TEAM SARANZA
(Sambas, Salinas, Libranza)
PART 2 - DESIGNING ALTERNATIVES

Project Description:

SYNCO is a group collaboration app designed specifically for university students engaged in academic group work. It addresses common challenges in coordinating tasks, tracking progress, and managing communication among team members, especially in a busy post-pandemic academic environment. SYNCO will support tasks such as setting deadlines, monitoring individual and group progress, sharing files, and maintaining focused group communication. The primary users of the app are college students involved in group assignments, research teams, thesis projects, and organization type academic events who need a centralized, student-friendly platform to work more efficiently and collaboratively.

Requirements Summary:

SYNCO is a group collaboration app designed specifically for university students engaged in academic group work. It addresses common challenges in coordinating tasks, tracking progress, and managing communication among team members, especially in a busy post-pandemic academic environment. SYNCO will support tasks such as setting deadlines, monitoring individual and group progress, sharing files, and maintaining focused group communication. The primary users of the app are college students involved in group assignments, research teams, thesis projects, and organization type academic events who need a centralized, student-friendly platform to work more efficiently and collaboratively.

Design Space:

Ensuring reliable performance with low data usage and offline capability may be difficult, especially for real-time updates and file syncing. Maintaining a smooth, intuitive UX while integrating multiple tools (chat, file sharing, task tracking) into one app is also a challenge.

We considered balancing simplicity with functionality. Adding too many features may overwhelm users, while too few may not solve coordination problems. Another tradeoff is between real-time syncing (which improves collaboration) and data efficiency (important for students with limited connectivity).

The easiest tasks to support are role assignment and task tracking with simple dashboards.

Harder tasks include designing effective accountability features and real-time collaborative tools without duplicating what platforms like Google Docs already do.

Design Summary

We considered relying on existing tools like Google Docs, Messenger, and Trello, but found that they don't fully support student group work in one place. They require switching between platforms, which often leads to confusion and missed updates.

We also looked into creating a basic checklist app but realized it wouldn't solve deeper problems like uneven task distribution or lack of accountability.

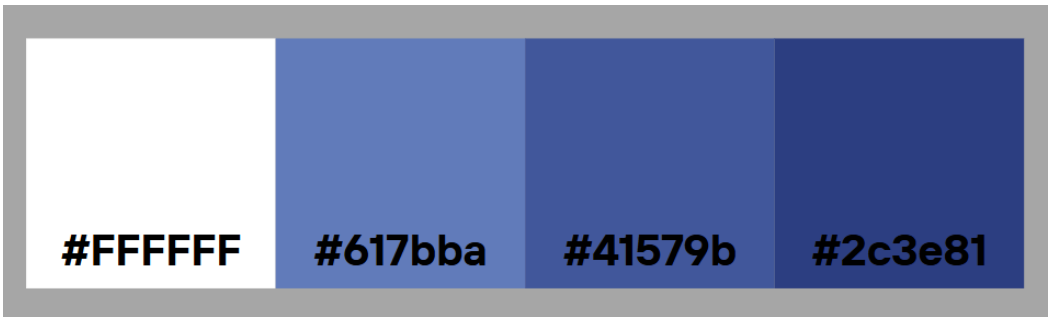
We chose to design SYNCO as an all-in-one platform that focuses on the real needs of student groups combining task tracking, file sharing, and communication in a single, easy-to-use app. This approach balances functionality and simplicity while directly addressing the common challenges students face in group projects.

The Designs:

SYNCO is designed with a modern, minimalistic aesthetic in mind. To bring this vision to life, key elements such as the color palette, font style, and graphical user interface (GUI) will be defined.

Color Palette:

The color palette shown is what's been selected to be used while designing the application, but we may add or change the color palette during the developing process of the application.



Font Style:

ABCDEFGHIJ
KLMNOPQRS
TUVWXYZ
1234567890

Inter Font

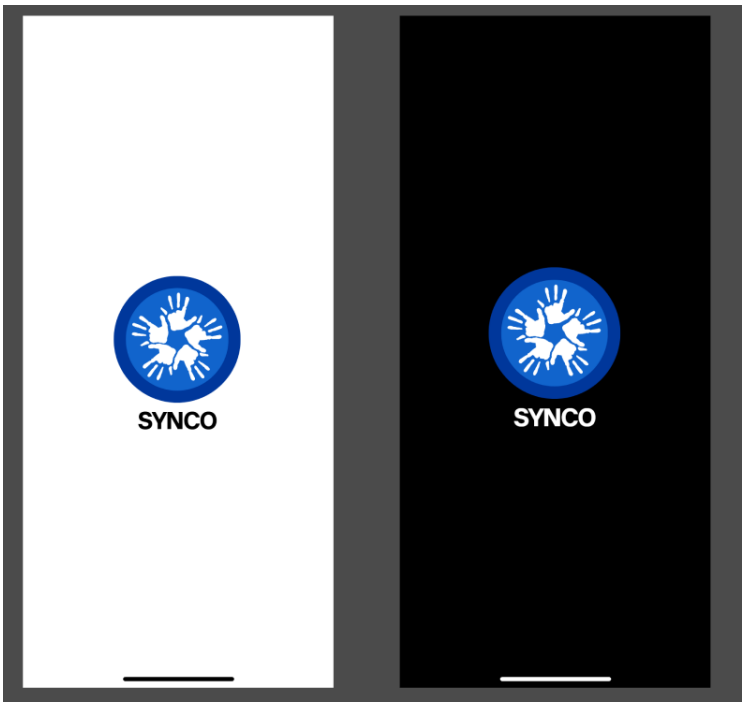
The team decided to use the font Inter. We decided to use this font for its minimalistic and modern design. This is also subject to change as during the developing phase we may change it.

