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Case Study: Virtual Meetings & Events at UCI

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented public meetings. In response, the UCI Student Center IT Team has created a platform where organizations can publicize virtual meetings and events in order to encourage community and activity. The Virtual Meetings & Events at UCI webpage displays online events and other virtual resources that UCI student and faculty can access to adjust to remote activities.

The Information & Computer Science Student Council hosted a Design Challenge competition in collaboration with Design at UCI and the UCI Student Center IT Team. The purpose of the challenge was to perform a case study and create a redesign of the webpage. The Student Center IT Team was in search of ways to improve their webpage, and they acted as the judges for this competition.

Competitive Analysis

There are a number of other universities that have event webpages. Three of which are UCLA, UCSD, and UC Berkeley, who's event pages can provide insight on what can be improved for the Virtual Meetings & Events at UCI webpage.

UCLA Happenings: Events on this webpage are posted without image thumbnails. Each event name redirects the user to an individual event page that has additional information about the event. There are also options to filter events, keywords, and categories.
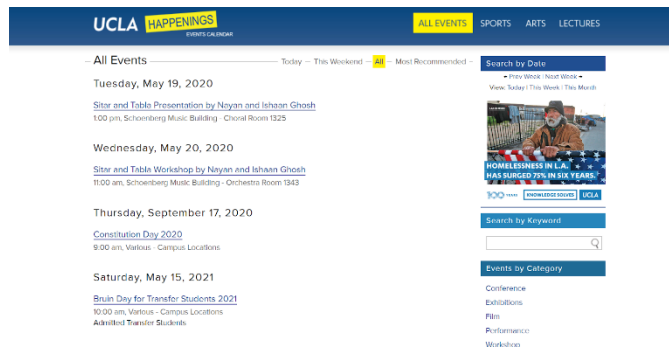
UCSD Events Calendar: This site is similar to UCLA Happenings in many ways. Event names are links that redirect the user to an individual event page with additional information. This site also provides the user with the same filtering options to accelerate event searches. One unique feature is that this webpage contains a separate Featured Events section apart from every other event.
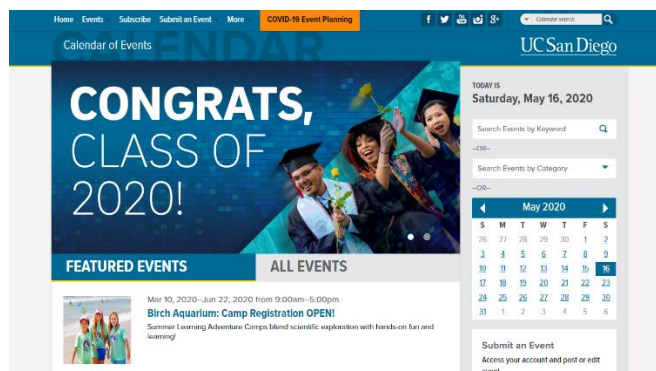
UC Berkeley Events: Akin to the other webpages, UC Berkeley Events provides filtering options (though only for date). In addition, event names redirect to individual event pages.

Improvements that can be made to UCI's webpage based on competitive analysis:

There should be individual event pages per each event, where all information about that event can be shown. As of now, the UCI webpage portrays full descriptions of each event on its event calendar. This takes up a lot of space, leads to inconsistent event card sizes, and forces the reader to excessively scroll in order to view multiple events. By moving long event descriptions to another page, the user is able to view many more events more efficiently.

Events on the main webpage should not have thumbnail images. In some cases, images can act as valuable signifiers. However, in the case of UCI's webpage, many users who post events on the webpage do not include images, as uploading images is optional. A default image is put in place of where an image would go, which is not informative at all. When pictures are uploaded, they are squashed to fit onto the fixed proportions of UCI's event calendar. Ultimately, images should be omitted from the event calendar. And instead, they can be put onto an individual event page.

There should be a sorting/filtering feature for events. This can help accelerate the process for a user who is looking for a specific event. All three competitive analysis webpages had sorting/filtering features, and an actual calendar with dates in order to find events.

Virtual Meetings & Events at UCI Webpage

Read this section alongside the redesign to see the reasons behind design decisions.

Problem: It is unclear how a user is supposed to post a virtual event. They actually are not able to post a virtual event on the webpage itself, and need to download a mobile app in order to do so.

Solution: After contacting Brian Petyo, Marketing Manager at the UCI Student Center, he explained that the Student IT development team plans on updating the webpage in the future to allow users to post on the web instead of a mobile app. Because the webpage garners significantly more traffic than the mobile app, a webpage redesign should focus on indicating that the user can post their event there rather than having to download the app.

The redesign does this by getting rid of the information about the mobile app in place of the "Schedule a Virtual Event" button located at the top of the page. This button would take the user to a submission page, where the mobile app information can be mentioned as an alternative to the web submission.

Problem: The purpose of this webpage and what a user can do on it is initially unclear, and the first thing the user reads is that the UCI Student Center is promoting a mobile app. What a user should realize when entering this webpage is that they can view and post virtual events on this page.

Solution: The webpage should clearly present the user with the ability to post their virtual event, and indicate that they can also view virtual events on this webpage.

The redesign does this with the "Schedule a Virtual Event" button, and listing virtual events right when the user opens the page.

Calendar of Online Events:

Note: Brian Petyo stated that he wants to have some kind of featured events section for the webpage, and suggested a carousel. As a result, the redesign includes a Featured Events carousel near the top of the webpage.

