[HW 8] Prototypes: RateMyProfessors

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ABSTRACT / SUMMARY

The RateMyProfessors website is one of the most well-known websites to students. Yet over the years, we've encountered many problems regarding the site's usability and how it could be improved. There's extraneous features, clunky navigation, unresponsive web design, and sloppy ad placement. In this abstract, we take the step to improve the website's design and usability. Our target demographic is college students. In particular, we are targeting college students who are interested in sharing their experiences taking classes with professors at their college. The website should ideally showcase their reviews and ratings to help other students select courses and professors.

KEYWORDS

ratemyprofessors; education; students; ux design; usability; prototyping; concept; Balsamiq

1. INTRODUCTION

This document will share our high-fidelity prototypes created on Balsamiq. Our prototype interface was designed to solve the usability problems presented by the current RateMyProfessor website. We have designed our prototype to offer the following improvements: improving the user story and flow' understanding what users want, need and adhering to those needs; and making the website easy to understand and navigate.

2. MATERIALS

A storyboard summary of our prototype is presented in Appendix A. The Balsamiq prototype itself is presented in Appendix B.

3. STORYBOARD

The storyboard covers what was by far the most common use case of the RateMyProfessors website when we interviewed potential users, that use case being to find reviews about various professors. Because this was such a common way to use the website, it would only make sense that the storyboard would show the possible paths a user could take to perform this task, from homepage to search page to professor rating page.

4. DESIGN DECISIONS & DISCUSSION

As mentioned in our introduction, our goals for our prototypes for RateMyProfessors are that the redesign

- improves the user story / flow,
- understands what users want and need and adhere to those,
- is clear, easily understood, and simple to navigate.

When starting out the homepage redesign, our designer for that concept created two prototypes:

- one (1A) where there was a clean page with a minimalistic design, with two search bars, one at the top and one central one, and
- one (1B) where there was a lot more content, filter panels, search bars, newsfeeds.

From our population (Design Gallery #1 and team consensus), the overwhelming, if not unanimous choice was the minimalist, clean page. From our user research, we found that users did not understand why there were two search bars, one in the menu bar and one in the middle of the page, in addition to not knowing whether, in the middle search bar, if one was to enter just one of the parameters (school, class, professor) or all three. With that in mind, we corrected course and removed the menu bar at the top and placed a one sentence instruction in the remaining search bar that the user could use one or multiple parameters to search for a professor. Our decision to keep this particular search bar was based on user feedback such as "Having 1 box around all 3 search options conveys unity" and being direct with having that "main" search bar in the middle of the page.

From our work in the last two weeks planning and running through our evaluations, we were able to get live feedback from a subject in the empirical evaluation and also grab multiple user personas' data from the cognitive walkthroughs. Some of the feedback received for the search page included allowing users to retype in professor names and clarifying filter and sort features. Users are now able to search again using a search bar at the top of the page, which otherwise should show the professor name whose results are displayed below. This feature improves efficiency. As recommended by one reviewer, users can now sort results by school name and so on. Compared to the first iteration of the search page design, users can view far more potential professor matches on a single page and may be able to pinpoint their desired search result more quickly. Detail on the prototype has now been enhanced; for example, users can see links to specific professor pages, university pages, and department pages. The search page has been altered to align with the overall design of the website. There is now visual harmony since it shares the same menu and footer as other pages. All of these elements should add to the page's memorability factor. The cognitive walkthrough helped clarify the icons that are used in sorting and filtering, as well as confirmed that the search page should be easily figured out and useable by any web-savvy user.

