INFO/COMM 3450

Group Assignment #5c

Final Paper

Project Title: Find a Buddy

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Group Members:

Cordelia Jin (chd34)

Grace Song (gs488)

Natalie Fung (nf238)

Rebecca North (rn256)

Ryan Curtis (rec284)

Description of Chosen Design Problem and Proposed Solution

College is stressful enough with homework, tests, clubs and so much more. The last thing students want to worry about is their social life. Finding friends is the first task students complete upon starting at a new university. Once students find their place, they do not typically try and branch out to completely new people. This makes it extremely difficult for students who transferred or do not have a defined group or even those who just want to make new friends. This creates a segregated social environment on college campuses. Everyone around each other on college campuses is in similar situations. They inspire collaboration and group bonding. However, defined groups of friends do not allow for this environment to occur.

The concept of the design is connecting college students who want to make new friends with one another. Our goal was to determine the obstacles preventing students from meeting other new students and to analyze social interactions. We would then include these obstacles and other observations from our interview into a mobile application.

The participants that were interviewed were students in their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year at Cornell. These students were from different backgrounds, demographics, and academic majors to ensure we did not have a homogeneous sample. We were able to recruit five participants by advertising via social media. The interviews were specifically conducted in social settings amongst campus – some of the offered locations on the Google Form were Duffield, Mac's Café, Libe Café. These locations were imperative to our data collection. Aside from just collecting answers from our participants, we also were hoping to take notice of their interactions to the busy, social environments around them. Conversation in a quiet setting is different from an overly social one.

Our primary data collection technique for the interview was note-taking. One team member would ask the question and the other member would take notes of the responses and the participant's expression and movements.

The questions we asked varied and participants were to identify the question types differently based on what they believe is either identifying, confidential, or sensitive information. The questions that we asked were about the users' social interactions on a college campus. Therefore, we obtained information about how the participants interact with different people and how comfortable they are in new settings. We were aware that asking how comfortable they are about meeting new people was potentially a sensitive question.

One of our goals was to make the participants comfortable during the interview and to protect their privacy. To make sure of this, we had each participant sign a consent form. Additionally, all documented notes and recordings will be disposed of after we complete the final documentation for the project. All in all, we were hoping our users have the easiest and most enjoyable interview experience and through a variety of questions we could extract data that will be useful in creating a design to help connect college students who want to make new friends with one another.

Summary of the Approaches Taken within Design Process

Our design process used an iterative approach to continually refine our ideas to develop a solution that meets the needs of users to solve their problem. We started by understanding a problem and the users of the target audience. We then analyzed their goals, behaviors, and needs to set design requirements. We then iteratively designed a solution and evaluated each round

before increasing the fidelity. At several points in the process, we interacted with a variety of potential users for input and feedback and maintain a user-focused design.

Real-life Problems We Are Trying to Solve

Our application, Find a Buddy, encourages students, namely upperclassmen students, to go out of their comfort zones and to meet people outside of their existing friend groups. **The problem we attempted to solve is to help upperclassmen students meet other people in a natural, comfortable way**. From our initial user testing, we gathered data that informed us that people were open to meeting new people, but felt like it would be awkward to meet someone who does not want to meet a new person. Since the purpose of the application is to encourage people to meet one another through attending events, eating meals together, or online chatting, we believed that our application would entice people are actively interested in making new friends. Additionally, to ensure that a comfortable and safe space is provided to users, we made our application anonymous. This was to reduce the possibility of users having preconceived notions and implicit biases and stereotypes which may hinder people from using the application.

Main Claims for Proposed Solution with Evaluation Results

With our application, we presented two claims. The first being that our application will allow students, namely upperclassmen but open to all, meet other people anonymously, and without existing biases. Secondly, our application will encourage students to meet with one another for the purpose of finding a new friend.

From our usability testing, we received positive feedback that the application provided a good platform for people to find other people to eat meals with. A user noted that sometimes

they do not wish to eat alone and that the application "addresses the issue of finding people to eat with [when one's friends' are busy]."

