1. Edu-Assist:

Project Overview-

1. The problem:

There are over 2,500 universities, just in the USA, and each university has over 20 majors. For a student, wishing to pursue higher studies these numbers alone can be discouraging. Reason being,

abundance of choices without the guidance to choose the perfect choice for themselves.

Not to mention, it is one of the most crucial decisions in their career life.

With such vast amount of knowledge, how would a student choose the university and major suiting them?

1. The solution:

An app, that not only suggests universities, majors and locations for you specifically, it also makes sure you have the perfect guidance, by connecting you with the current students of all universities. The current students, having gone through the same along with experienced knowledge of the major become the perfect people to mentor prospective students.

<prototype link> <https://www.justinmind.com/usernote/tests/22502723/22503771/22798898/index.html>

(A video of the prototype.)

1. My role: (in a group project)

Researching the reasons and requirements for the problem

Researching the appropriate solution for the problem

Creating the low fidelity(Sketches) and the high fidelity models of our idea

1. Tools:

Paper-pen (low fidelity and storyboarding),

Balsamiq(low fidelity),

JustinMind(High fidelity)

1. Our Methods:

* Research
* Contextual inquiries
* User Interviews
* Survey
* Brainstorming
* Scenarios
* Storyboarding
* Prototyping – Low and high fidelity
* Cognitive Walkthrough
* Heuristic Analysis
* User test for the prototype

Discoveries (Contextual Inquiries)

Having gone through the same process ourselves, we knew about the struggle to find the accurate and appropriate webpages to gather knowledge. We wanted to dig further into the problems and understand the common complaints and requirements of the students going planning to make this decision. This led us to conduct user interviews and online surveys. Following are a few common complaints we received.

Common complaints:

No dedicated list of all the universities and the degree courses each offered.

No specific University list tailored for them

It was very difficult for them to get accurate answers for their questions.

A better description of the programs offered and the university.

Some ended up choosing the wrong major due to less or no guidance.

We realized that even though all the information is available online but it was distributed and the source was not necessarily authentic. Also, the information doesn’t answer the individual doubts one might have.

Hence, we decided to implement a platform which focusses on bringing authentic and apt information for a student based on their perspective and doubts.

Our next step was to gather the data and come up with a list of requirements from the solution.

<questions we asked the interviewees> https://drive.google.com/open?id=1sfKlJtB-4FDtXdX2xyA0T-ZQyjZhNQFJlktQ0KfvU4k

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Persona

Based on our research and contextual inquiries, we developed our persona, Alice Shah. Throughout the rest of the project, we focused our design designs based on how Alice would react to them.

Our Persona: Alice Shah

Residence: Delhi, India

Occupation: Student

Bio: Alice is an undergraduate student in her 4th year of computer engineering student. As a dedicated and fun-loving student, she has various interests. She is a part of her the Computer Science Student Association of her school. She’s an active participant of the web-designing classes as well as the programming classes. Being an ambitious girl she wishes to pursue a master’s degree as soon as she is done with engineering.

Goals:

Graduate on time and pass her classes

Get into one of the most prestigious universities of USA

Decide what she wants to choose her as her career path.

Frustrations:

Too many interesting and attractive courses to choose from

Very less time to research on all universities and courses with finals coming up

Has to prepare for competitive exams along with undergraduate studies as well

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Storyboarding and discovery

We next created an online affinity mapping and organized the inputs we received through the survey and user interviews. This helped us create a list of requirements we should focus on, and a list of secondary features which can be added to our solution.

Primary Requirements:

Incentive for the current students to answer responsibly

legit and up to date university information

Forum to connect current students with prospective students

Personalized feeds of recently answered questions

Forums for each university with courses/majors and professors in each university

Sorting feeds by interests for the person

Suggestions of universities and majors for the prospective students

Secondary Requirements:

Help for competitive exams

Help for documentation

Ranking universities

Different Languages

Peering people if they like

Campus videos and about places and transportation

Step-by-step procedure for the admission process

Based on the requirements, we storyboarded a basic scenario.

<Scenario> [folder 1]

Wireframes and high fidelity

As the solution for the problem, we chose to build a mobile application owing to the following reasons:

Accessibility for users

Acceptable for the users

Availability worldwide

Economically Reasonable

Fun and easy to use along with giving appropriate information

<Sketches, balsamiq and JustinMind prototypes> [folder 3]

We included the following features in our final prototype:

1. Two separate approaches: one for current student and other for prospective student.

Common Features:

1. Feeds: Feeds are questions asked and answered by students (both current and prospective).
2. Profile: Page to edit details about the student
3. Bookmark feature: To save feeds for later review
4. Message Request feature: For security reasons, messages can be exchanged only once two people establish a connection by accepting each other’s friend request
5. Messages: In-built texting between profiles, which enables private communication and individualistic mentorship
6. Notifications: This feature notifies the student of the status of messages, feeds and friend requests.
7. “Heart” that is like feature for feeds
8. University has its own page – with information of the university and majors/courses offered along with related feeds
9. Each course has its own page – with information about the course and its professors along with related feeds
10. As a prospective student:
    1. Students are asked to provide their interests, which can later be used to correlate with courses and those courses can be suggested to them. (This is compulsory)
    2. Students are asked to provide their preferred choices about universities, courses/majors and locations, if any. These are later used to suggest courses and universities to them. (This is not compulsory)
    3. Feeds are filtered using their interests and preferred choices.
    4. UniHelp feature: Suggestions of universities, courses/majors on the basis of their preferred choices and interests.
    5. They can edit their interests and preferred choices in their profile
    6. They can answer the questions asked in the feeds
    7. They can award 5 points to the answers if the answer was helpful
11. As a current student:
    1. Students are asked to provide their university and course/major
    2. Students are asked to choose other courses/majors of their university. These will be used to filter their feeds. (This is not compulsory)
    3. Feeds are filtered based on their university, course and the other courses they chose
    4. They have levels: each 5 points awarded for a good answer by a prospective student will get accumulated. As they reach a certain threshold, they will level up. This will make them “trusted students”
    5. Responses: This allows the student to keep tabs of the replies he has posted by saving those feeds

User testing

We tested the prototype with graduate HCI and already graduated HCI students to get a better feel of how effective it is.

Goal: To successfully have the user navigate the application with ease, understand the features and complete the tasks.

Methodology: The Usability test had:

1. A set of 3 tasks
2. A task wise evaluation sheet for the participant to fill out
3. A survey about the experience

Task 1: Sign Up as a prospective student who has decided to go for either HCI or computer science at IUPUI in Indiana

Task 2: While browsing, find the university, IUPUI, and the course details of Computer Science in it.

Task 3: Open the feed titled, “What are some of the best courses offered at Cornell University?”

Survey link <https://goo.gl/forms/03TkkkG7eimixf0Z2>

Learnings:

* Participants faced a few problems with the navigation
* Participants complained that though the idea is great, the design could be made more intuitive
* Many suggested to add a few help pages in the beginning of the app

These along with the secondary requirements<tag> explained above, will be the future scope of this project.

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Key learnings

Main take away from this experience: Having a lot of features from the get-go complicates the solution. If the main features are designed and implemented first, then they are built upon, then in the end the app’s design would be more stable than the approach I followed. Keeping this in mind, I will approach the next project in a more methodical manner.