which is the message that we want to convey to our users. We decided to stick with these colors consistently in order to allow the users to subconsciously associate those colors with our app. Using calming background images such as the ocean or the mountain is supposed to evoke the emotions of peace and mindfulness in our users. We intend to have every welcome screen have a variation of pictures of that nature. This allows us to establish our brand as an app focused on improving mental health because those images are associated with positive feelings and emotions.

The strengths associated with this design are allowing our user to evoke emotions that are conducive to the mission of our app such as peacefulness and happiness. Visually appealing pictures typically generate positive emotions and if our users are attracted visually, they will have increased morale for our app. The weaknesses are that the user may be distracted by the visual aid and forget the functionalities in the process. Therefore, we develop a balance of functionality and design.
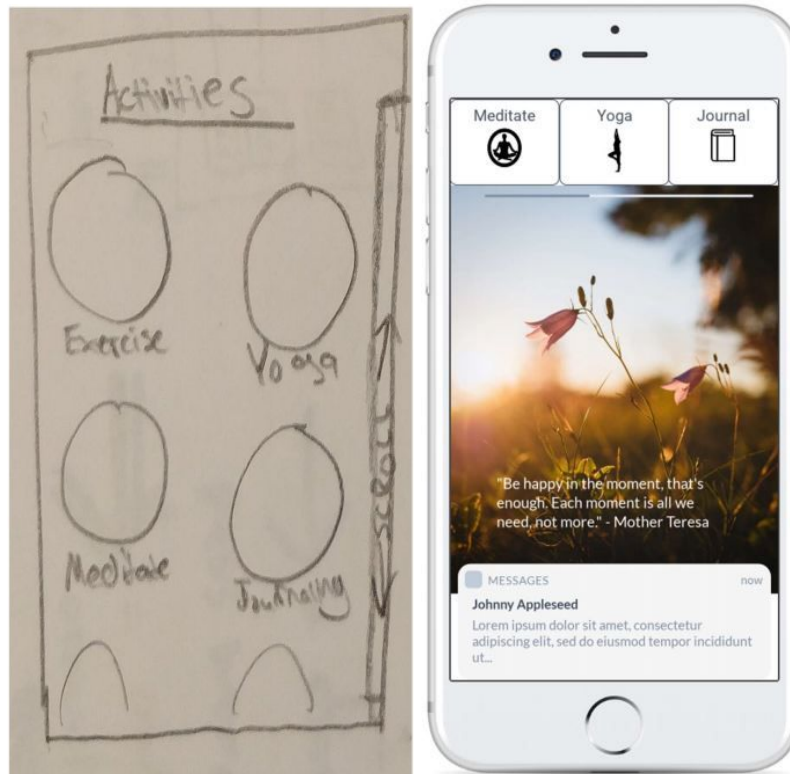
Functionality-Based Designs

In these Storyboard Task mockups, we decided to focus on the functionality aspect for our designs. In this design scheme, we decided to emphasize things that would make the app more user friendly so that all areas of the application are easily accessed and self-explanatory. To accomplish this, we went with designs sketches that emphasized intuitive navigation, simple layouts, button and header names, and instinctive icons. We also chose to have minor variations in screen layout and design when navigating between and within menus. To compensate for this as well as continuing to aim for the design goal of optimizing functionality, we instead chose to use variations in color for each screen. This was deemed more than useful as it would give feedback to the user as they navigated through the applications features, allowed for a simple layout where in implementation we would only need to adjust buttons and names as opposed to updating entire screens, and it kept the design simple to where the user would still be able to navigate from feature to feature without much confusion.

However, in going with this approach we did have to sacrifice heavily on the aesthetics for the layouts of each screen. Because of this, some of the color schemes and button shapes were not given as much consideration and fore-planning in the final storyboards and mockups. Therefore, screens that we reflected on after completion , if we were to go with this design approach for later stages, would definitely need modifications related to visual aesthetics. Furthermore, some of the actual screen layouts themselves would likewise be best adjusted. But, considering again that the focus for this particular design strategy was functionality this is not too much of a drawback or concern. And if said changes were made later on we would still follow through with the current design goals of emphasized intuitive navigation, simple layouts, button and header names, and instinctive icons.

1. **Homescreen**

(Homescreen for functionality-based design, from sketch to final design; the design used in the sketch was moved to another screen of the app)

The intent of the functionality based design home screen is to present the user with only the most necessary options and a straightforward design. The top of the screen is dedicated to the different activities available, when selected each button will take the user to the corresponding activity page. The bottom of the screen provides some minor notifications, such as app updates or important events occurring soon. This notification area will only use a small amount of the screen in order to minimize user distraction. Since no other functionality is necessary, the rest of the screen is dedicated to being aesthetically pleasing.

This design will do a good job of minimizing the amount of time spent on the homescreen. Users will be able to easily navigate to other pages due to the few options they are presented with. Having so few options has the drawbacks of making the app unclear of what its actual purpose is. Users who do not wish to explore the application might become dettered as they won't have any real direction when opening the app. Another disadvantage of the application is that it doesn't provide users with any obvious social element, potentially taking away from a major functionality of the application.