On the contrary, multiple users from our usability testing, as well as those who listened to our pitch during the poster presentation session, mentioned their concerns about privacy when using the app. Since our application is a platform for users to be given anonymity, users were concerned about their safety. Multiple users asked how one can guarantee safety when the app could literally be used by anyone.

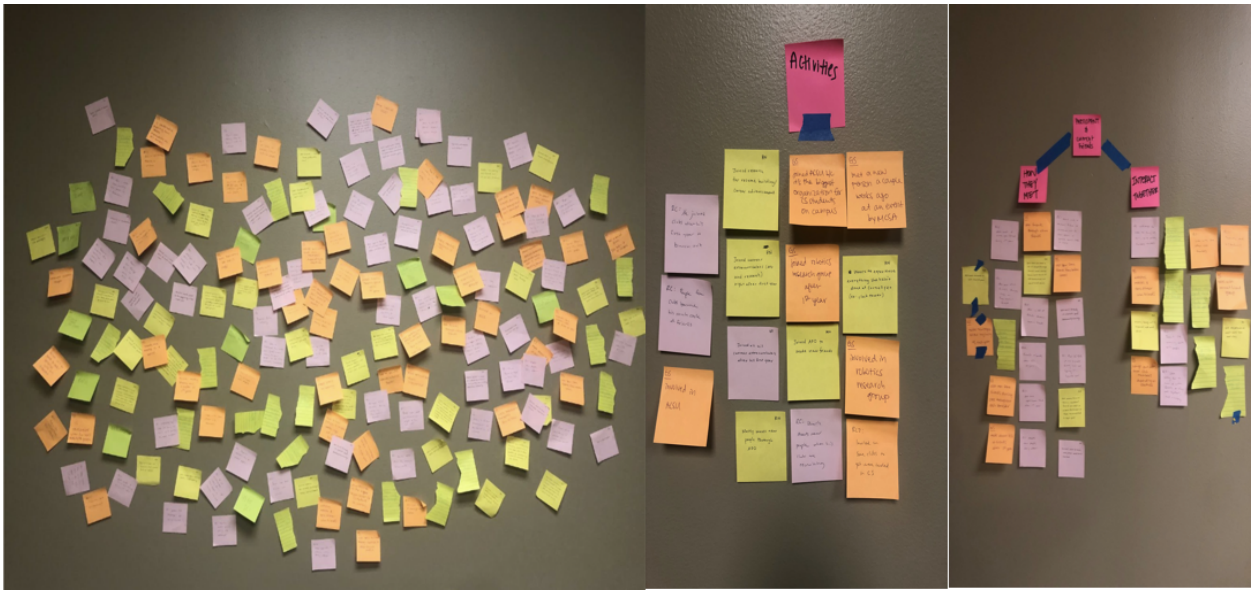
For this important reason, we will conclude that our application is partially successful. Our reasoning for providing users with anonymity does not directly solve the problem of allowing people to meet each other comfortably, as users are worried about their safety and comfort. That being said, the users who were worried about privacy and safety concerns were primarily concerned with the events page. The food page we created gained mostly positive feedback. For this reason, we would like to conclude that our application was partially successful.

Story of Design Process

Our design process began with a brainstorming session to identify problems that can be addressed to help "weave the social fabric". We began by individually brainstorming several ideas to improve the community, largely focused on the student community of Cornell University. We then pitched ideas to each other and decided to address the perceived problem that many students had a hard time meeting new people after their first year because of the changing social environment. We had an early idea of a solution where students could use a

