

Project Overview

As the *Career Events & Marketing Coordinator* at the *University of San Diego*, one of my key responsibilities is managing our department's weekly email newsletter. When I first joined, my role focused on weekly execution. Basically, I was updating event details, creating flyers when needed, coordinating approvals, and scheduling the newsletter through *Constant Contact*. I also handled the backend logistics, including pulling the most up-to-date student list and ensuring each issue was delivered on time.

The existing newsletter had been in place for several semesters and followed a fixed structure, with recurring sections like "*Hot Take*", "*CDev Events*", and "*Meet with CDev*". I maintained this format for about a month, learning its rhythms and limitations. From the start, my manager mentioned that a redesign was on the horizon but with no set plan or direction, only a general suggestion that "*it was time for a refresh.*"

Rather than wait until summer, I took the opportunity to reimagine the newsletter immediately. I approached it as a UX challenge: *What does the data tell us about how students engage? What's working, what's not, and how can we make this experience clearer, more actionable, and easier to digest?* Using Constant Contact analytics, best practices for email design, and my own research into student-centered content strategy, **I redesigned the newsletter from the ground up.** I also ensured it visually aligned with our department's broader marketing materials. Creating a seamless and cohesive brand experience across print, email, and social platforms. The new version is scheduled to launch at the beginning of the Fall 2025 semester.

The Problem

When I began working with the Career Weekly newsletter, it became clear that its structure wasn't aligned with how students actually engage with content. The newsletter was long. Visually cluttered. And largely static. Each week, I noticed that 4 out of 6 content sections remained unchanged. The "*Career Readiness*" and "*Career Tech*" sections, for example, were rarely updated. This meant that students had little reason to scroll past the top. I felt this wasn't just a design inefficiency, it created a loop where readers learned there was nothing new to see and disengaged as a result. Constant Contact analytics confirmed what I suspected:

- Open rates were consistently strong (averaging around 80%)
- But click-through rates were low (usually under 2%)
- And scroll heatmaps showed students rarely made it past the halfway mark

In short, students were opening the email, scanning for anything relevant, and closing it just as quickly. The only sections that drew regular attention were “*Hot Take*” and “*CDev Events*” both of which were positioned near the top and tied to timely, actionable opportunities. Visually, the newsletter felt outdated. It used inconsistent colors, scattered type styles, and a layout that didn’t follow any clear hierarchy. Brand cohesion was missing, and the mix of icons, backgrounds, and fonts felt more like clip art than a modern, student-first design.

Functionally, it had other issues too. The CTA policy which required a clickable button for nearly every section often led to redundant links or unnecessary clutter. I frequently had to create buttons that led to pages repeating the same information just worded differently. I understood the intent (maximize engagement), but the execution wasn’t working for the user. Perhaps most frustrating was the mobile experience. The mobile layout stacked every section vertically, making an already long newsletter feel endless. While technically responsive, it created a poor user experience, especially for busy students scanning for something useful.

There were sections I felt could be removed entirely, like “*Career Readiness*” or “*Career Tech*” because they repeated static info students could easily access on our website. But removing them wasn’t an option. I had to work within strict boundaries and limited authority. **That meant approaching the redesign not with control, but with intention.**

Despite these limitations, I saw a real UX opportunity: to reduce friction, improve flow, and build a system that made sense for how students think, act, and engage today.

The Solution Part A – Structuring for Flow and Clarity

The first step in redesigning the Career Weekly newsletter was rethinking its structure. I didn't want to just shuffle content. Instead, I wanted to align the layout with how students actually use it: for quick glances, not deep reads. I approached it through a UX lens, focused on reducing friction, shortening perceived length, and creating a clearer hierarchy of content. To remove visual clutter, I removed the unnecessary background color shifts that previously separated sections. They added noise without meaning. In their place, I designed custom Canva headers using USD-approved colors, matching the tone and visual identity of our larger marketing system. This gave each section a consistent, branded feel while improving skimmability.

I also built my own button templates in Canva. Constant Contact's default buttons were clunky, inconsistent, and hard to style. While the platform itself has major design limitations (not very UX-friendly, in my opinion), I found workarounds that let me bring more polish and consistency to the layout.

Next I reorganized by relevance. Instead of grouping sections by internal logic, I reordered them based on what students actually care about and act on:

- Events and Torero Treks were merged into a unified event block to keep all timely opportunities top-of-mind.
- A new "Our Voices" section features authentic student thank-you notes (with permission) or engaging stats, written in a conversational tone. To make it scalable, I paired each entry with a playful avatar pulled from a large asset library to give it personality without needing constant original visuals.
- All counselors are now consolidated under "*Our Team*" with a simple message: "*Your journey matters to us.*" This section puts faces to names and recognizes that students often choose support based on human connection and even something as intangible as "*vibes.*"
- The Career Readiness section was trimmed and paired with a custom mascot, "*Young Diego*" whose presence was meant to inject lightness into a required but underwhelming program.

- The Career Tech section was also cut down significantly. It now highlights one tool at a time, usually Handshake, using branded assets provided by the platform.

I also removed a large amount of redundant or overly dense text, focusing instead on clarity and minimalism. Each section now has a specific role and is visually and cognitively easier to scan. I attempted to design for sustainability. Every design choice was made with scalability in mind. Sections like “*Our Voices*” can be updated weekly, while lower-priority sections (like “Career Tech”) require little maintenance. This lets the newsletter remain fresh without creating an unnecessary content burden which I believe is a key part of building a system that works long-term.

The layout also reflects engagement data: fresh, student-focused content lives at the top; static or rarely updated content moves to the bottom, where it won’t disrupt the experience if ignored. Every structural decision was grounded in data and less on assumptions. I didn’t guess what students needed. I looked at how they behaved, and I did my best to design for that.