2. **Guided Meditation**
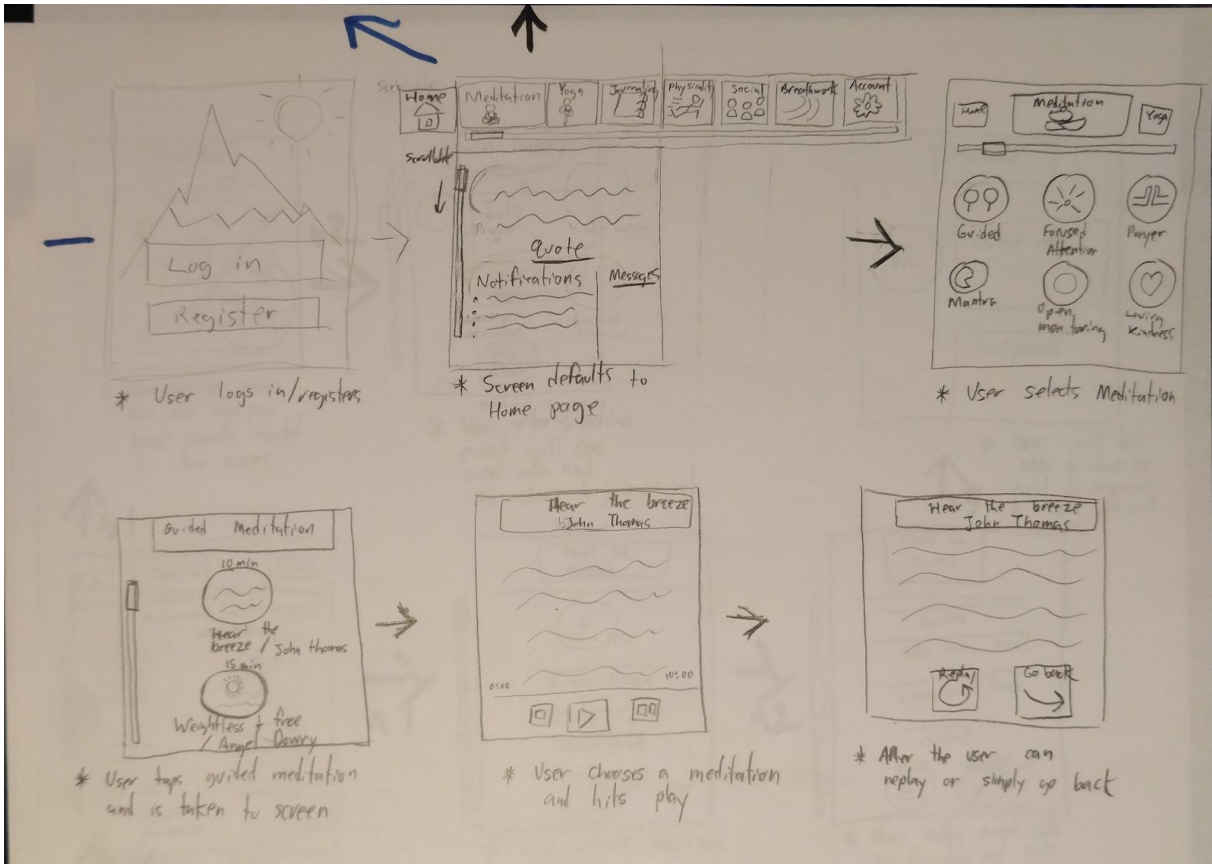
(Storyboard for performing a guided meditation exercise in functionality-based design)
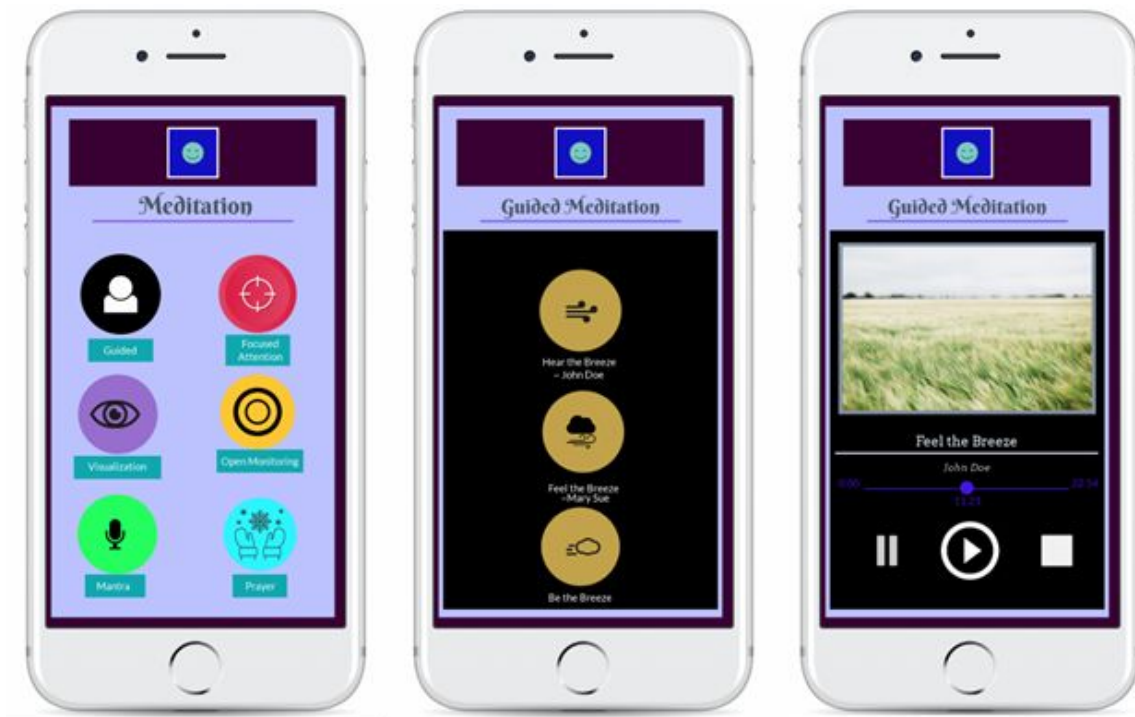

(Designs for performing a guided meditation)

One of the features of our app is the ability for a user to perform a guided meditation. We chose to storyboard this particular activity because since the main area of focus for this and other related designs were implemented with functionality there isn't much variation from menu to menu and a majority of our menus and their features would all share a similar screen layout. Furthermore, we also anticipated that this would be a popular feature among our potential users so we felt that it was important to see how a common interface would change under each design approach.