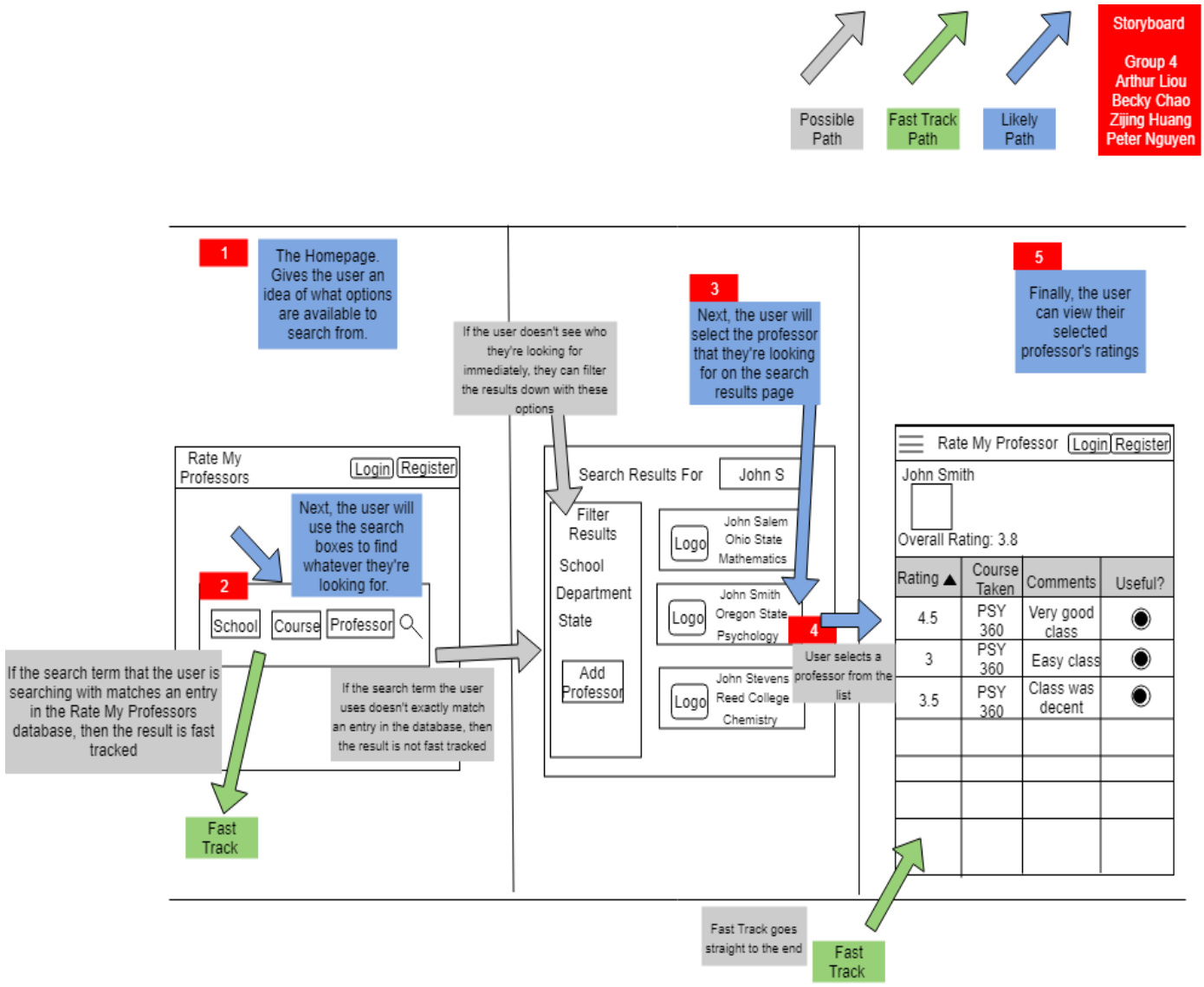
Based off various design principles, we continued to shape and iterate upon our prototype. Each week / iteration we went through, we used feedback, evaluations, and greater understanding of design principles to narrow and focus on the core parts of the designed prototype of RateMyProfessors. Using the homepage example from earlier, our team had expected that the clean, minimalist homepage would be preferred over the more complicated homepage with multiple features and a news feed. We didn't expect that the feedback would be unanimous in the former homepage concept. The takeaway we here was that learnability and usability of the homepage were of vital importance to our prototype, over an emphasis on visibility and efficiency that we had in mind for the latter, complicated

homepage prototype. But on other pages, such as the ratings professor page and search page, we found that our users did want more focus on visibility, feedback, and mapping. In addition, as we continued our iterations, we focused on maintaining consistency between our concepts and storyboard, while keeping in mind the constraints to narrow our prototype's focus to actions we did want to use. For the search page, we found that users, in a sense, prioritized different design principles compared to other pages. We mentioned earlier that for our ratings professor page and search page that users preferred to focused more on visibility, mapping, and efficiency. To conclude, finding that users focused on different design principles at different points in the storyboard was a unique perspective that we will keep in mind for future reference.

APPENDIX

1. PROTOTYPES

1.1 Storyboard



1.2.1 Storyboard Prototype shows a user searching for a professor named John Smith

Participation Report

Group Member name	Role	Responsibilities and Assigned tasks	Tasks Completeness Grade*0-5
Arthur Liou	Leader	● Summary / Abstract ● 1 - Intro ● ACM Formatting ● Balsamiq: Homepage ● Proofreading and editing	5
Becky Chao	Writing	● Balsamiq: Search prototype ● Decision decisions ● Proofreading and editing	5
Peter Nguyen	User Communication	● Balsamiq: Storyboard	5
Zijing Huang	Visual Design	● Balsamiq: Professor Rating Page	5