

[HW 9] Final Prototype: 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 and need; 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 shows the various uses of the pages on the website, but has an emphasis on covering 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, the storyboard shows the possible paths a user could take to perform this task, from homepage to search page to professor rating page. Side paths including logging in, registration (which is needed for adding a new professor), and adding a professor are shown.

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 get 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. Additionally, instead of one search bar at the top of the search page, there are now three, mimicking the design of the homepage. This was a suggestion from a classmate that came up during a gallery review. 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.

5. CHANGES FROM INTERACTIVE DESIGN GALLERY #2

Here is a brief list of changes in the prototype that were added after evaluating comments from the Interactive Design Gallery #2 and why they were made:

1. Implemented a clear all filters button on the search page thanks to the suggestion of the TA. A few users

commented that they would like this functionality because there are a lot of filters on the left hand side bar.

Thus, in accordance with efficiency, we added a clear all filters button.

2. Similar to the above point about efficiency, we converted the checkmarks on the reviews page to Y/N checkboxes.
3. On the search page, we changed the "type ahead" placeholder from "professor name" to "search term". This provides understanding by clarifying that keywords other than a first name and last name could be searched with the search page.
4. To make our page more effective, we made university logos on the search page links. The logos and the links add to the memorability factor of the page -- users are often automatically attracted to familiar visuals and they should be able to instantly recognize their university's logo. The connection between the university logo and the link to the university page should be easily understood.
5. We added the university page prototype, to help potential users complete their presumed task of finding their professors. These pages list university professors by department, as well as identify the university's name and location. Thus, users have more data points to properly find the correct page. Users can filter by department on the university pages.
6. On the professor ratings pages, we implemented an expand drop-down review feature that helps users open and close long comments. This

comment box was further refined with more empirical data (see below). This allows our application to be effective and efficient.

7. On the search page, the search box could be considered vague to certain users, since it originally indicated that it considered a professor-related term but didn't seem to consider others or if they had indicated multiple search boxes (from the homepage search bar). Thus, we mimicked the three search boxes from the homepage for the search page.
8. We added the Add New Professor and account registration wireframes, per the grader's comments. We agree that it adds to the security of the site and that an account should be needed to create a new professor page.

To conclude this particular design gallery, there were a lot of functional requests and enhancements that were provided in the user feedback that led our prototype to be more efficient, effective, and easier to learn how to do specific tasks.

6. CHANGES FROM FINAL DESIGN GALLERY

Here is a brief list of changes in the prototype that were added after evaluating comments from the Final Design Gallery and why they were made:

1. In the professor ratings page, we tweaked the expanding review feature so now the review box doesn't block other reviews. This is a reasonable request from the users and was indicated in multiple comments. From a design

standpoint, we don't want to hinder the user, so we removed the blocker. The table now expands into extra rows if more room is needed. Less clicking is needed if the user wishes to read other rows.

2. We created an empty rating page, which the user can access after they create a professor. The previous iteration took the user to a page that already had several student reviews. It made more sense to take the user directly to a page where one could add the first review for the newly added professor. Empirical data indicated that this was a confusing result that didn't confirm that the correct new professor page was created. This is a case where we had multiple user comments, took the feedback, and acted upon it.
3. On the first two pages on the "add a professor" page, we converted the login/register buttons into logout button since the user can only add professor when logged in, so it did not make sense to have the login/register buttons on those pages.
4. On the list of professors page, we added a scroll bar to clarify that many professors can be viewed on the list, not just the ones that can be seen after the page first loads. This change was implemented from a reasonable user request.
5. After logging in or registering, the user is redirected to the original page they were on. Previously they were redirected to the home page. Accommodating for this made for a more consistent user flow and did not unnecessarily create confusion.

This change should decrease the number of possible user errors.

6. In the menu that opens upon clicking the hamburger icon at the top left, we shortened the menu's length from extending all the way to the bottom of the page to just the end of the 4th option. This is because the extra whitespace in that menu is not necessary and is oddly placed.