In this storyboard task it is assumed that the user has tapped the meditation menu option from the home page and is now viewing the mediation menu page (the first image). Here the user can scroll up and down the page until they find a meditation activity that they would like to complete. For this storyboard the user has decided that they want to do a guided meditation. To do this the user would then find the option and tap to navigate to the next screen (the second image): the guided meditation screen. On this screen, similar to the previous page the user can see a listing of various guided meditations with both the title and meditation teacher displayed. This way if the user has a "favorite" meditation or simply for variety's sake they have the option to play a meditation based upon the teacher or the meditation itself. Once they've decided, the user again taps on the particular meditation they desire and are transferred to the final screen (third image) which is simply an audio player screen. Here the user can pause, play, scroll, and stop the recording at their discrepancy. Once completed they can either replay the meditation or just navigate unto another feature.

3. **Creating an Account**
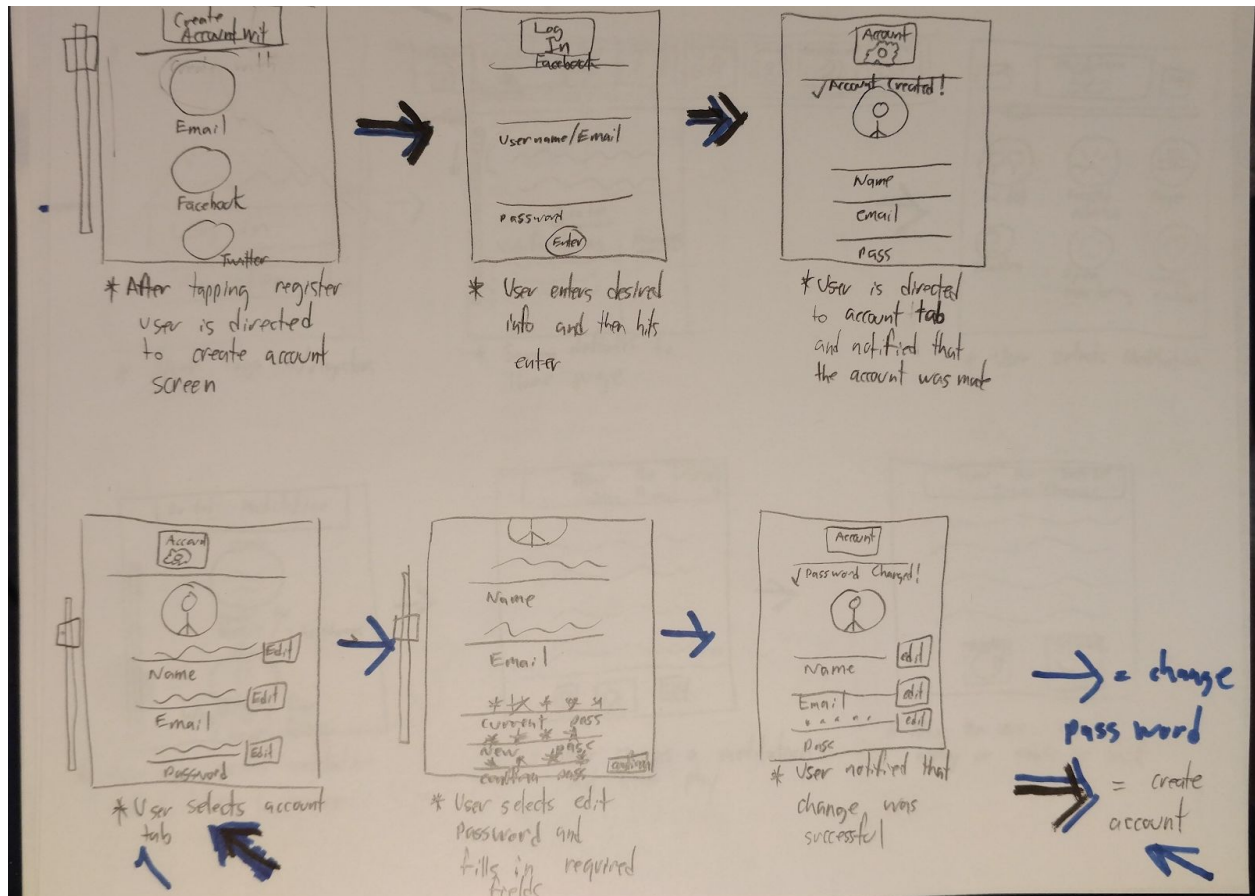
(Storyboard for creating an account in functionality-based design)
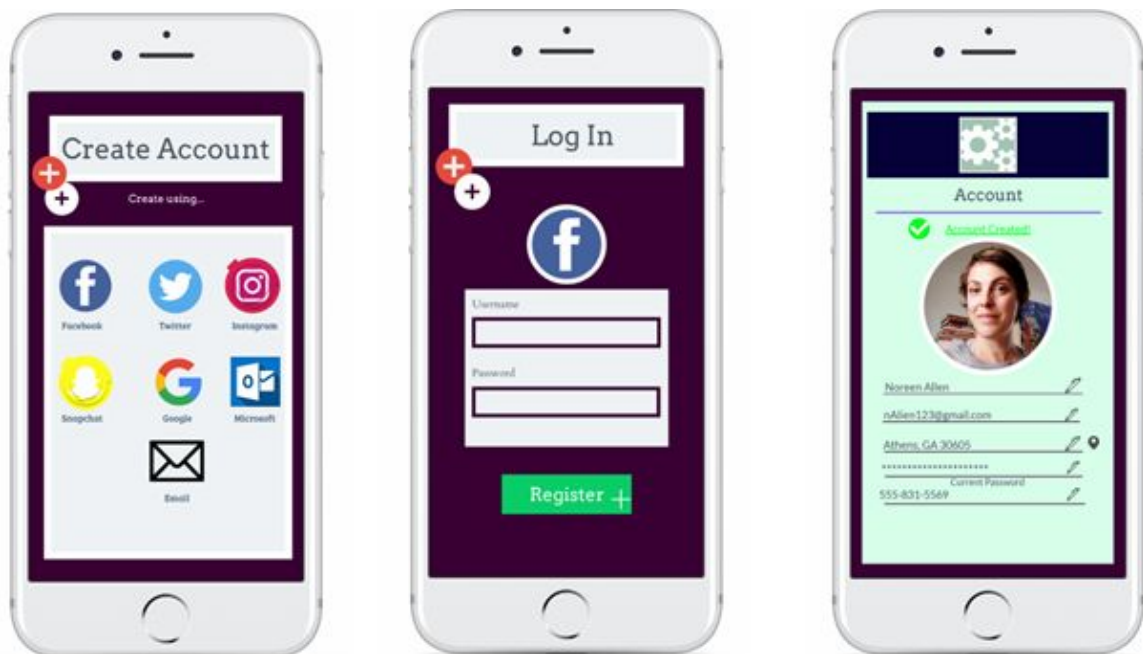
(Designs for creating an account and viewing profile)

