

Case Study:

YSDN Course Selection

Streamlining a Feared Process, by Embracing Process

There is a peculiar aura making its way through design degree programs. This aura is convincing passionate students that the path they are taking is objectively worse than others. This aura shoe-horns people into giving up on their passions and pursuing other facets of design. How might we support students in choosing the best pathway for themselves? The pathway that will lead them to a life filled with **passion, fulfillment, and great work?**

My team and I didn't want to take this problem at a surface level, and we put plenty of effort into ensuring we were attacking the right problem. From there we were able to narrow down the problem to the current course selection process. But we wanted to go deeper.



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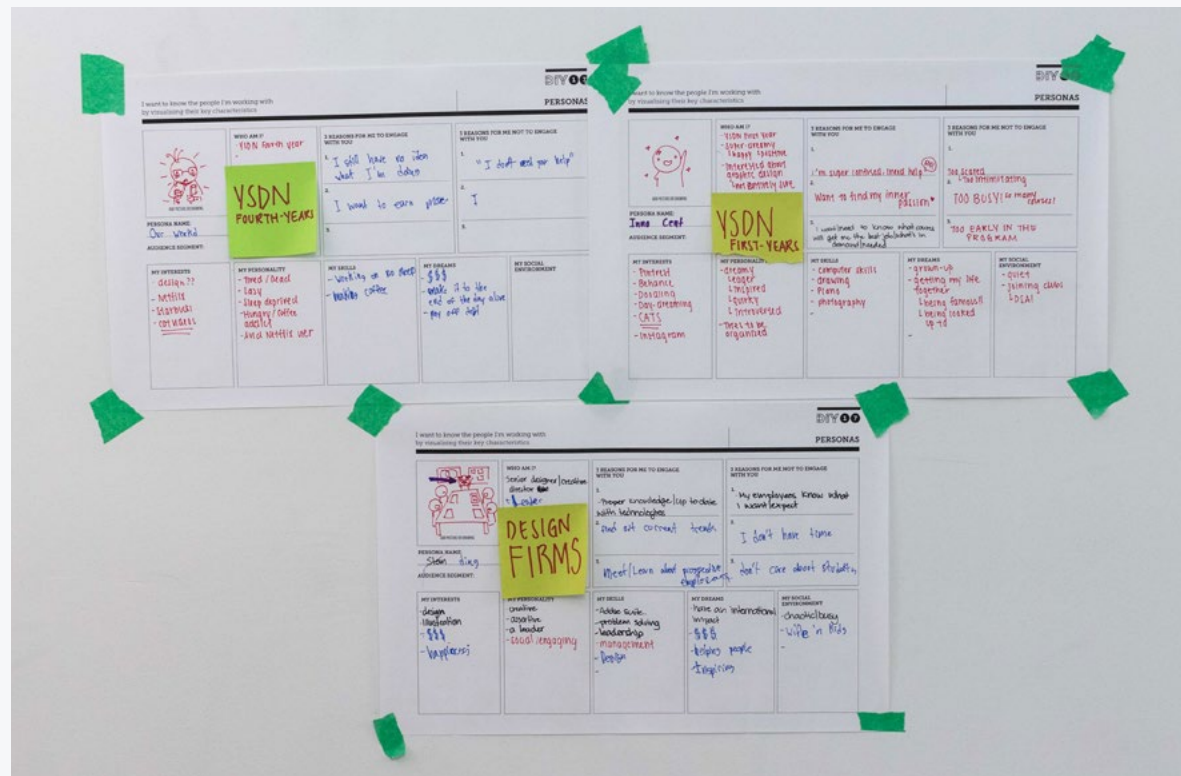
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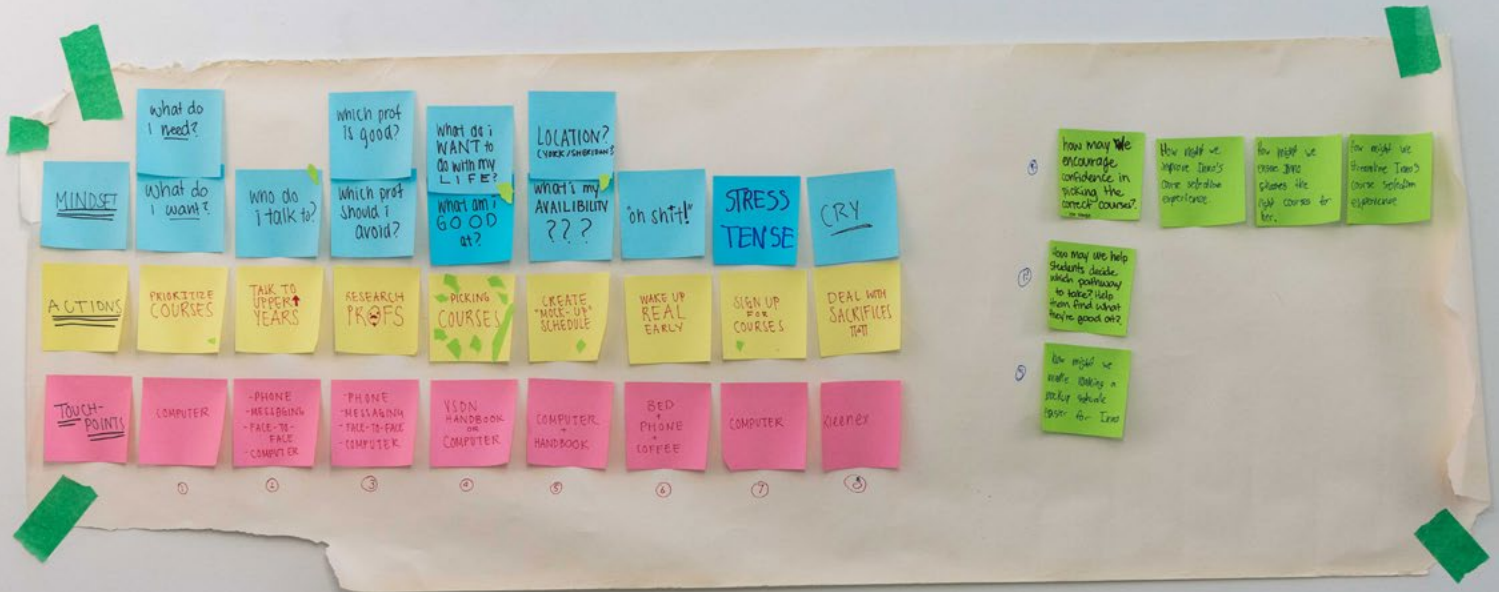
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Redefining the Problem