GUI (Graphical User Interface):

The team will only be using the mobile app GUI for the application. The team will be adopting the mobile app GUI from Figma for this application.

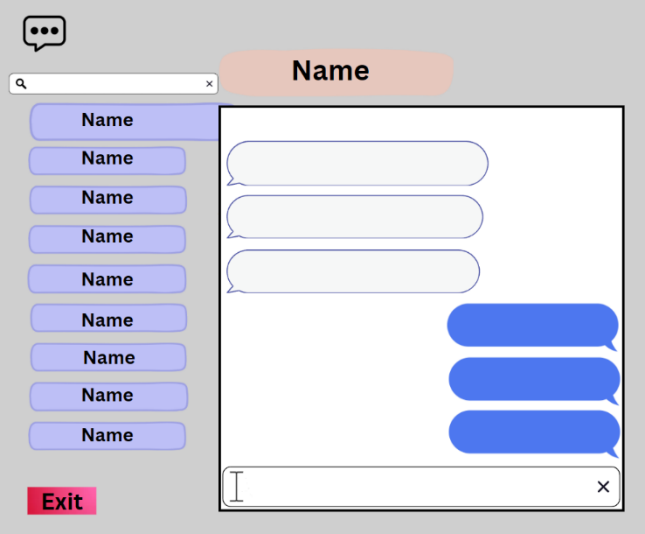
Design Sketches and Alternatives:

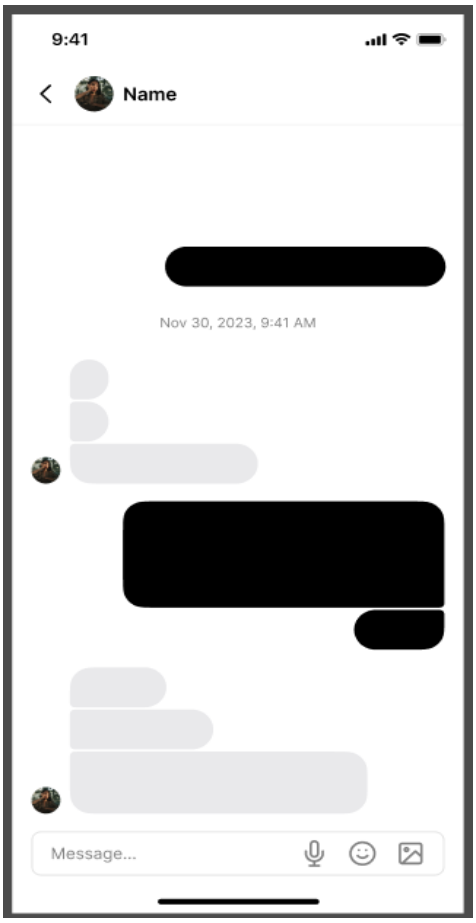
The team has developed a set of alternative designs intended for use in the application. These designs are not yet final and will be evaluated once proper prototyping begins.



Splash Art/Opening Screen

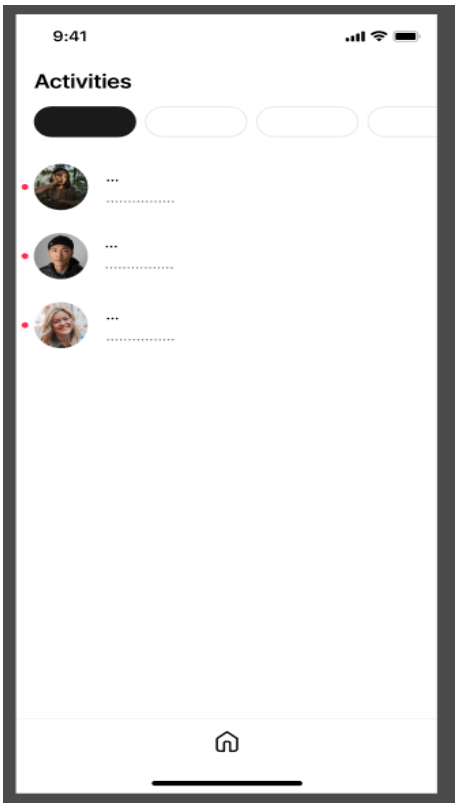
Different looks for the potential splash art of the app, light or dark mode. We will try to implement a toggle for the two options but if were unable to do that well settle for either one.

