Research Plan
- Goals and Sub-goals
    1. How do students currently search for textbooks online (or offline)?
        a. What tools do they use? Websites, online stores, or other search methods?
    2. When do students currently search for textbooks?
        a. What time of the school year do they search for textbooks?
    3. How long do students spend on average every time they search for textbooks until they make purchase decisions?
    4. How do students move on from the search results to purchasing/renting/obtaining e-book access to the textbooks?
        a. How do they decide which bookseller to purchase the textbooks from?
        b. What factors influence their choice of bookseller to purchase from? Do they consider these factors at all?
            i. Possible factors: shipping fee, delivery time, purchase options (purchase/rent/e-book), quality/condition of books, price range, variety
        c. For factors mentioned, why are they more important than others?
    5. What are common difficulties students experience when students search for textbooks?
        a. Which aspect/part of the process is specifically difficult?
        b. Are there any challenges in the purchase process?

User Interview Findings
- Sample population: 4 undergraduate college students attending Northwestern University, 1 student attending another college
    - Target audience: students who are currently attending colleges and purchase textbooks for their courses

- Joanne (Junior, Journalism major)
    1. Doesn't search for textbooks online partly out of laziness
        a. Normally goes to offline stores because her classes require novels more than textbooks
        b. But if there was an easy way online for searching textbooks, she would definitely be interested
        c. Would search for Google and look at top results when searching online
            i. Bought it from Amazon and Barnes and Nobles last time
            ii. Would compare more sources if they were all "next to each other" on one page like a search results page
            iii. But would spend less time comparing if she had to visit each individual website
            iv. Would prefer it if she could view costs, delivery time, and trustworthiness of each retailer all on one page
    2. Searches and buys books on the first week of school
        a. Feels like teachers are reluctant to pass out syllabuses
    3. Spends a day buying textbooks
        a. Spends the days searching and thinking about options, compares price differences, visits offline stores
    4. Delivery time, reviews, and price are important
        a. Overall price with added costs matter
        b. Delivery time matters a lot because she wants to be on top of everything
        c. Reviews regarding the accuracy of stated shipping time are important because she wants to be prepared for her classes
        d. Condition of the books not particularly important
        e. Nice to have different purchase options
    5. Doesn't like the fact that there isn't a price comparison tool
        a. Doesn't like that Google spits out random results
        b. A company that could cater to Northwestern students and figure out what books Northwestern classes actually require would be helpful
- Jessica (Sophomore, Computer Science major)
    1. Goes on Amazon because fast shipping is guaranteed
        a. Uses Chrome extension Occupy the Bookstore that shows you 20 bookselling websites to compare costs
            i. Clicks around on those websites
        b. Northwestern's Barnes and Nobles website also tells you what textbooks are required for courses

2. Started really early during freshman year, but now searches during first week and second week
   a. Classes will say you need a textbook, but you end up not needing it
3. Doesn't spend a lot of time searching and buying textbooks – around 15 minutes
   a. Not too concerned about price
   b. Too lazy to buy it from other students who have previously taken the course and are selling them at cheaper prices
   c. Buys textbooks based on availability
4. Delivery time, price, reviews of the bookseller are important
   a. Delivery time is important because she buys books late in the game
   b. Price is important so that she knows how much she can save
   c. Reviews of booksellers are important because she doesn't want to be buying textbooks from a shady looking website
   d. Would care about condition of the book if she thinks she is going to hold on to it for a long time (usually for major classes)
5. The fact that websites don't mark the editions clearly makes it hard to search and buy textbooks
   a. Booksellers also don't have a variety of editions

- Jisoo (Sophomore, Psychology major)
  1. Tries to look for free online pdf versions, but if not available, uses Chegg and Amazon to rent textbooks
     a. Would compare prices on the two different platforms, if she determines that they are essential
     b. Often times, she ends up not using them throughout the school year
  2. Searches and buys textbooks until first day of class
     a. Textbook titles are usually available beforehand on the student portal, but most of the time professors tell students that they're not required
  3. Doesn't spend a long time searching and buying textbooks, but spends more time determining whether or not she should actually buy it
     a. Used to compare prices during freshman year, but realized that prices are pretty similar across a lot of retailers
     b. Now, she weighs whether or not she would actually use it instead of comparing prices
  4. Delivery time and the drop-off location when returning the textbooks matters the most
     a. Price isn't an issue
  5. Price is a big component because determining whether or not the textbooks are REALLY worth the price is the hardest part of the process