From there we wanted to learn as much about the problem as possible. We went in with human-centered design and design thinking principles guiding us to explore the many facets and perspectives surrounding the problem.

We started with a **stakeholder map**, listing many of the direct and indirect stakeholders to ensure we considered a wide range of possible perspectives. From there we extracted three and created **user personas**. First-year design students, fourth-year design students, and design firms. We also mapped out various components, characters, challenges and characteristic of the problem.



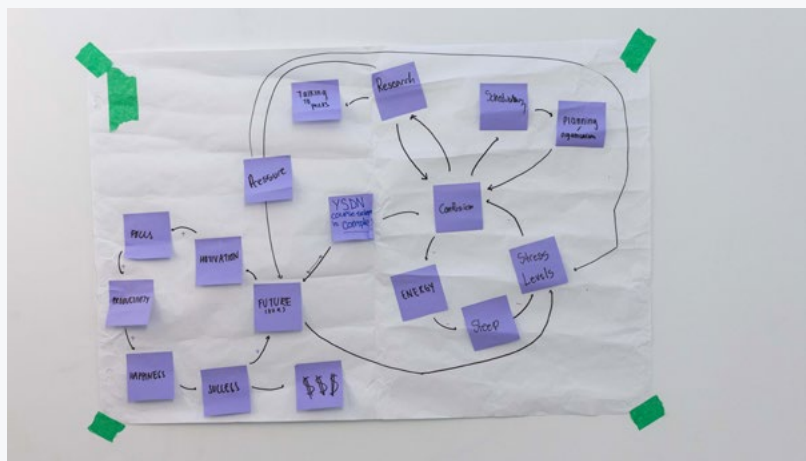


*What do
I want to
do with
my life?*

After analyzing the stakeholders we chose Inno Cent, the first year design student persona to create a journey map for. We mapped his entire course selection process, listing actions, mindsets and touchpoints. This visualization was incredibly helpful in identifying pain points in the course selection process. We asked colleagues outside of the team to identify which pain point resonated most with them, and a resounding majority selected the act of *'picking courses'*. At this point we re-phrased our problem.

How might we streamline the YSDN course selection process?