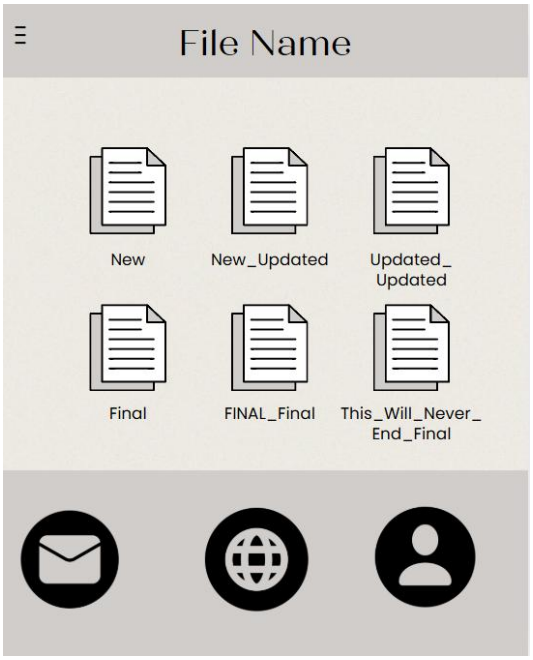




Chat Rooms

Different looks for the potential chat rooms of the app. As you can see from the photos want to try different approaches in how the chat room looks. This is also the place where you can share files. Overall, we want it to be simple to not confuse the users.





Task Viewer/Manager

Different looks for the potential Task Viewer/Manager of the app. The team also thought of different approaches for the task viewer/manager. Our goal for this section of the app is to make it simple and not confusing for the users.

Scenario:

Scenario 1: John and Wayne had a misunderstanding about which task they were going to do and ended making the same part of the project leaving one part of the project unfinished.

Design Assessment: SYNCO

The current design of SYNCO aims to meet the core requirements of a student-focused collaboration tool: task tracking, file sharing, and team communication in a clean, centralized platform. Based on the proposed features and interface sketches, we assess the following advantages and disadvantages, along with the level of requirement satisfaction and feedback from potential users.

Advantages:

- **Simplicity and Usability**: The minimalistic interface and consistent color palette create a clean and non-distracting experience.
- **Design Flexibility**: Multiple alternative layouts were sketched, showing openness to iteration and user testing. This increases the chances of finding a user-friendly solution.
- **Focused Functionality**: By emphasizing core functions like task lists, group chats, and file management, the app avoids unnecessary complexity and supports key collaboration needs efficiently.

- **Modern Visual Identity**: Use of the Inter font and consistent styling gives the app a modern, professional feel, which helps establish trust and appeal among students.

Disadvantages:

- **Limited Interactivity in Early Designs**: Some sketches show early concepts without detailed interaction flows, which might make it hard to test behavior-based features.
- **Unclear Offline Functionality**: Offline support is a stated requirement, but not yet reflected in the design or interaction planning.
- **Light vs. Dark Mode Uncertainty**: The splash screen includes both light and dark themes, but no final decision or toggle mechanism has been confirmed, which could affect accessibility for different user preferences.

User Feedback and Evaluation:

To gather feedback, we conducted informal interviews with students/classmates. We presented initial sketches and asked participants to rank features by usefulness and give suggestions.

Key Takeaways:

- Most students liked the task viewer layout with icons and file types clearly labeled, noting it felt organized and familiar.
- Students requested a reminder or notification feature to stay updated without checking the app constantly.
- Several students preferred having a dark mode toggle, especially those working at night.

Conclusion:

The current SYNCO design meets many core requirements, particularly in ease of use, clean layout, and support for essential group work tasks. With continued feedback-driven iterations especially around offline support, theme customization, and interaction flow this design has strong potential to become a reliable student collaboration tool.

Requirements Changes

During the design process for SYNCO, several requirements and usability criteria were modified or added based on user feedback and design evaluation.

1. Addition of Dark Mode Option
Originally, theme customization was not a requirement. However, after showing initial designs to potential users, several students requested a dark mode option to reduce eye strain during nighttime use. As a result, we added the idea of a light/dark mode toggle to our usability goals and reflected it in our splash screen design options.

2. Emphasis on Notification and Reminder Features
While the original requirements included real-time updates, they were not detailed. Feedback from user surveys highlighted that students wanted notifications for task deadlines and chat updates to help them stay on track without constantly opening the app. This led us to prioritize real-time notifications and possibly in-app reminders as a key usability requirement.

3. Deprioritization of Full Offline Mode
We initially considered offline functionality essential. However, during design discussions and based on our technical limitations, we decided to deprioritize full offline support and focus instead on data-light design with basic offline viewing (e.g., read-only access to task lists). This shift ensures we can deliver a usable app version within our scope.

4. Simplified Cross-Platform Focus
Although the app was intended to run across mobile and desktop platforms, we decided to focus solely on the mobile version for now. This change arose due to design complexity and time constraints, with plans to expand later depending on student adoption and development capacity.

5. Refined Accountability Features
Originally, we had broad goals around “ensuring fair contribution.” After reviewing what was realistically implementable, we narrowed this to include task completion tracking and visual progress indicators—features that support accountability without needing complex analytics.

These changes show how the design process, especially early testing and feedback, helped us refine our requirements into a more focused, realistic, and user-centered system.