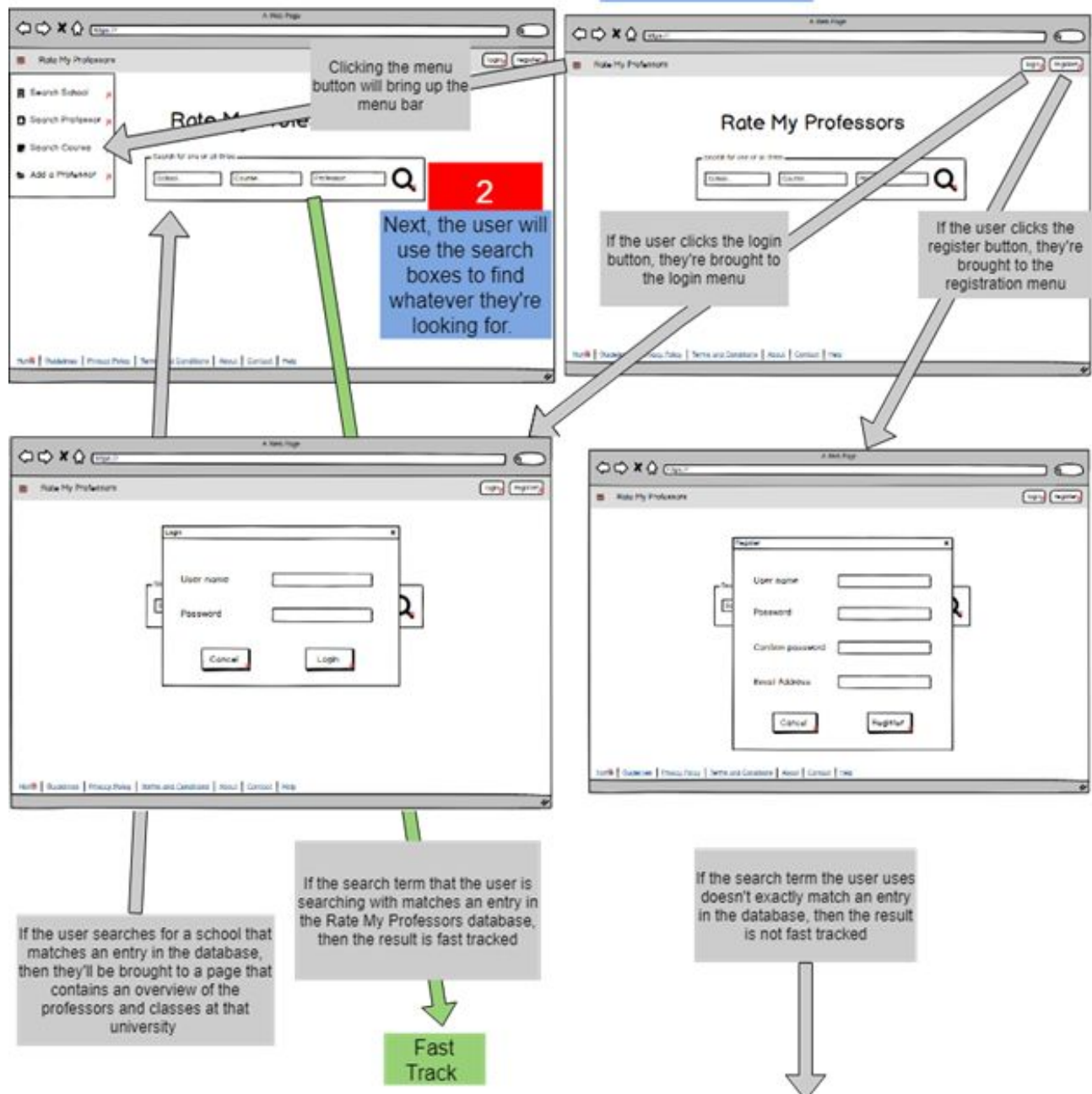
To conclude this particular design gallery, mostly cosmetic changes and link redirects

were suggested. After reviewing the user feedback and considering the limitations and tradeoffs of implementing them, we were able to accommodate and implement most of the concerns and comments we received from the final gallery design review. We think users will be satisfied by these changes.