The question that plagued us now was *why* the process of picking courses was such an incredible pain point for many students. Well luckily GameStorming had an exercise for just that question. The **5 Whys** assisted us in fleshing out some of the low level reasons why the course selection process is difficult. It boiled down to students just wanting to be **happy in their careers**. We explored the project in a few more ways then decided we were ready to talk to the users.



Interviewing

Collectively we interviewed a large enough range of people to uncover some of the **most important and eye opening** information to date. Through semi-structured interviews with YSDN students spanning various years in the program we were exposed to a more *human perspective* on the issue. On top of this we asked the interviewees to complete a journey map of their own, which gave us insight into how each student approached course selection different, and what problems they had. We were surprised at just how unique each student's approach was, but there were **common pain points** that resonated.

The current course selection process is a **overly complicated, confusing, incohesive and 'poorly designed' mess**, and that was echoed throughout many of the interviews. A common trend was **talking to Antonia** as she was the only glimmer of clarity amongst the confusion. We put these into a list of themes. From these we derived our design principles, in order to address the themes.

Common Themes

- *Confusion*
- *Intimidation*
- *Passion vs Demand*
- *Fear*

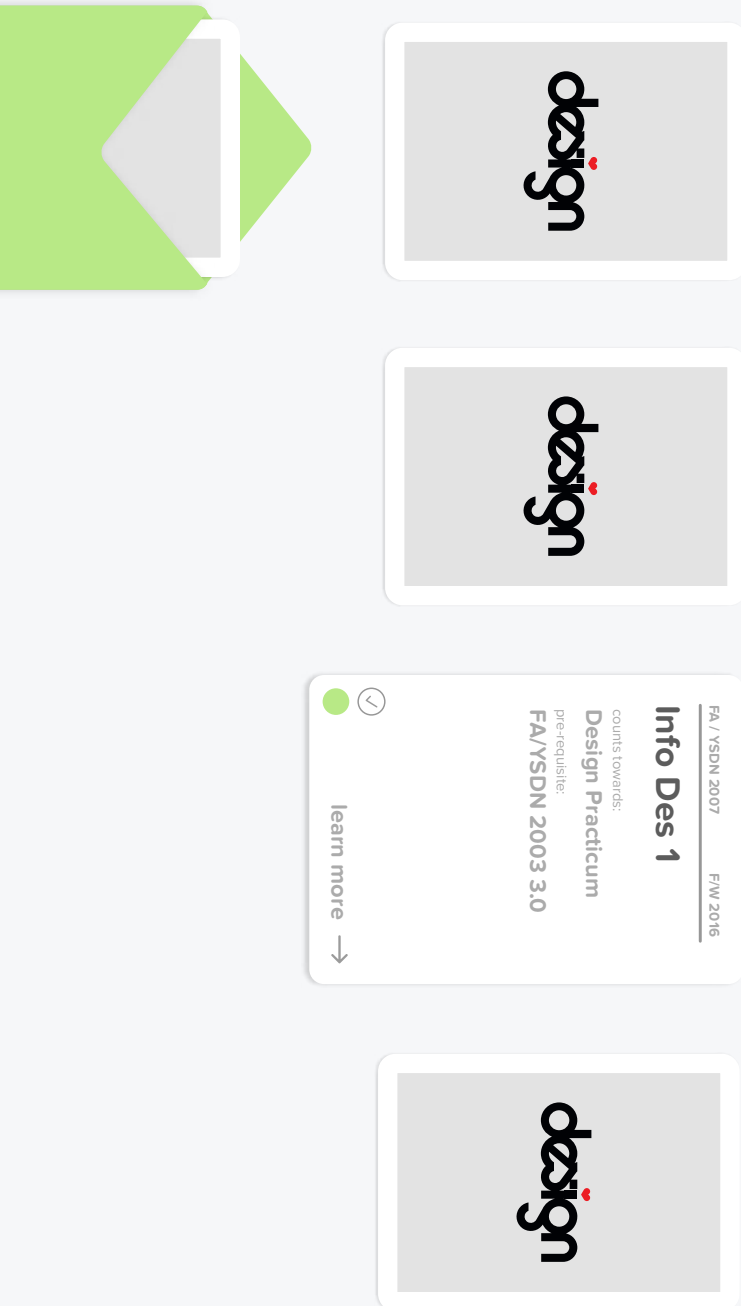
Design Principles

- *Clarity*
- *Comfort*
- *Confidence Inspiring*
- *Ease of use*

A Solution

Earlier in the process with thought a redesigned handbook would be enough, but as we went along we realized we needed more than that. We needed something more personable, and interactive. After many different ideas the one that resonated was an online course selection companion. A one-stop-shop for a YSDN student picking courses, with a core design language driven by our design principles. Due to this being a rather large task, before building the full thing we wanted to flesh out the fundamental ideas behind our redesign, that along with the design principles would guide the design and execution of our site. There are three fundamental ideas:

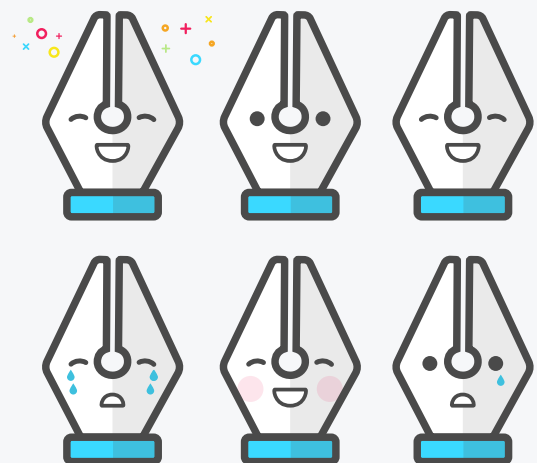
1. *A Friend*
2. *Badges*
3. *Courses = Cards*

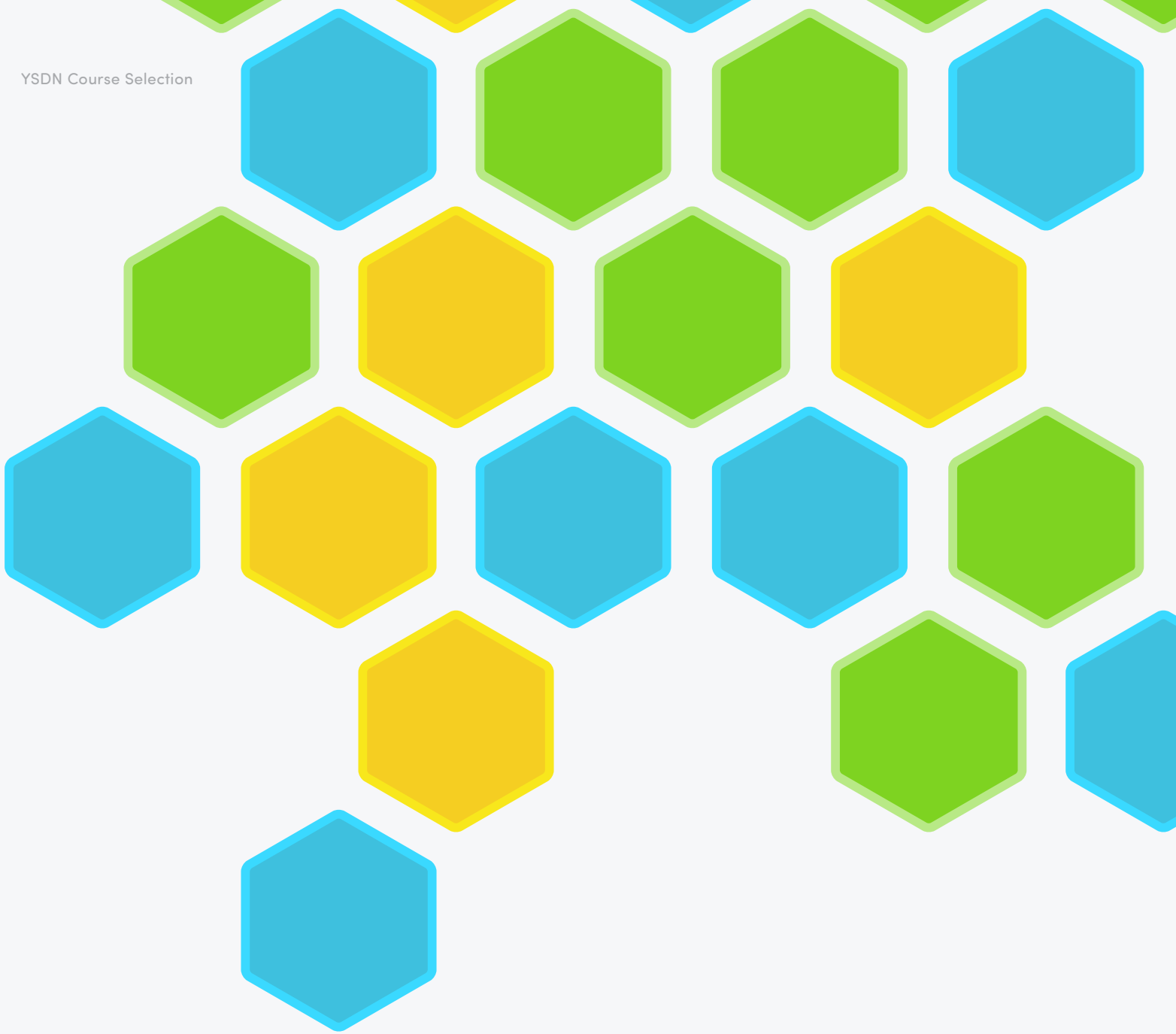


A Friend

We wanted to create a companion, and give our design an underlying positive and inspiring voice. We took this quite literally and created Penno, your course selection friend.

Optimal Cuteness is the term I coined when describing the goal for designing Penno, and I think we succeeded. Penno was designed with the intent of comforting the user as well as motivating them and guiding them through the process. Penno is your confidant, your support line, and above all, your friend.





Badges

Who doesn't like getting rewards? YSDN faculty encourages you to check your degree progress report, but conveying that information in a more exciting and clear way would ensure people know if they are on track. Badges represent certain course milestones throughout your YSDN career. Think girl guides. But YSDN.



design

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Courses & Cards

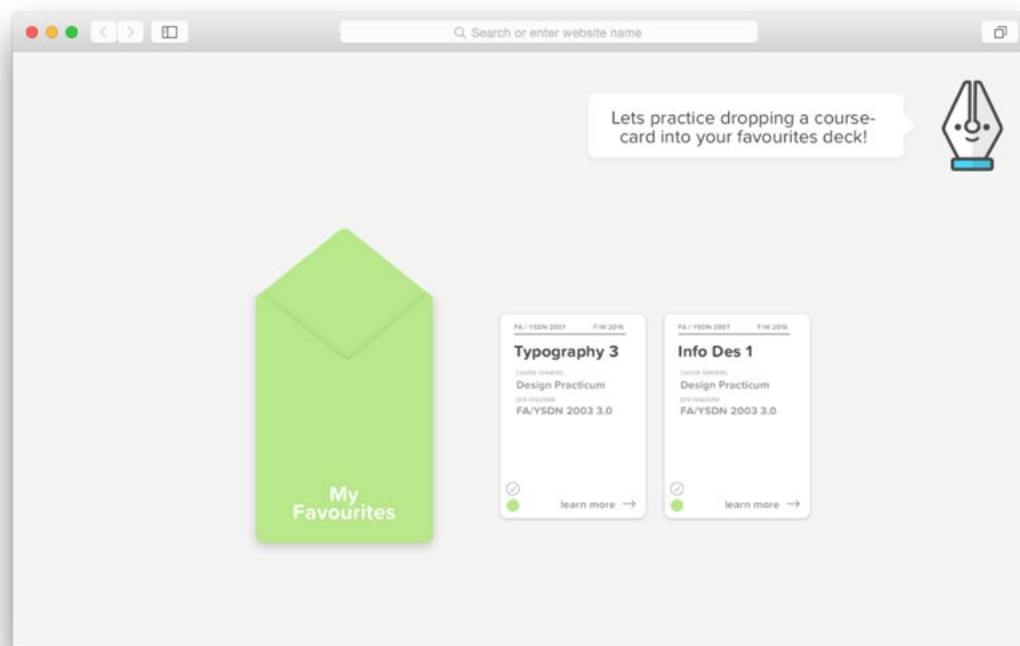
Organizing courses is challenging when you are trying to remember 15 different course codes and names, as well as trying to figure out what courses count towards what requirements. The companion introduces a new way to think about courses, by using a cards as a metaphor. Thinking of courses as cards not only allow a more physical and substantial way of thinking but also allows the cards to be sorted in decks.

Prototypical

Due to the nature of this project, a prototype is one of the best ways to portray some of the unique ideas behind the solution.

Here is a prototype with some rough ideas and interactions:

<http://share.framerjs.com/5egdjj6sgy5e/>



In Closing

The full gamut of features ranges from a mock schedule creator to a assistance hot-line, but weren't touched upon in order to stay sussinct.

With the three fundamental ideas and the core design principles, the path to a full execution of the companion will be an exercise of strong typography and UX design. Each designer in YSDN is here with a **unique voice and passion**, and by streamlining the course selection experience we hope to help each one reach *their* potential.