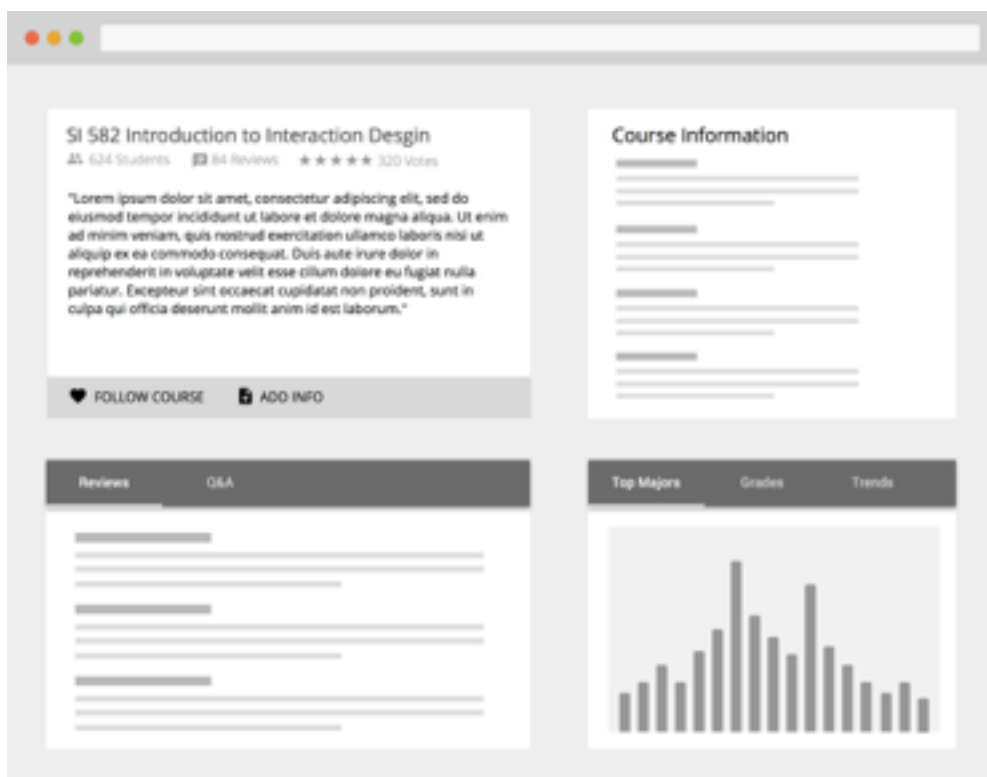Selwyn Kancharla
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CourseMine | Decision Analysis

Feature for analysis:

One of the key goals of CourseMine is to provide the user with rich information about courses. So each course has an entire page to display comprehensive information like course details, meta information, reviews, statistics, Q&A, and some actions following a course, adding information, and so on. With so much information to display, the problem arises in designing it to be intuitive, easy to navigate, and most importantly to be cohesive. In this document, I will discuss three approaches that can be considered for designing the course page effectively.

Approach 1 – Tabs

Organizing related sections into tabs not only saves a lot of screen space but also creates a structure. For instance, reviews and Q&A can be put into a tabbed group as their primary function is to know/share peer opinions. Similarly, all the statistics can be tabbed into one group, as all of them are charts with metrics.
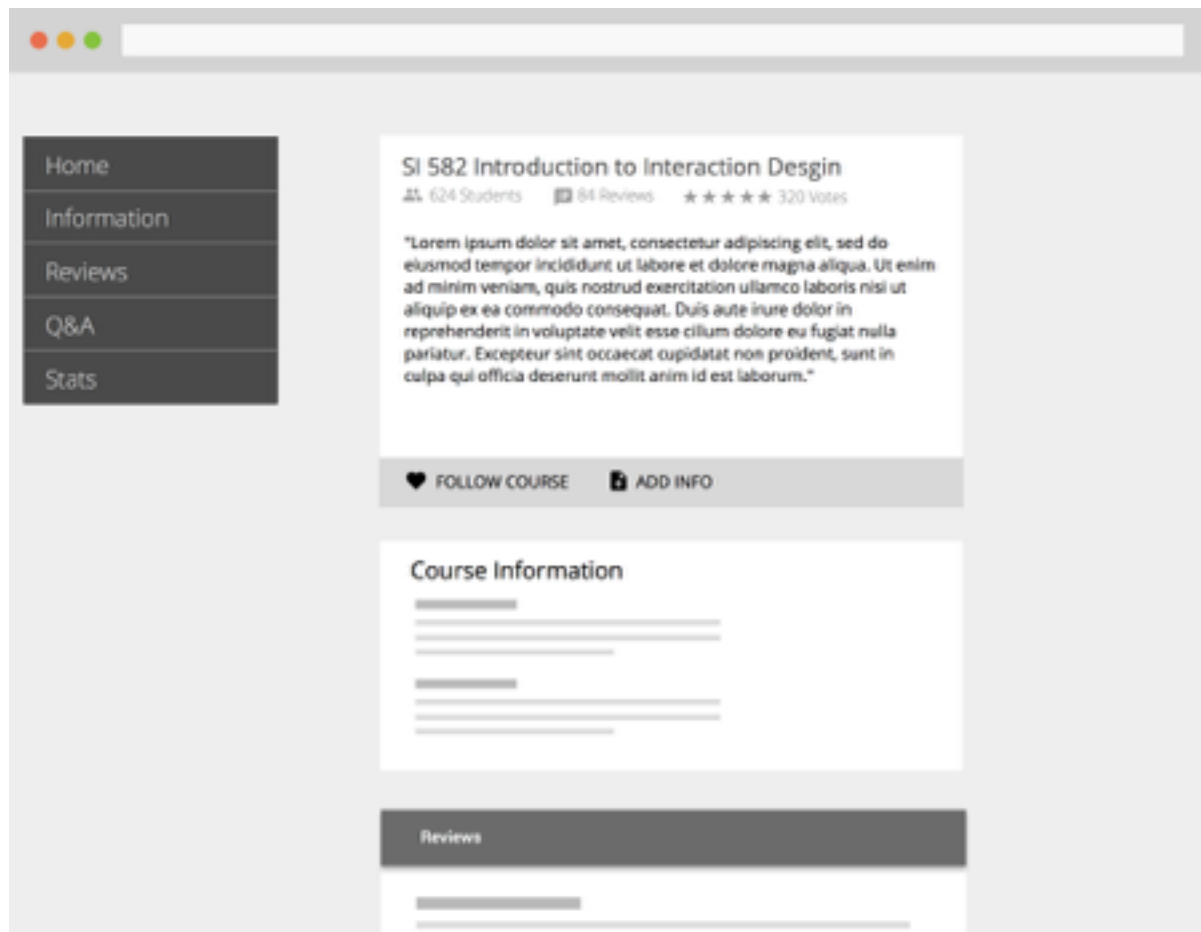
But a couple of concerns with this approach include,
  - Inability to simultaneously view two panels in a tabbed group. For instance, if I want to compare the Top Majors and Grades charts side by side, it becomes very hard and distracting to switch between the tabs
  - As there is a high change that the kinds of metrics would increase over time, they have to be added to the tabs, this creates clutter and might even force the creation of scrollable tabs. All these kill the easy of use and result in bad experience