1

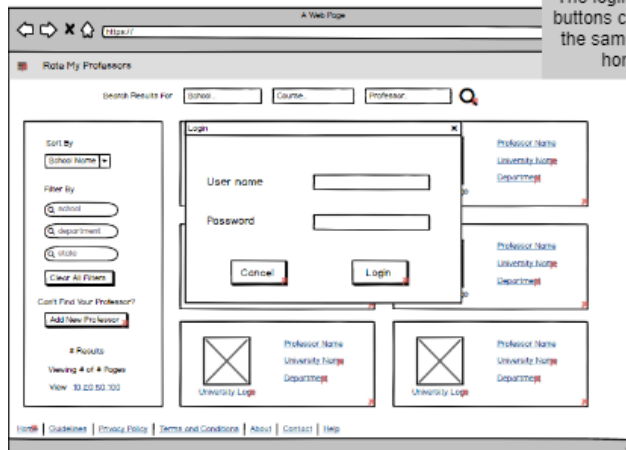
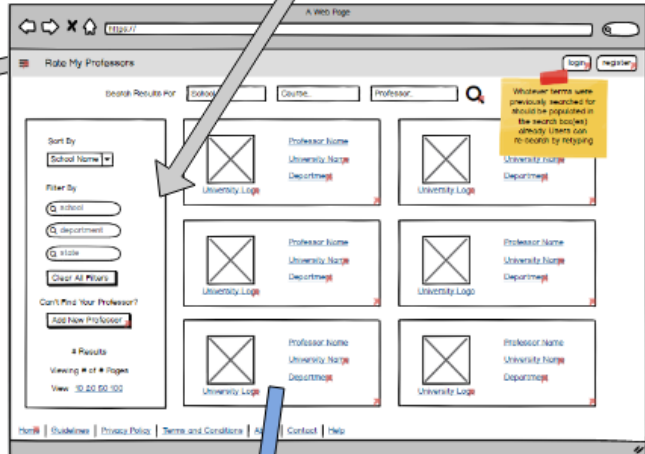
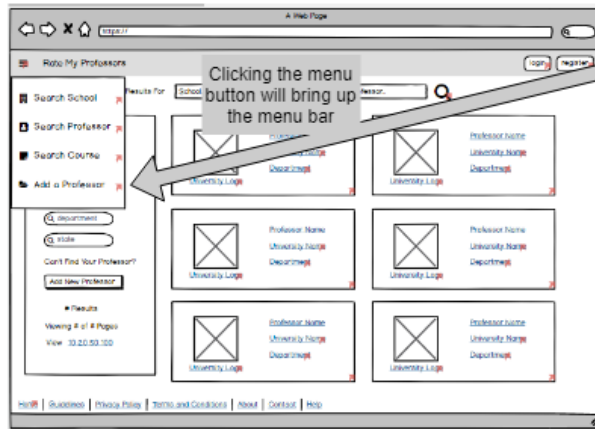
The Homepage. Gives the user an idea of what options are available to search from.



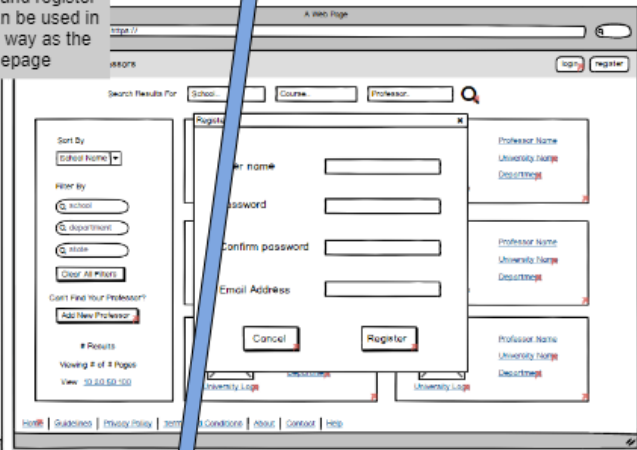
3

Next, the user will select the professor that they're looking for on the search results page

If the user doesn't see who they're looking for immediately, they can filter the results down with these options