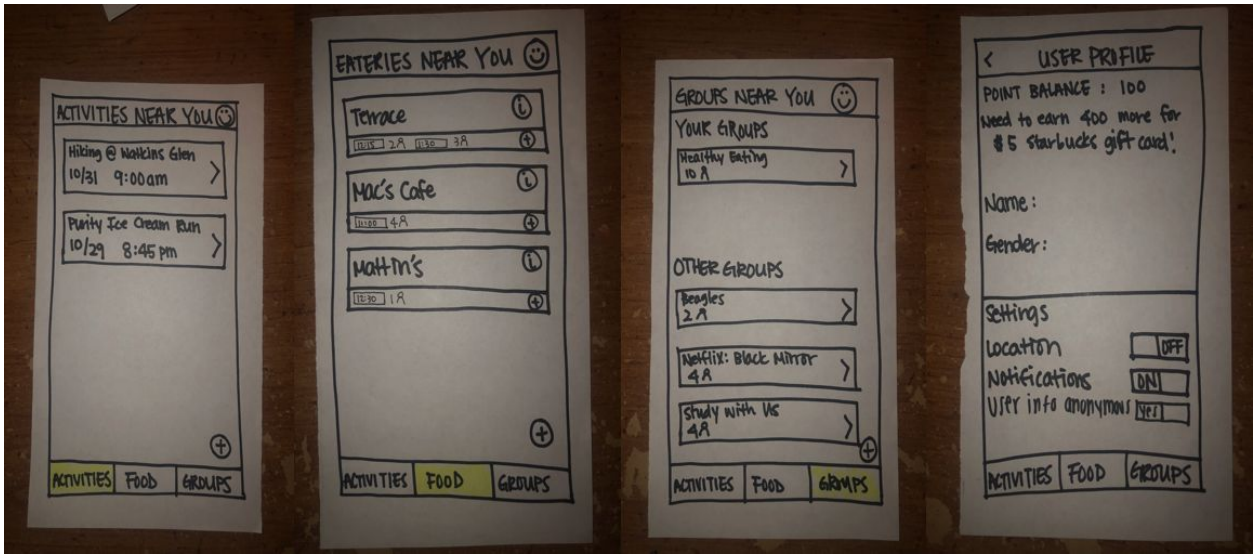
mobile app to find random people to eat a meal with and receive half off for doing so, inspired by the app Pocket Points.

After this, we conducted contextual user interviews with a variety of people in our target audience, upperclassmen at Cornell. Each interview followed the same protocol for consistency and focused on understanding the social habits and experiences of our user group to identify their needs. Following the interviews, we analyzed the data by creating activity notes from our findings and then creating an affinity diagram of the notes. The affinity diagram produced a set of common behaviors, goals, and needs from across the different interviews that we used to construct a persona that was a fictional user that we could specifically design for. This helped us to create a set of requirements important to the user group that should be included in the designed solution.



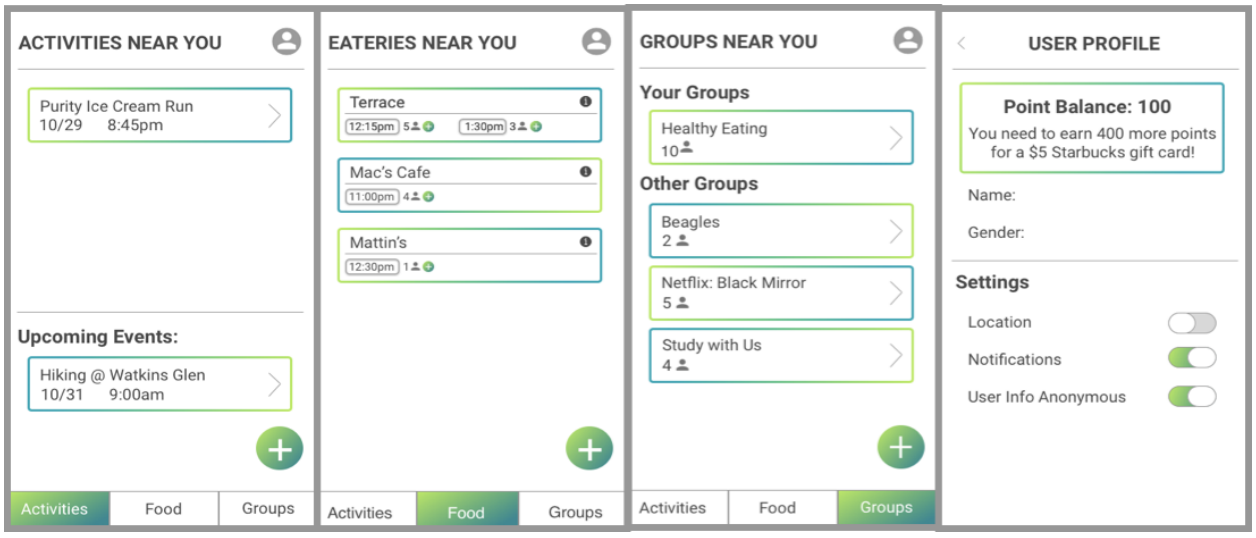
We then conducted market research to understand existing solutions that could be used to address our problem and analyze. Each team member then individually brainstormed 20 ideas for a solution to pitch to the group. During the group brainstorming session, we found many