Problem: Entire event descriptions are listed on the event calendar. As stated during the Competitive Analysis section of this case study, "this takes up a lot of space, leads to inconsistent event card sizes, and forces the reader to excessively scroll in order to view multiple events".

Solution: There should be a separate event page per event listed on the event calendar. And instead of listing the entire description on the calendar, it can be listed on the event page.

The redesign removes full descriptions for each event card to another page, allowing for more breathing room for the user on the event calendar. Instead of the whole event description, users can put a brief short description that will appear on the event calendar.

Problem: Many images are just default thumbnails because users choose not to upload an image. This takes up unnecessary space and does not look aesthetic.

Solution: Exclude images from the event calendar. Instead, they can be optionally put on the individual event page. The redesign includes an individual event page where the user will be redirected to if they click on the name of the event.

Problem: There is no way to filter for events. This makes the process of searching for an event very tedious, as the user will have to scroll tirelessly to find it.

Solution: As stated in the Competitive Analysis section on this case study, " There should be a sorting/filtering feature for events. This can help accelerate the process for a user who is looking for virtual events. All three competitive analysis webpages had sorting/filtering features, and an actual calendar with dates in order to find events".

The redesign adopts the sorting/filter section from UCSD's Events Calendar.

How You Can Get Involved This Quarter:
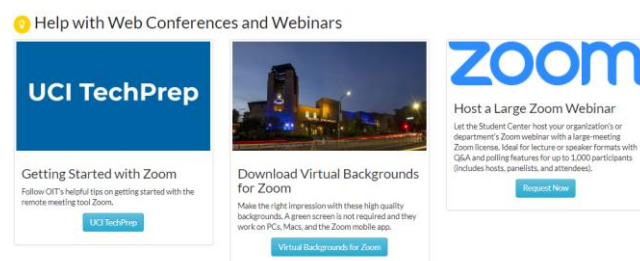
Problem: Image and card dimensions of this section are very inconsistent and make the webpage look messy and unprofessional.

Solution: Make event images and event cards have uniform sizes to improve minimalist and aesthetic design.

The redesign does just that, while also making some minor aligning adjustments for the buttons.

Help with Web Conferences and Webinars:

Problem: Akin to the "How You Can Get Involved This Quarter" section, image and card dimensions are inconsistent and make the page look messy. In addition, the images on this section aren't very informative.

Solution: Eliminate the images from this section, as they are redundant and sometimes say exactly what the card title says.

The redesign does this, and also eliminates the card format in general. Instead, they are text sections where the titles act as a link to a website in place of the buttons. As a result, it reduces a lot of the clutter on this section.

Webpage Redesign

[The Redesign](#) (Created with Figma)
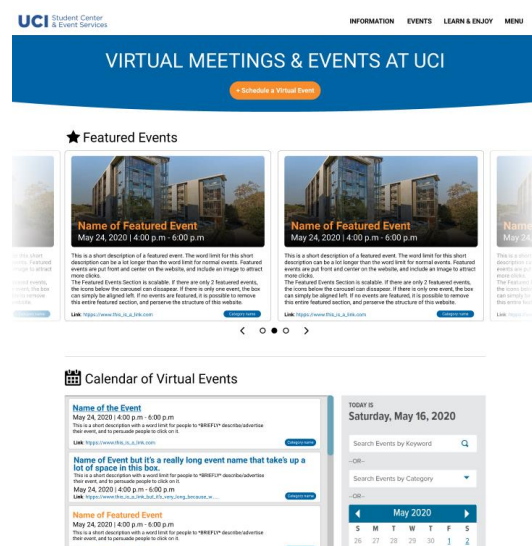
Client Feedback

After the Design Challenge, the Student Center IT Team provided a feedback report of the redesign. Here is their commentary:

"The designer has effectively sectioned major page elements into clear categories. Doing so has successfully managed a lot of information while avoiding clutter and confusion. Improvements to the calendar's searchability are intuitive and user friendly. Design uses color to feature certain events, which could lead to more value for event hosts/organizers wishing to promote

their event. There is some concern over the use of a carousel as it could lower the Student Center's accessibility score."

"Clean design aligns well with proposed Student Center redesign mock-ups currently in production. All of the page's primary objectives are satisfied with what can be viewed as visually clean and organized look. The calendar benefits from improvements in search functionality. Calendar choices are thoughtful and balanced."

"The design attempts to make scheduling a virtual event the primary objective. However, the designer must make it clear or distinguish between scheduling a virtual event and listing or promoting an event. This site is not intended to allow users to reserve, schedule or book a virtual event. However, simply changing copy from "Schedule a Virtual Event" to "List a Virtual Event" would remedy this issue. Additionally, moving the primary objective of listing a virtual event to the top of the page could improve the overall user experience for event organizers and hosts wishing to promote their event. The design is successful in organizing Featured Events, Calendar of Events, Getting Involved, and Additional Resources sections in a clear and concise manner. More on how the designer planned to enhance the "How You Can Get Involved This Quarter" would be helpful."

Conclusion

The Virtual Meetings & Events at UCI page was created as a quick response to the quarantine that the COVID-19 pandemic enforced on communities. And although it functionally serves its purpose, the webpage is in need of a redesign. The purpose of the webpage was not clear and it is also difficult for a user to discover how they can post their events. The calendar of events needed some major improvements to allow users to leisurely view multiple events instead of being forced to scroll past long descriptions. Other sections required restructuring to improve the overall aesthetic of the webpage to look more up-to-date and organized.

The UCI Student Center IT team has been given permission to utilize all case studies and redesigns from the Design Challenge competition. Going forward, they have a lot of user research to reference in order to create major updates for their webpage.