Approach 2 - Scrollable Content with a pinned menu

In this approach the course page is divided into two parts. One that contains the information about the course in separate sections and the other part is a pinned menu which always sticks to the left part of the page. Only the content part is scrollable. This creates more room for each section thereby removing the need for tabs as every section has enough real estate to display it's contents. This approach looks like this,
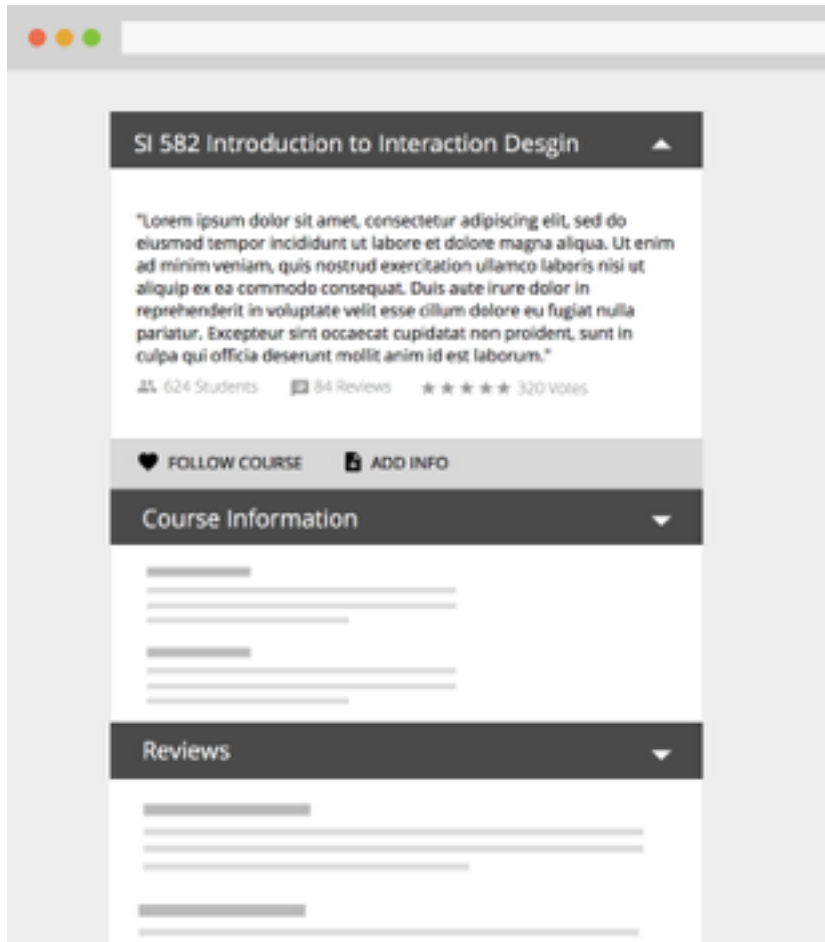
A couple of concern with this approach are,
- The use cannot get an overview at once glance until he clicks on the link for each section
- The other issues with this approach is that the user it results in distraction when the user is consuming the information as he has to continuously click items in the left menu or scroll up and down to reach the desired section. This also makes the organizational structure of the content more vague

Approach 3 - Accordion

In this approach each section of the page is divided into panels with a heading. Clicking on each of the panel, reveals the content and clicking on the panel title again collapses the content. This shows all the available sections at one glance to the user and as each section has a dedicated panel, there will be more room to display content in a rich way. An implementation of this approach might look like,

This results in several concerns like,
- Ability to view only one section at a time
- Very poor navigation
- Very distracting as each panel closes/opens and moves to the top of the page

Conclusion

Having analyzed the advantages and concerns of each of the approach, I feel that an ideal view of the homepage can be concluded by doing some user testing to evaluate navigation patters and usability issues with respect to each approach. But a good place to start would be with a hybrid of approach 1 and 2 where each reviews and Q&A can be tabbed into a group as not much of comparisons can be made between two while splitting up the statistics into a separate menu items makes it more usable and easy.