- Annette (Sophomore, Cognitive Science major)
  1. Usually looks for and buys e-books in pdf version; last rented an e-book on Amazon for a certain time period

       a. If not available online, searches and buys books in the school bookstores or nearby local bookstores

       b. But usually searches online because she prefers not to carry heavy books

       c. When searching online however, she tends to first visit Reddit because there are a lot of forums where people are searching for the same textbooks and posting links to online pdf versions

       d. Searches by typing in textbook name and adding "Reddit" on Google

2. Buys textbooks before the quarter starts, if syllabus for class is available and books are mentioned as a requirement for class on the syllabus

       a. But if they are not on the syllabus, she waits till the first class

       b. Bought all books before class started during freshman year, but one professor mentioned that there is a free copy online and only for students' reference on the first day of class – ended up wasting $40

       c. Textbooks mainly end up being only for students' reference and not a requirement

3. Takes only around a hour to find textbooks because she knows where to look for online pdfs

       a. But if there are not there, she takes longer

4. Values price and delivery time

       a. Values price over delivery time; would purchase it on Amazon if it's cheaper than local bookstores or college bookstore because she can wait two days

       b. Always chooses free shipping

       c. Also prefers being able to buy e-books because you decide how much time you want to have the book for

       d. Also prefers rent

       e. Tries to re-sell if book is purchased

5. Finding a good deal for textbooks are always hard compared to how much you end up using them

       a. Books are also available in limited quantities in local bookstores and college bookstores

- Estelle (Sophomore, Communications major)

  1. Uses Amazon for purchasing and Barnes and Nobles for renting, but searches for free online pdf versions first

       a. Uses Amazon to purchase used books

       b. If prices online and those offered in the campus bookstore are similar, she buys them on campus

       c. If she actually wants to keep textbooks for a very long time, she visits local bookstores

       d. Seeks out Northwestern community to buy used books from students on Facebook

  2. Searches and buys textbooks first or second weeks of class

       a. Sometimes, she doesn't buy textbooks at all because professors don't use it a lot

       b. If it seems unnecessary, she doesn't buy it because they cost a lot

3. Spends around 1-2 hours for each textbook because she goes on multiple websites

       a. Tries to find the retailer offering the cheapest price

4. Prices, shipping fee, and delivery time are most important

       a. Usually needs textbooks quickly

       b. Chooses the retailer that ships the fastest at the lowest shipping fee rate

       c. Purchase options (rent/buy/e-book) don't really matter, but she prefers to rent

       d. Quality/condition of the books doesn't matter as long as they are not severely damaged

5. Hard to search for free, usable online pdfs because you have to search multiple websites

       a. When it comes to buying and renting, comparing prices and calculating the costs are the biggest challenges

- **Common Themes and Patterns from User Interviews**
  - Students do not simply purchase textbooks from just one bookseller right away; they at least compare across a few booksellers during the search process
  - Students take several hours on average searching and buying textbooks for their courses
  - Students usually purchase textbooks during the first week after the first class because it is unclear whether or not textbooks are needed or going to be used extensively throughout the school year
  - Price was a major factor for students when deciding which bookseller to purchase from because they mostly did not want to invest a lot of money into purchasing textbooks
  - One of the common difficulties students expressed was that the whole searching process is inconvenient because it requires visiting different booksellers (either physically or online), and comparing prices across them is often a messy process. They also thought that it was generally hard to find textbooks offered at reasonable prices.

Competitive Analysis
- BookFinder
  - Ecommerce engine that searches new, used, out-of-print books *and* textbooks
  - Searches major catalogs online and lets users know which booksellers offer the best prices/selection to help save time and money
- Textsurf
  - Free price comparison site only for textbooks that allows users to compare prices from several different websites of book retailers so that users get the best deals on books
  - Gives users the links to buy those best-deal books from the biggest used, rental, digital textbook sites on the web
- Bigwords.com
  - Price comparison tool for textbooks, books, DVDs, games, music, and other products ranging from groceries to pet supplies
  - Searches the best stores for new and used textbooks and all other listed products
  - Determines total cost by considering price, shipping cost, and promotions to figure out the absolute lowest price for items