For our application, it is necessary for the user to have an account in order to access all of the features available for their usage. So, from the homepage new users are asked to create an account if they do not already possess one. From their they must tap on the create account/new user/register option where they are directed onto the first screen (first image).

To make the account creation process as simple as possible for the user, we decided to allow them to create an account by using information from one of many common social media applications that they may potentially have. And if they do not have a social media they are still able to create an account via an email address. In this particular case, the user has a preexisting Facebook account and would like to create an account through this service. The user then taps the Facebook and are then taken to a Facebook login page (second image). From here the user simply enters their Facebook account information by tapping on the designated field and then typing it in. Afterwards, they just tap the register button and if the login is unsuccessful they will see a notification on the page telling them to try again. If the login is successful however, they will be taken to their account page (the third image) where all of the account fields are pre populated using their Facebook account information.
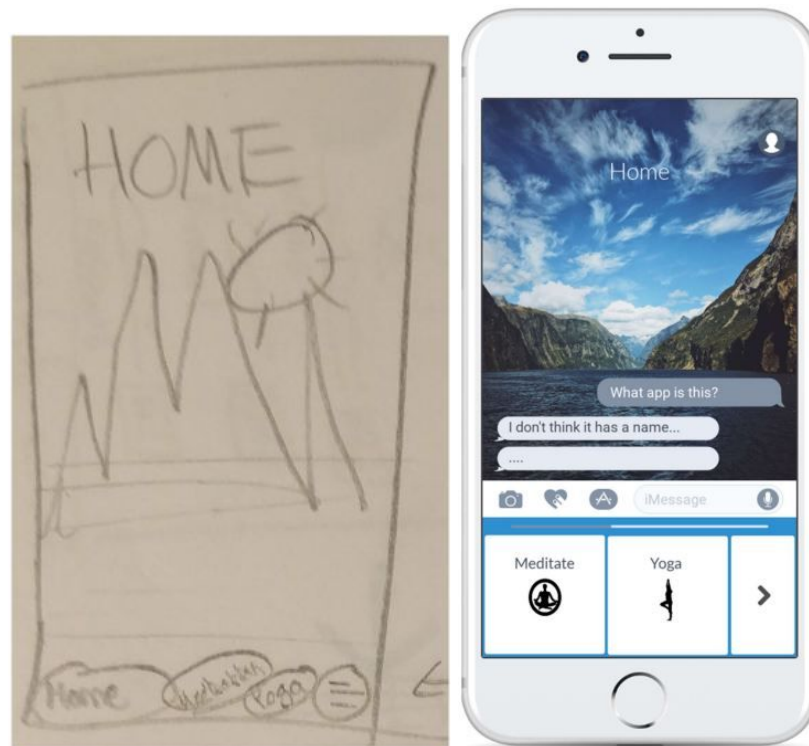
Social-based Designs

A major function of the application is allowing users to connect in order to perform activities together. The Social-based design concepts were created to make the social function of the application obvious and easily accessible. For every opportunity that we saw, we tried to implement some sort of way to allow the user to connect and communicate with other app users. Because the idea is to emphasize the ways in which users interact with each other, our designs take much inspiration from popular social media apps. In terms of visual appeal, this would perhaps be one step above the functionality-based designs, but it does not have the same aesthetics as the first set of design alternatives specified in this report. The problem with social apps is that one must decide on the amount of information that is presented to the user and how it is presented. This was a rather troublesome concept that we spent a great deal of time on, and this will most likely be modified in later stages of app development.

While designing these apps, a few disadvantages were noted. There isn't a large number social media outlets to choose from, since we traded quantity of outlets for quality of how we use them. That is, due to our intent to maximize what the user can do with their connections to social media such as Instagram and Facebook, we concluded that there won't be as many social media options to choose from compared to what the functionality-based designs may offer. The major social media groups are included in our app, but any further support for less popular social media outlets, such as Skype and Myspace, would take up resources that could be delegated towards expanding upon the functions of the app itself. Also, these designs do not have the visual appeal that the design-based/aesthetics-based designs do, nor do they allow the user to optimally utilize the core functions of the app as easily as what is portrayed in the functionality-based designs. If

we incorrectly judge how many notifications the user receives, he or she may be overwhelmed and might be dissuaded from using the app any further.

The social-based design concept provides several advantages over the other alternatives that warrant a necessity to be included in the final product. First of all, these designs are very user-friendly. Since the actual visual aspects were not the biggest priority for this set of mockups, the simple UI makes navigating through the app very simple, especially with the aid of all the icons and words. In addition to this, it is very easy to communicate with others and meet new people. This allows the user to not have to feel alone on their journey to a better state of mental health. After all, one of the core goals behind this app is to create a social community where everyone using it supports each other, greatly improving both the experience and the results obtained.