The login and register buttons can be used in the same way as the homepage



4

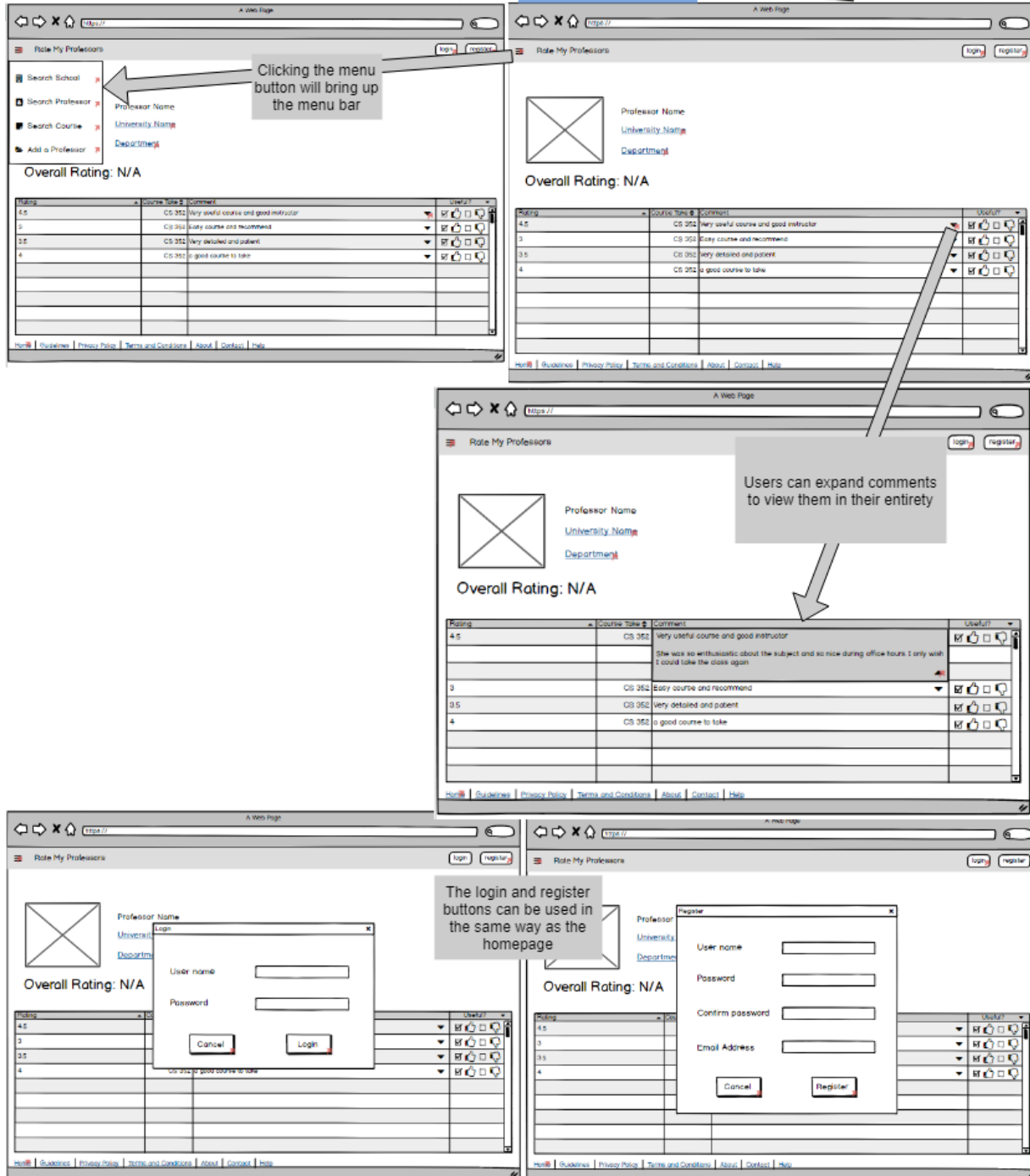
User selects a professor from the list

5

The user can view their selected professor's ratings

Fast Track path can go straight to the professor's rating page

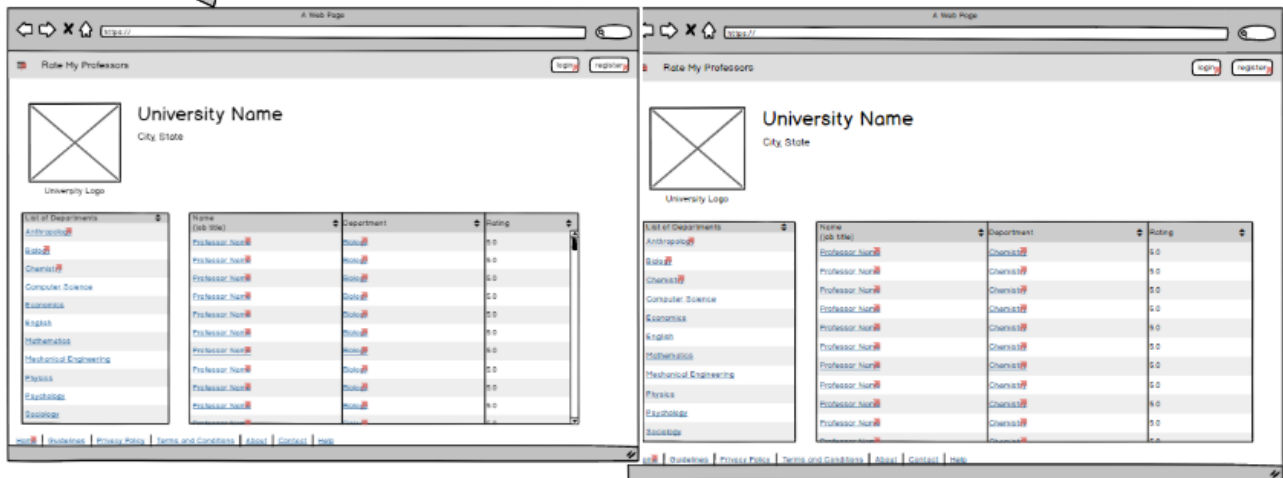
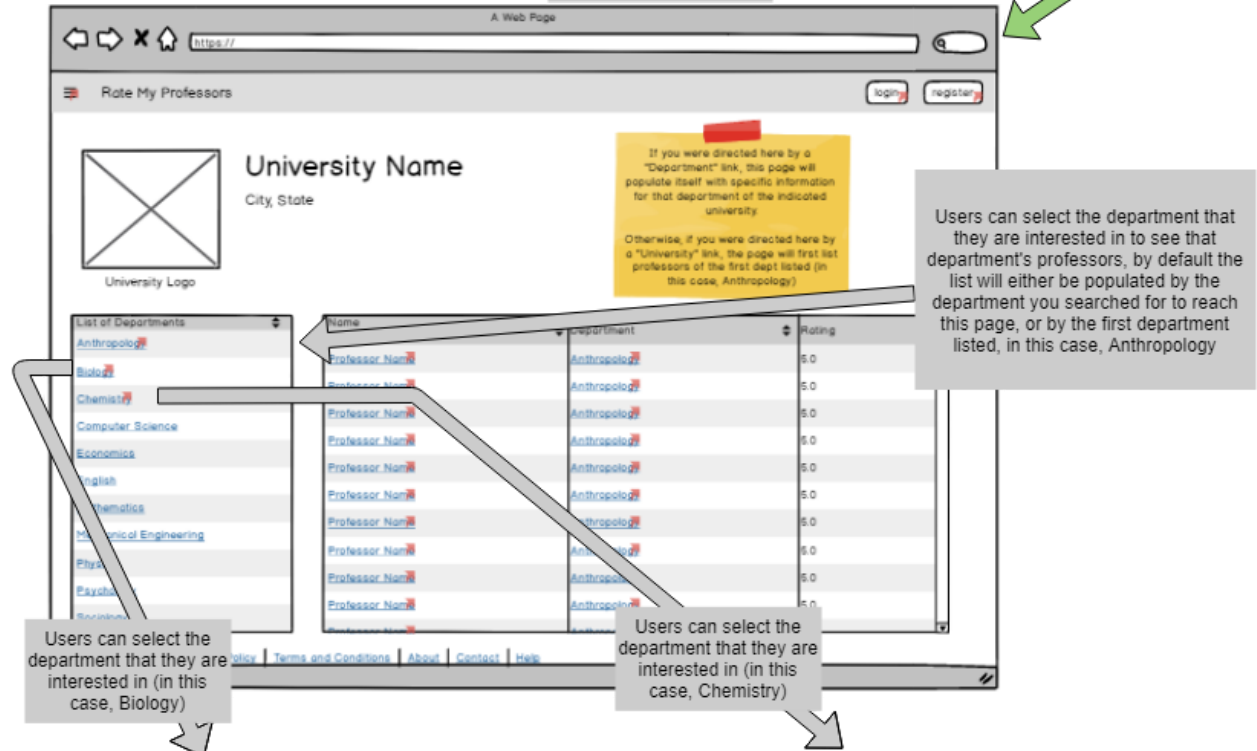
Fast Track



Users can view an overview of the professors and departments of a school

Fast Track path can go straight to the professor's rating page

Fast Track



If the user can't find the professor that they're looking for, then they can choose to add that professor to the website if they are logged in

Rate My Professors

Search School
Search Professor
Search Course
Add a Professor

Professor Name
Gender
School/University
Department
Course
Rating
Comment

Cancel Add

[Home](#) | [Guidelines](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Help](#)

Clicking the menu button will bring up the menu bar

Rate My Professors

Add a professor

Professor Name
Gender
School/University
Department
Course
Rating
Comment

Cancel Add

[Home](#) | [Guidelines](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Help](#)

Rate My Professors

Add a professor

Login

User name
Password

Cancel Login

Comment

Cancel Add

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If the user is not logged in, but wants to add a professor, they will be prompted to login or to register. The login and register buttons can be used in the same way as the homepage