Competitive Analysis – General Features

Competitors	BookFinder	Textsurf	Bigwords.com
Search Bar	Yes – by author, title, ISBN	Yes – by author, title, ISBN	Yes – by author, title, ISBN, publisher, or "All"
Vendor/Bookseller Display	Yes- pulls from inventories of over 150,000 booksellers	Yes – 3-5 different booksellers for a book	Yes – about 20 different booksellers displayed
Price Display and Comparisons	Yes – breaks down total cost separately (book price, shipping cost, total price) for book under each bookseller; comparisons included	Yes, but only indicates book price (shipping prices not included) for book under each bookseller; comparisons included	Yes – indicates retail price along with book price, shipping fees, and total price for each of the booksellers; comparisons also made

Purchase options (buy/rent/e-book) Display	Yes, but only displays buy and rent options	Yes – includes buying, renting, digital, and selling options as well	Yes – displays "rent, buy, new, e-book, sell" options
Book Condition	Yes – indicates new or used, along with actual condition of book (e.g., acceptable, good, etc.)	No	Yes – indicates book condition under "Details" section for each book
Shipping/delivery time	Yes- indicated below description in "Notes" section for book from each book seller	No	Yes – also indicated under "Details" section for each book

Summary of Competitive Analysis

Competitors	BookFinder	Textsurf	Bigwords.com
UI/Easy of Use	Pretty straightforward – allows users to search for textbook by name in search bar Uses path-based breadcrumbs below bookseller display page for ease of navigation "Go back", "Revise search", "New search" buttons on bottom of search results and bookseller-display page	Pretty easy to use – allows users to search for textbook like BookFinder directly from main search bar Uses location-based breadcrumbs so that the user can easily navigate between pages Great sense of visual hierarchy; user knows which part of screen to focus on for each page Minimalist design	Very confusing UI – two search bars on home page that look the same and seem to carry out the same function "Sort By" and "Filter" options on search results page are confusing; unable to tell the difference between the functions Too much information displayed in a scattered manner; requires user to actively search for

			information and makes it impossible to take all information on one page at once
Layout and Design	Layout: • Simple home page layout, but search results page displayed using vertical space in list form • Lays out book details side-by-side by separating booksellers offering "new" and those offering "used"; short description included for each bookseller • Rent options centered on bookseller-display page, below all the displays containing booksellers that allow users to buy only • Placement of links and words seem arbitrary and creates too much clutter; contains too much words on each page in general and no visual hierarchy (hard to know where to begin reading on each page	Layout: • Simple home page layout; clear and concise search results page (shows 10 search results per page) • Separates booksellers by the purchase options (buying, renting, e-book, selling) they offer and lays them out side-by-side Design: • Bright but calm colors (green and blue) used • Easy to read all text, which is essential when having to read lots of text while searching textbooks • Buttons big and clear with white text; buttons clearly differentiated from rest of text	Layout: • Confusing home page layout; two search bars – one at top and another one right below • Allows user to choose between list and grid form of layout on search results page • Filters for search results placed on top of search results page • Detailed information about each bookseller displayed below each bookseller Design: • Bright and harsh colors used— orange background; creates disturbing atmosphere and uncomfortable to read text • Buttons and links not properly differentiated from normal text and hard to read

			against background color • Normal text difficult to read; some important information too small to read
	Design: • Heavy use of black and blue colors; dull feeling • Text is a bit hard to read because of its small font size • Minimalist, but too text-heavy		
Nice Qualities	Lots of detailed information about the bookseller and book Pulls from a variety of inventories – lots of room for comparison	Layout not cluttered; very simple and spaced out aesthetics Easy-to-use in general Lets users know how much money they save for each bookseller Allows users to sell back textbooks	Lots of detailed information about the booksellers and book Shows users how much money they can save for each bookseller Can filter and customize search results so that it makes the search process more efficient Shows users any available coupons that can be applied to booksellers Shows users lowest prices for items other than textbooks
Areas for Improvement	Too much text – descriptions of booksellers are single-spaced and cramped together that it places cognitive burden on the user and hogs too much screen space Could make better use of horizontal space on the search results page Could differentiate buttons from text so that users	Does not show book condition Shipping fees and delivery time not displayed for each bookseller Could pull from more booksellers or include a list of all the booksellers they pull from Could provide more information about each of	Change colors used for website—too harsh and bright Fix confusing link categories and buttons; e.g., rename buttons and links to give users a better sense of what clicking the link/button will do e.g., "Price Alert" Too much text when

	know they are "clickable" Back buttons could be placed on top of page as well so users don't have to scroll down every time	the booksellers in general besides the price	hovering over buttons; unclear signifiers for hovering Confusing where to begin processing information for each page; visual hierarchy not evident Website not solely for textbooks; range of products covered too wide