1. **Homescreen**

(Homescreen for social-based design, from sketch to final design)

The homescreen of the social based app attempts to immerse the user in the community of our app. Users are immediately presented with notifications about activities happening in their area. The different activities that a user can complete are listed as buttons along the bottom of their screen. In order to fill the white space of the screen, a calming picture is presented as the background, more specifically a picture that works well with the app color scheme.

This homescreen has the advantage of improving communication between users, and its minimalist design makes the app easily navigable. As previously mentioned, the biggest potential

problem with this design will be overloading the users with information as soon as they open the app. Giving the user too many notifications to view could cause the user to have adverse reactions to the app and stop using it altogether, especially for users that do not want to use the application for social means at all.

2. **Guided Meditation**
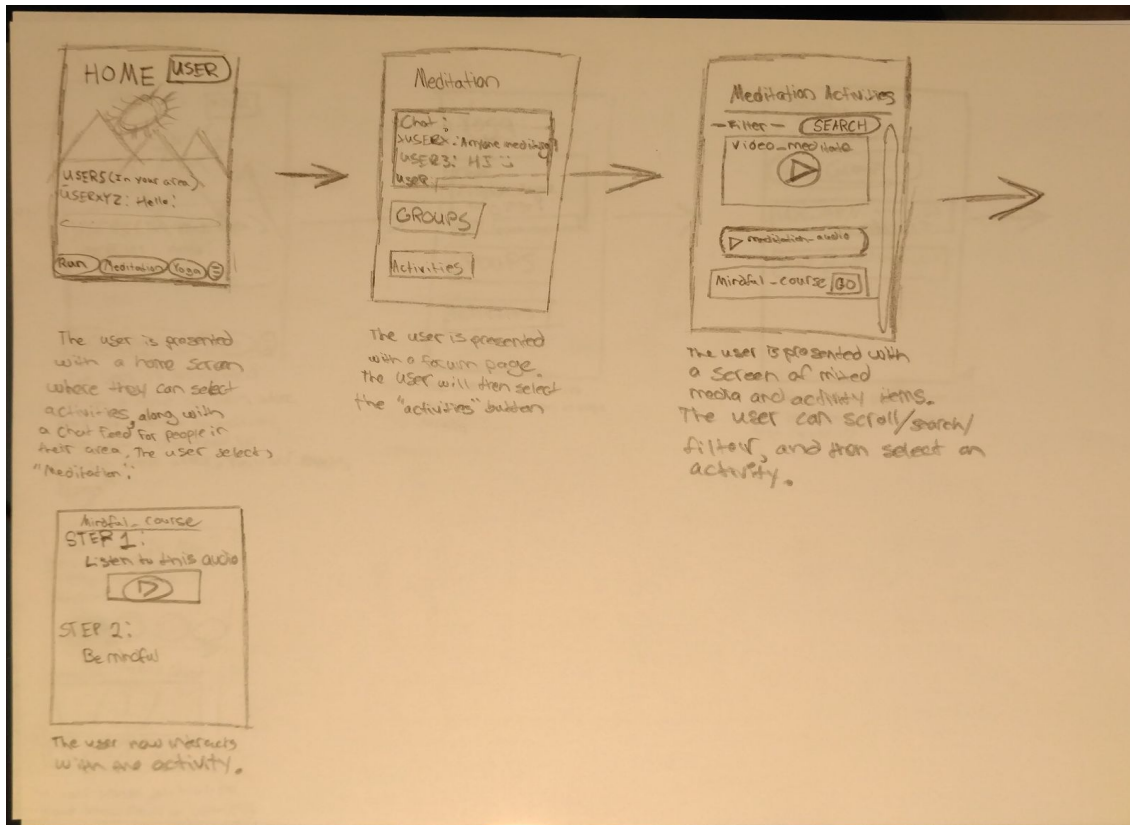
(Storyboard for performing a guided meditation exercise in social-based design)
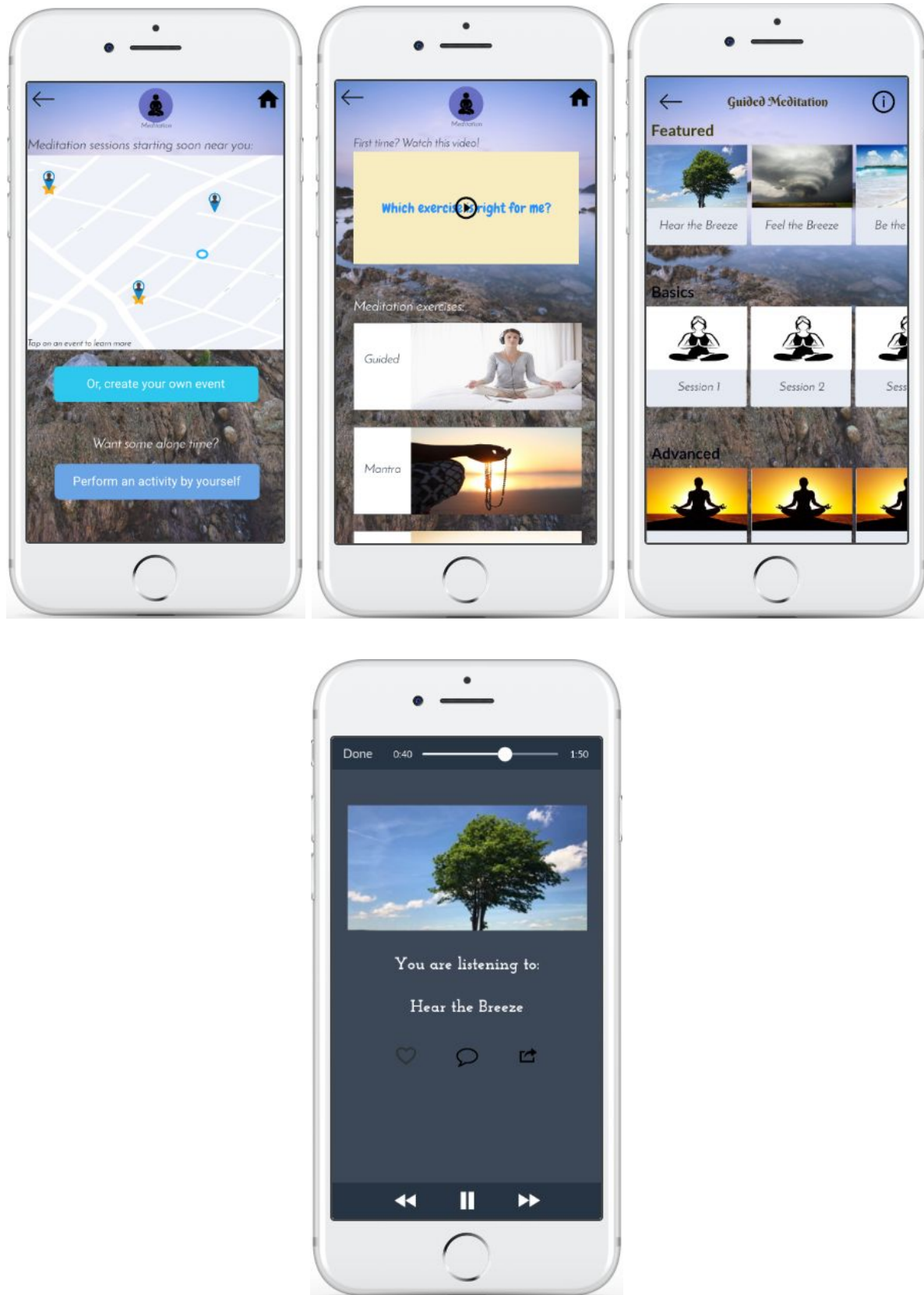
(Designs for performing a guided meditation)