similarities across ideas with key features to address different requirements. We then combined some of the best ideas into our designed solution, Find a Buddy. In developing the design, we created a set of UI sketches to represent the app's main features and storyboards to highlight the features and tasks the app can be used for. Using this preliminary design, we created a low-fidelity paper prototype.



We then got early feedback on our design through a series of user interviews where the users were asked to complete a set of tasks using the paper prototype that represent the functionality of the app. Following these interviews, we used the feedback to make a few modifications to our design and create a mid-fidelity prototype in Balsamiq.

We then evaluated this prototype with a set of heuristic evaluations using Neilsen's set of Heuristics and in a group evaluation session decided on the set of problems to fix and proposed solutions for those problems. We made these changes when creating a high-fidelity prototype using Sketch and InVision.



Once we had a high-fidelity prototype, we conducted several usability testing interviews with users to evaluate our design solution for the tasks we defined. This along with a poster presentation gave us more feedback to iterate on our design a final time now that more functionality is implemented.

Through this process, we discovered some key insights that significantly shaped our design solution. One of these was that many students are not necessarily averse to meeting new people but do not usually initiate conversation with strangers as they are unsure whether the other person is also open to meeting or talking to someone new. This became apparent from our user interviews at the beginning of the design process, when we asked our interviewees about their social lives at Cornell. During the solution space and idea generation stage of our design process, we heavily considered this insight as it was key to understanding users' motivations and thought processes. Our design solution presents a way for users to meet others who they know will also be open to meeting them, as they would not be using the app if they were not.

During our usability tests and poster session, concerns about the real life impacts including anonymity and accountability arose multiple times. This was a key insight because it revealed fundamental problems regarding users' desire to use the app and level of comfort engaging in the app's activities. This shaped our design in that we completely removed the option to be anonymous or not so that all users will remain anonymous. We also added a feature which gives each user a unique QR code that hosts of events can scan to confirm attendance without taking down personal information. These modifications are intended to create a platform where users are equal in transparency and were made in the final iteration of our inVision prototype.

Some other design decisions we made include a complete redesign of the Food section of our app, based on data we collected during our usability tests that showed that many people did not understand how to join Food events. Our redesign also improves the UI of the app as a whole by making the layout of the Food section consistent with that of the Events and Chats sections. We changed the text labels of the sections in the menu to be icons, which improved visual appearance and removed misleading text information. This was based on feedback that our app was too text-heavy as well as information from our usability tests that indicated confusion distinguishing between Activities and Food.

Challenges Faced and Overcoming Them

One of the biggest challenges of creating the application was the anonymity of users. The purpose of the app was to keep users anonymous on the app, so they can meet others and others will want to meet them with no preconceived notions. Students often avoid meeting other students who don't seem interesting based on the information they hear or are presented about them.

To maintain this feature, there is no log-in or sign-up form because anyone would be able to use the app. The app would only know the identity of the person based on the device the app was downloaded on and the customized QR code that each user is provided within the user profile. Despite the nature of the app, we decided to allow users to choose whether or not they want to remain anonymous by having text-input fields for their name and gender. In addition to this, we had a slider that the user can turn the anonymous feature on or off in the settings.

Once we implemented this feature and did usability testing, we found that the participants were confused as to why the user profile had empty text fields next to name and gender and why there is a section for those when there is no sign-up page. We also found that users were worried about how the app would protect users from malicious users. With these findings, we decided to completely remove the name, gender, and anonymous slider to only have the option to be anonymous users. This way, the integrity and the purpose of the app remain intact. As for user protection, just as how users use precautions when they use services like Craigslist and eBay, users would have to use the same precautions when using the app. Users are responsible for their safety and if they believe that an event seems suspicious, they should refrain from attending and report the event immediately.