Rate My Professors

Add a professor

Register

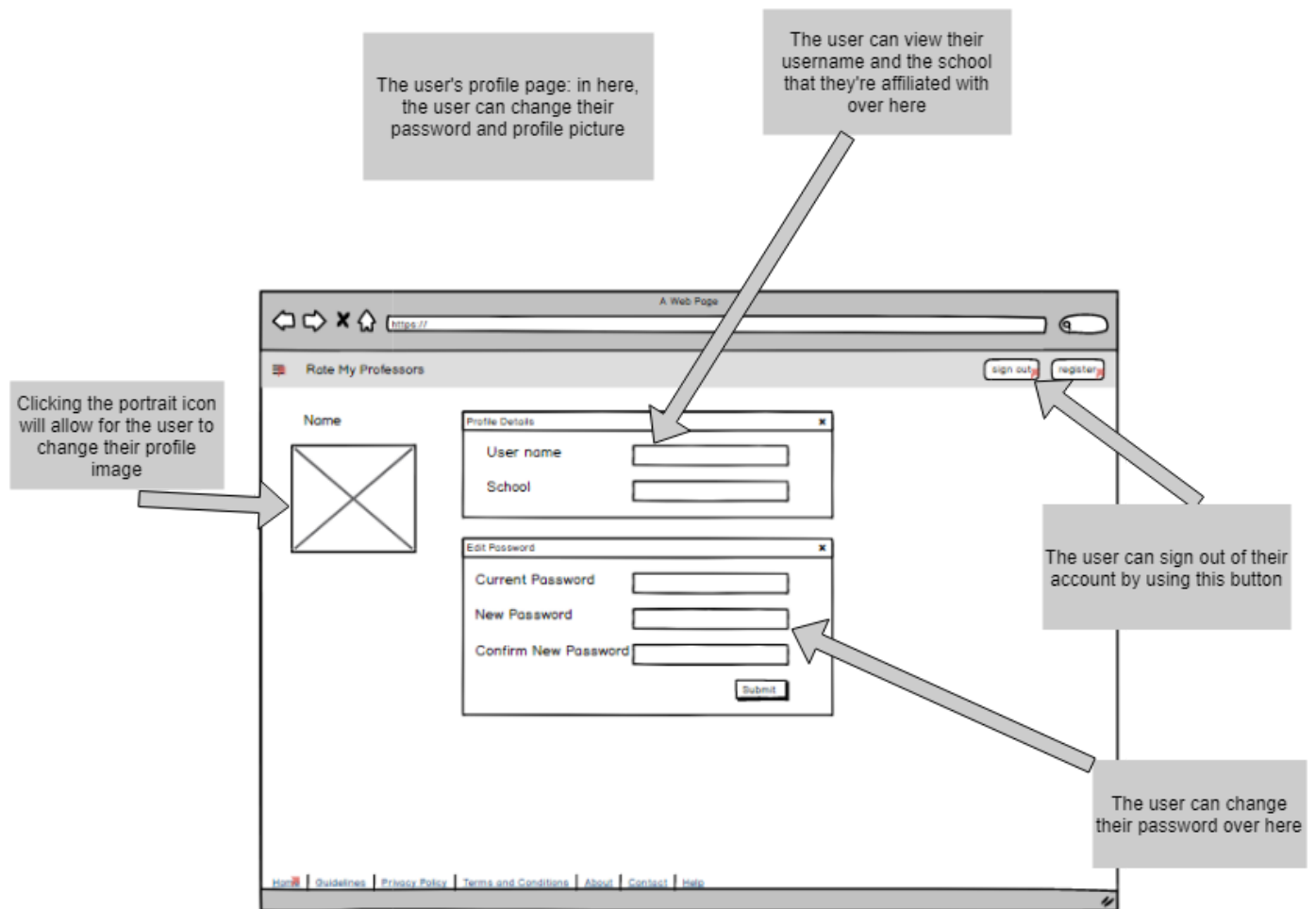
User name
Password
Confirm password
Email Address

Cancel Register

Comment

Cancel Add

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Participation Report

Group Member name	Role	Responsibilities and Assigned tasks	Tasks Completeness Grade*0-5
Arthur Liou	Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summary / Abstract• ACM Formatting• Balsamiq: Homepage + editing• Design decisions writing• Changes list• Proofreading and editing	5
Becky Chao	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balsamiq: Search prototype• Design decisions writing• Changes list• Proofreading and editing	5
Peter Nguyen	User Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Storyboard	5
Zijing Huang	Visual Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professor Rating Page• Register and Login window• Add a professor page• Button links added	5