There are three main functions possible from an activity screen, the user can interact with a map which displays existing activity groups, create a group to perform the activity, or view a guided lesson on the activity. Each activity page displays pins on an interactive map of the user's surrounding area, where each pin represents a lesson that will begin in the future at that location. The user can select a pin to view information on the group and then join the group. A user can also opt to create their own group to perform an activity. Lastly users can "perform an activity by yourself." Selecting this option will take the user to a page of sorted lessons on their chosen activity.

The minimal amount of buttons with descriptive and intuitive text is one of the strengths of this design. Users can easily distinguish between a social option and a solo option once they get to the activity screen. Another strength of this design concept is the little amount of distractions on the lesson screens. Since users will only have lesson options from the currently selected activity, they are at less risk of being distracted by other activity lessons. This is helpful when a user knows what kind of activity they want to do, but does not work well when a user is unsure of which activity to do. The user will have to access multiple different activity screens in order to browse lessons from different activities.

3. **Creating an account**
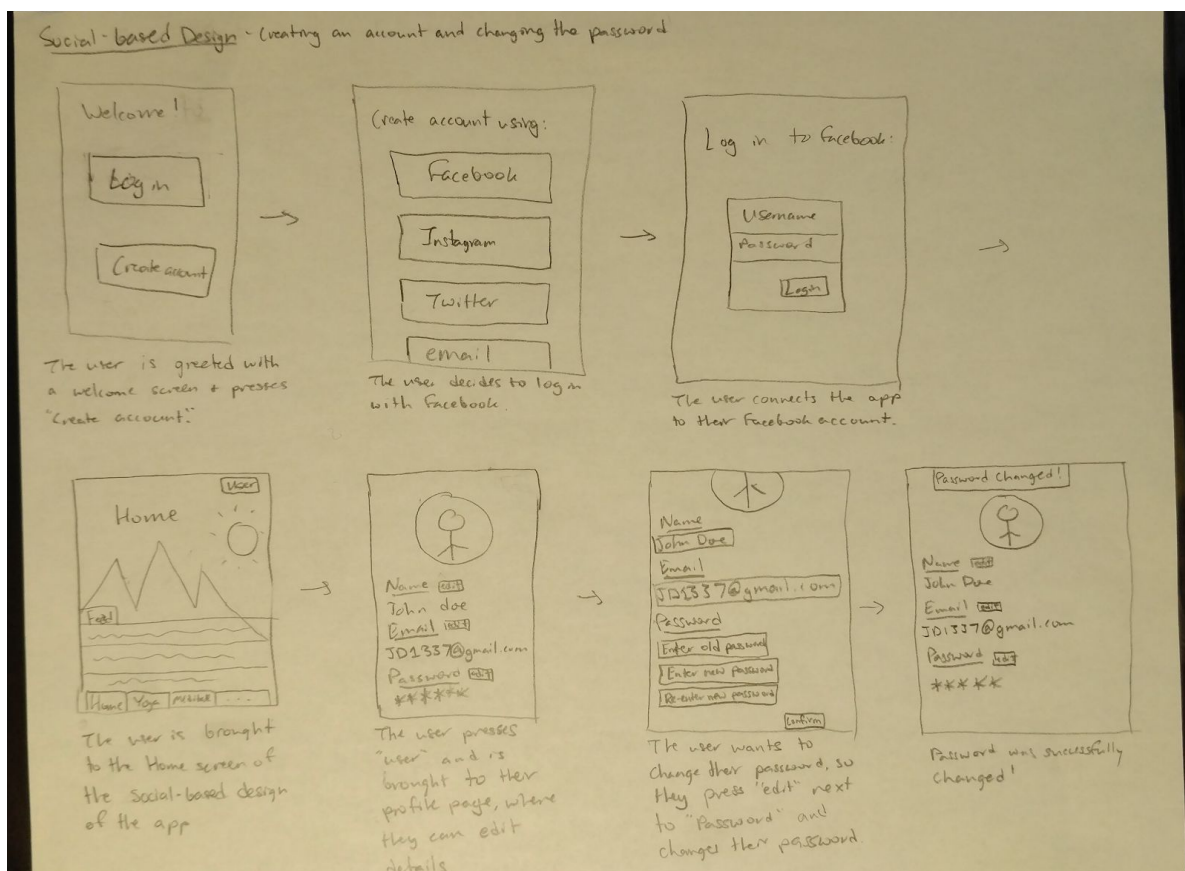