The Solution Part B – Visual Consistency and Human-Centered Design

Beyond structure and flow, I made deliberate visual and interaction design choices to align the newsletter with modern UX principles and the Career Center’s broader identity. My goal wasn’t only to make it “*look better*”, it was to create a more intuitive, calming, and human experience for students. This required me to eliminate anything that didn’t serve a clear purpose like random background color shifts, busy separators, lengthy text blocks, and even legacy animations that appeared to be added “*just because*”. These weren’t helping students engage. In my opinion they were distractions.

Instead, I leaned into white space, simplified layouts, and intentional groupings that created visual breathing room and reinforced a sense of order. A sense of unified branding was important to me. The entire redesign was built using official USD brand colors, fonts, and layout principles. I carried over the same visual language I used in our flyers and social media campaigns. These were soft blue backgrounds, gold accents, and clean dark-blue body text. Custom soft-background illustrations of campus landmarks added subtle visual identity. Even character elements like “*Young Diego*”, which is our

stylized mascot, appear here and in other materials, reinforcing continuity and recognition across platforms. This wasn't just aesthetic. It was about creating a seamless cross-channel experience so that when students saw this newsletter, they instantly recognized it as "CDev."

Although I wasn't able to remove the "*everything must be clickable*" rule, I found a middle ground. In cases where no real destination link existed, I replaced traditional buttons with lighter phrases like "*See you there*". This was an attempt at a small UX nudge that tells students this item is informational, not actionable. This preserved layout consistency while reducing false expectations. I also avoided visual inconsistency by keeping button formatting intact but shifting the language when necessary. And since click-through rates were historically low, I designed more for recognition and clarity than interaction.

In terms of accessibility, all colors were checked for sufficient contrast, and I ensured that each image included appropriate alt text for screen readers. The newsletter was also reviewed across desktop, tablet, and mobile to make sure layout, spacing, and legibility held up in all environments, especially mobile, where students are most likely to engage.

I added small but meaningful elements that made the newsletter feel more personal. The new "*Student Voices*" section showcases thank-you notes and reflections in a conversational tone, often paired with playful avatar images to keep things approachable. The "*Young Diego*" mascot appears to uplift, entertain, and reinforce community identity, even if a student only scans the email.

Outcome

Even though the redesigned newsletter hasn't officially launched yet, the impact of this work is already clear to me. The structure I created takes the guesswork out of weekly production. We now know exactly what kind of content we need to keep things fresh and valuable: student voices, data highlights, counselor visibility, and timely event promotions. For the team, especially our career counselors, the addition of the "*Student Voices*" section has the potential to reinforce the value of what they do. When students see real feedback and reflections from their peers, it builds credibility and trust in a way that static promotion never could.

Early feedback from the team was encouraging. Colleagues noted that the layout looked strong, and several people asked thoughtful questions about brand alignment which gave me a chance to explain how I applied USD's official branding guidelines across layout, color, font, and tone. These conversations helped strengthen buy-in and allowed me to frame the redesign through a UX lens: one rooted in intentionality, consistency, and user-centered thinking.

Personally, I now feel more connected to the newsletter as a meaningful part of our student experience. Before, it felt like a task. It was repetitive and disconnected. Now, it feels like a product I'm proud to put in front of students. It reflects care, thoughtfulness, and identity. It's not just a delivery system for dates and reminders. It's a way to connect, motivate, and show students who we are. Whether they're inspired by Young Diego, see themselves reflected in peer testimonials, or recognize a counselor who looks like them, they're now getting more than just logistics. They're getting a message of belonging.

If the redesign does what I hope, students will start scrolling with intention. They won't just glance, they'll explore. Success, for me, would look like increased engagement across the entire email, more appointments with our team, and a growing archive of student reflections we can proudly share. Those are signs that we're not just sending information. They are signs that we're making an impact.

Finally, this project reinforced my identity as a UX thinker. I didn't just make design decisions based on intuition, I used data. I identified friction points, applied principles of hierarchy and flow, and worked within real-world constraints. In reality, this was a systems challenge. And it reminded me that great UX is as much about adaptability as it is about vision. Knowing when to advocate and when to adjust is part of the work and part of the growth.

Reflection + Lessons Learned

This project gave me a clear window into what it really means to be a UX designer in a professional environment not in theory, but in practice. It showed me what it's like to work within constraints, respond to subjective feedback, and navigate requests that may not always align with best

practices. I learned that successful UX isn't about ignoring those realities. In fact it's about absorbing them, adapting when needed, and advocating when appropriate. Most importantly, it reminded me that the user should always be at the center. **The previous version of this newsletter was designed for the person who built it.** The new version was designed for the students.

It also reinforced how personal UX can be. A well-designed newsletter isn't just about structure or visual clarity, it's a story. It reflects the voices of students, the identity of our team, and the values of our university. Good UX doesn't just make experiences smoother, it makes them more meaningful.

Throughout the process, I saw my own adaptability in action. One of my core strengths. I adapted to tight constraints, shifting priorities, a difficult platform, and an environment where I didn't always have final say. And I still created something that works. Something intentional. Something I'm proud of. That resilience and that ability to move forward while honoring both the user and the system is what I'll bring to every UX challenge ahead. If I had full control, I would've removed sections that don't provide real value, like "*Career Readiness*" or "*Tech Chats*". They dilute the purpose of the newsletter and take up space that could otherwise be used to highlight more impactful content.

But even without that freedom, I made strategic choices to keep the experience focused, approachable, and student-centered. In the end, I'm proud of many things. I'm proud that I finished it well ahead of schedule, that I created original branded assets, that I grounded my decisions in real data, and that I built something elegant and elevated. It reflects who I am as a designer. A designer that is thoughtful, strategic, and motivated by clarity and care.