(Storyboard for creating an account in social-based design)
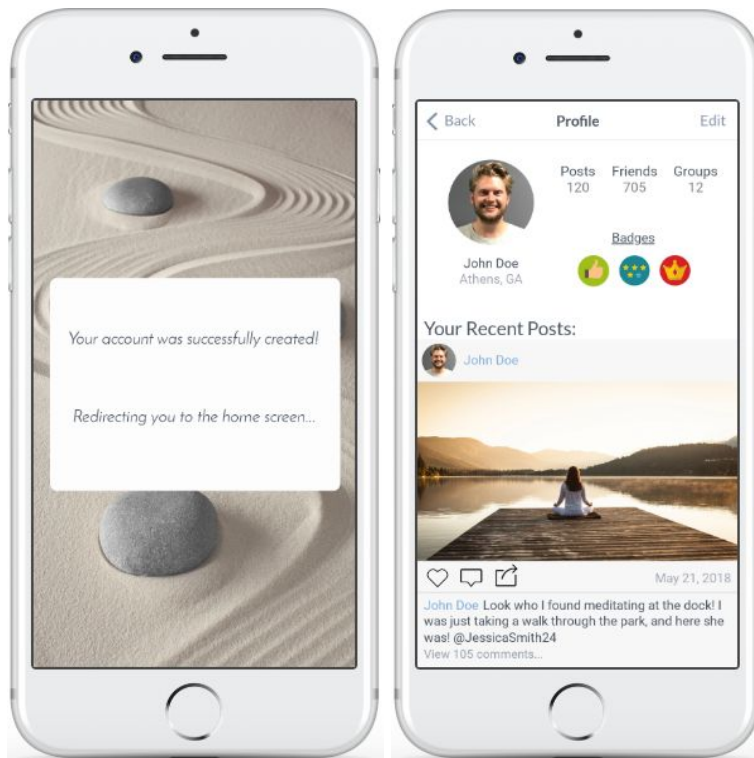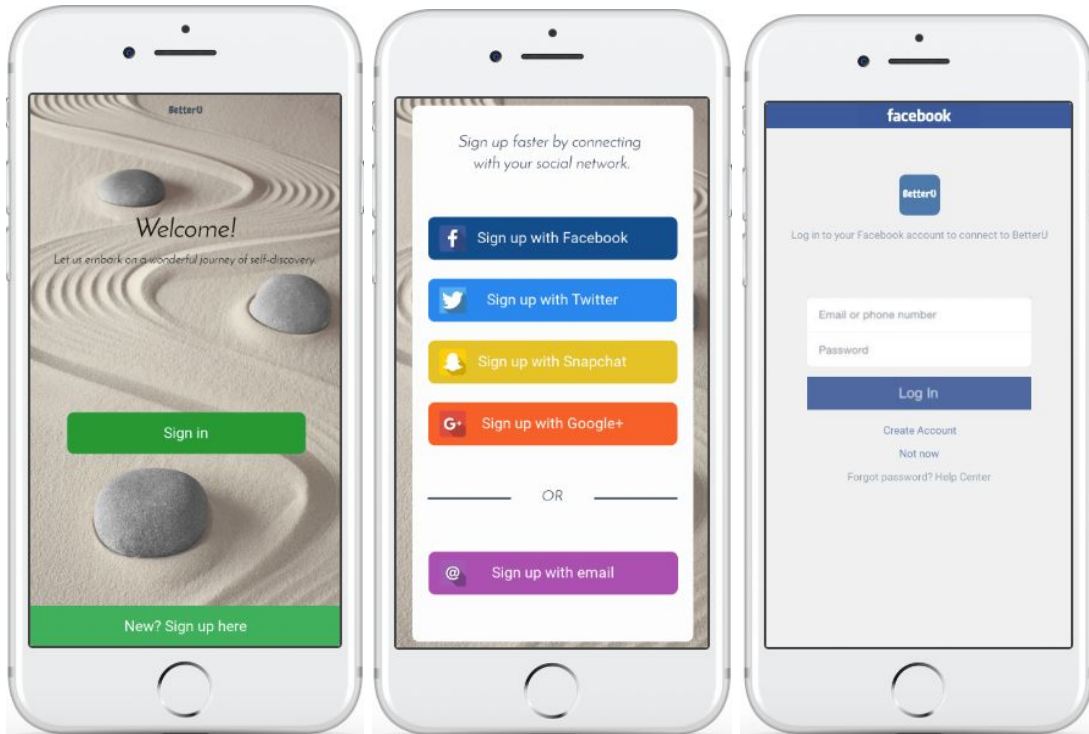
(Designs for creating an account and viewing your profile)

Upon opening BetterU, the user will be greeted with a welcome screen that will allow him or her to either log in or sign up. If the user chooses to create an account, a window will pop up with several options for accomplishing this goal. The options for linking his or her social media accounts to this app are presented first and make signing up very quick. However, there is also the option of simply signing up with an email. This alternative option will cause the user to take a bit more time, since there is no prior knowledge about him or her and information such as name or general location will need to be entered manually. Assuming the user has a Facebook account, all that he or she needs to do to create a BetterU account is to sign in to Facebook and allow the two apps to be linked. Successfully accomplishing this will redirect the app to the home screen (refer to the bullet #1 in social-based design). Pressing on the "user" icon on the top right of the home screen will allow users to view their BetterU profiles, as seen in the last picture of the screen shown above. Information such as profile picture, location, and name will be imported from the connected social media outlet, and from here, users can view their recent BetterU posts and edit their account information if necessary.

Although the process of creating an account in BetterU is relatively the same for all the designs, the social-based design alternative for this task focuses on allowing the user to easily be guided into creating an account by linking his or her social media account to the app. In addition to this, it will utilize the connection between the two apps to provide a comfortable environment where he or she can communicate with friends also using the app and meet new people. All of the design alternatives allow for this feature, but what makes this design alternative unique is that only the main social media outlets used are used when creating an account. While the functionality-based design alternative provides more options for social media connectivity, the degree to which it will utilize these connections will not be as much as this design. As a result, we concluded that we had to sacrifice the amount of options available for the ability to perform more with each social media outlet. The colors for each social media option in the account creation window correlate to their own design colors, and they were placed further up to draw the user to these options. Of course, users may sign up with just an email and password, but since we wanted to emphasize the importance of the social aspects of this app, this option was placed below the rest of the options as a sort of "last resort" for the user. The profile design was inspired by a mix of Instagram and Snapchat. However, we decided to include badges into the equation. Each badge represents a different goal that the user has achieved. For example, the crown can show that the user has been using the app for a while and is familiar with the exercises, while the stars can represent the idea that four out of five users would recommend working out with John Doe. The badges, while a minor feature, should motivate users to work hard and to inform others if you are not a trustworthy workout partner.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of this milestone is to highlight the three fundamentally different designs for our BetterU application. The three designs are unique because they each focus on a

specific aspect. The design-based design strictly focuses on the aesthetics of the application, while the functionality based designs uses simple layouts to make the application as intuitive as possible for potential users. Lastly, the social-based designs allows the connection to other users and social media websites. While developing these designs, there are different advantages and disadvantages to each design. So, when deciding on the final design for BetterU, our group plans to select the most user-friendly design that incorporates a combination of all the designs.

(Our poster board)

Team UX-Men
CSCI 4800
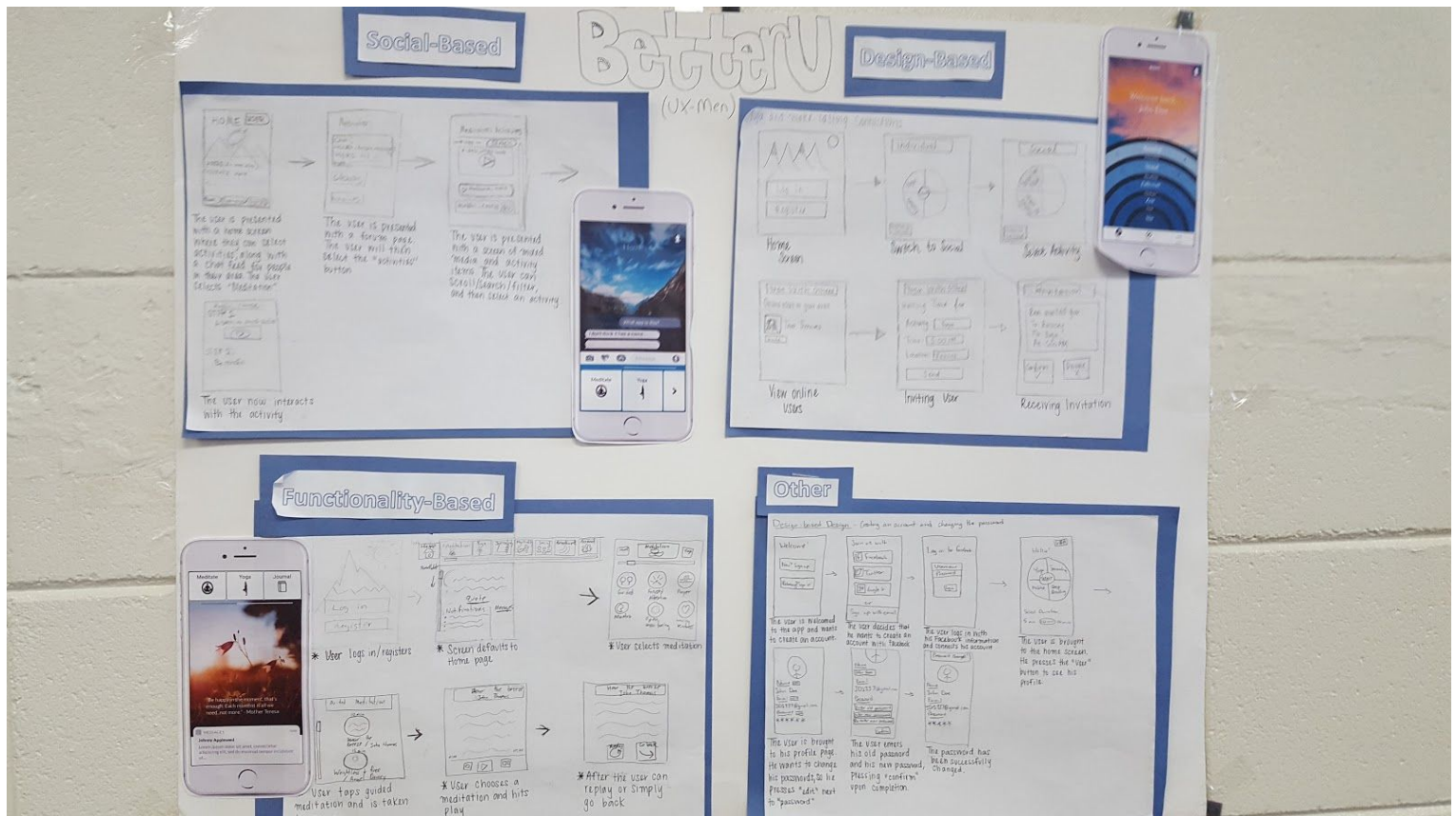
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