

Utkarsh Singh • Jan 29, 2023



Usability Study Report

Contents

01 Methodology

02 Executive Summary

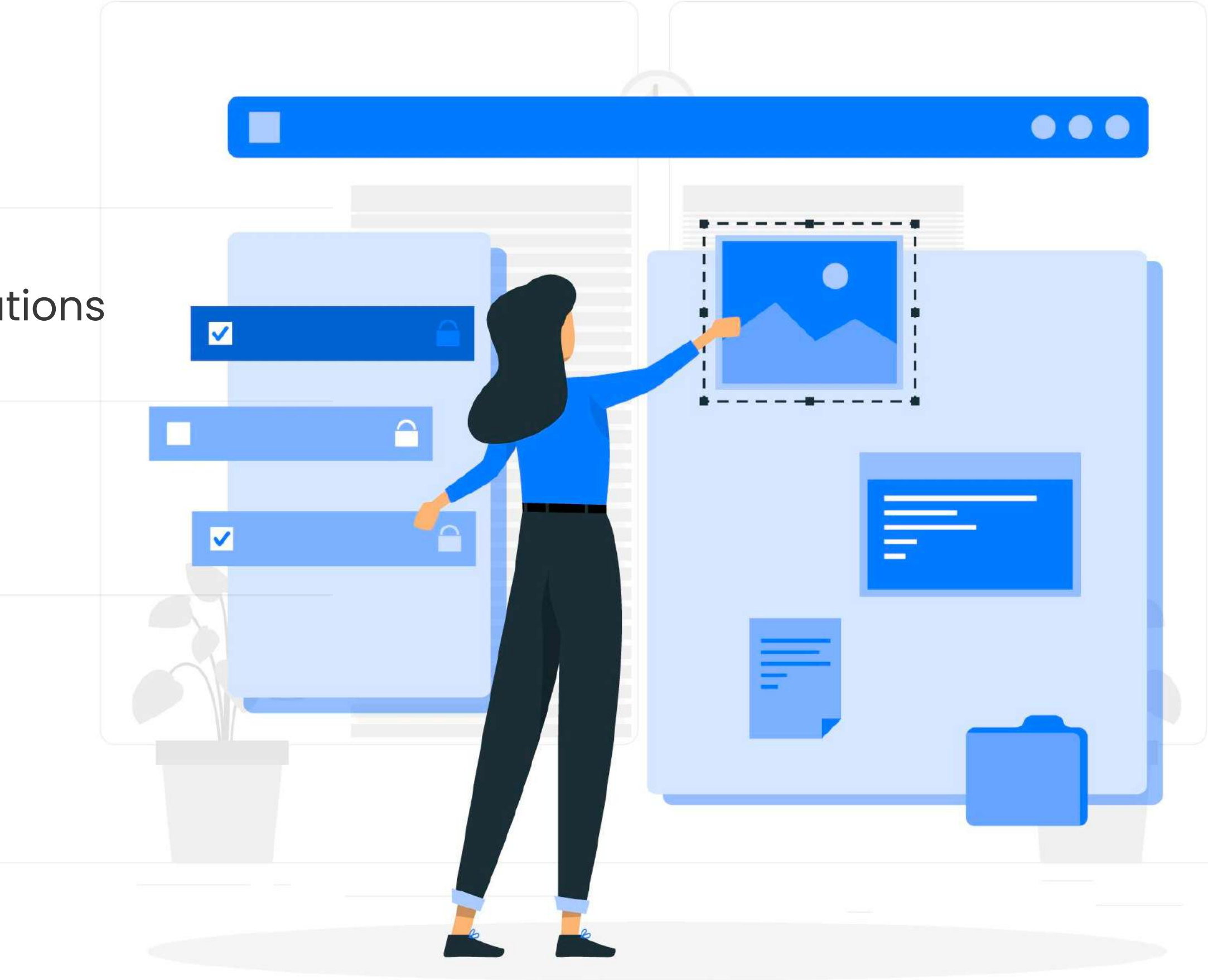
03 Quantitative Analysis

04 Participants

05 Tasks 1 – 3

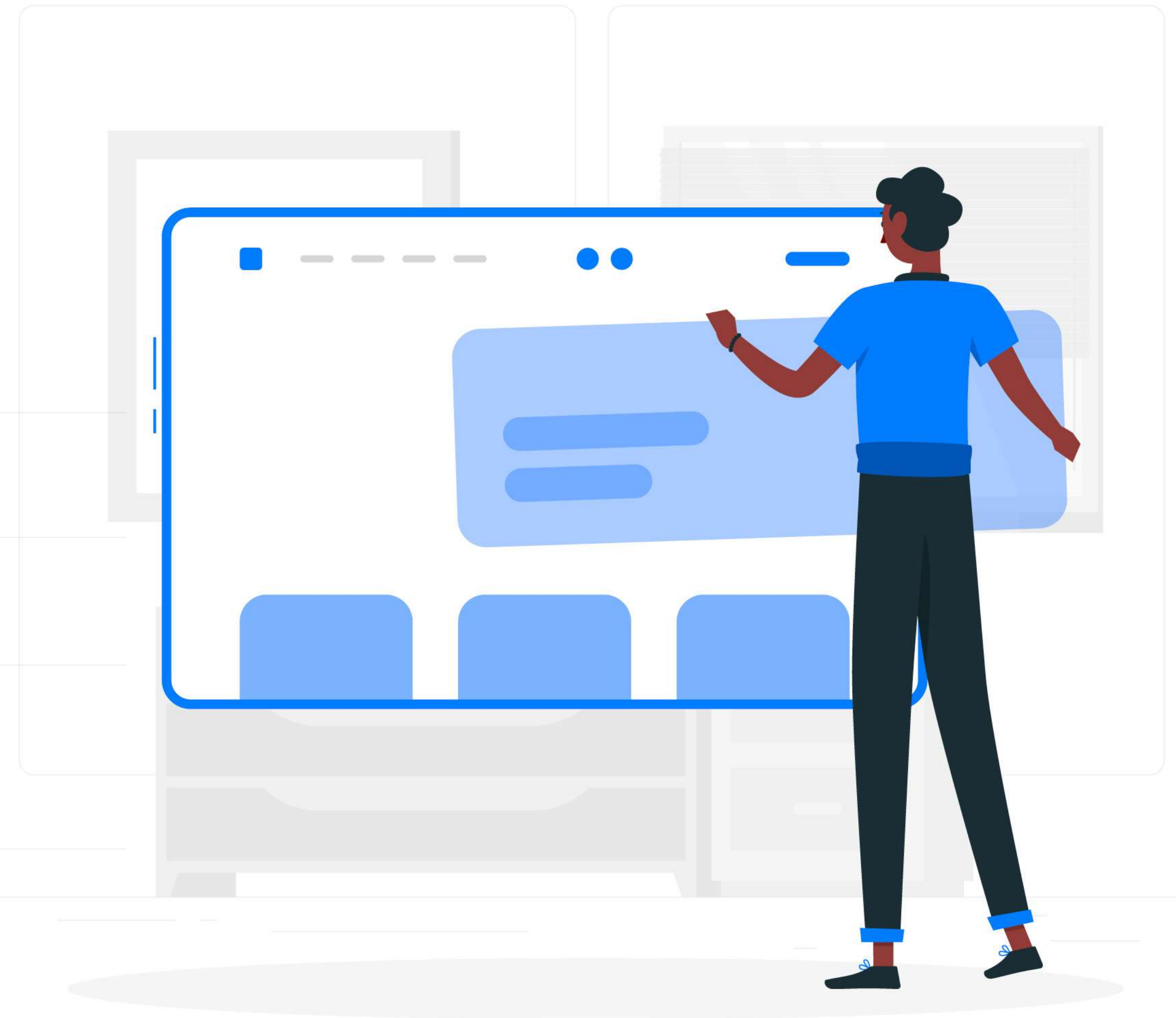
06 Design Recommendations

07 Resources



Methodology

Date:	Jan 20 – Jan 29, 2023
Method:	Remote testing, Zoom
Participants:	5
Areas:	User Journey, Homepage Program Search
Goals:	Check usability of the website from the perspective of its largest user group.



Executive Summary

The overall outlook of the website was positive among the participants. They felt that the website seemed trustworthy. A common concern was that the website demanded too much information upfront. It would be better if the information could be given incrementally depending on the stage of research of the individual.

Majority of tasks were completed without problems. The main issues were as follows:

- Navigating felt confusing as the buttons/links on the homepage were vague about what they did.
- The pop-up questionnaire felt too long and required a lot of details which the users didn't have handy. There were also privacy concerns.
- The hero section felt vague and didn't exactly make the value proposition clear.

60%

participants said that they found the navigation to be confusing.

40%

participants couldn't find a program using the pop-up questionnaire.

100%

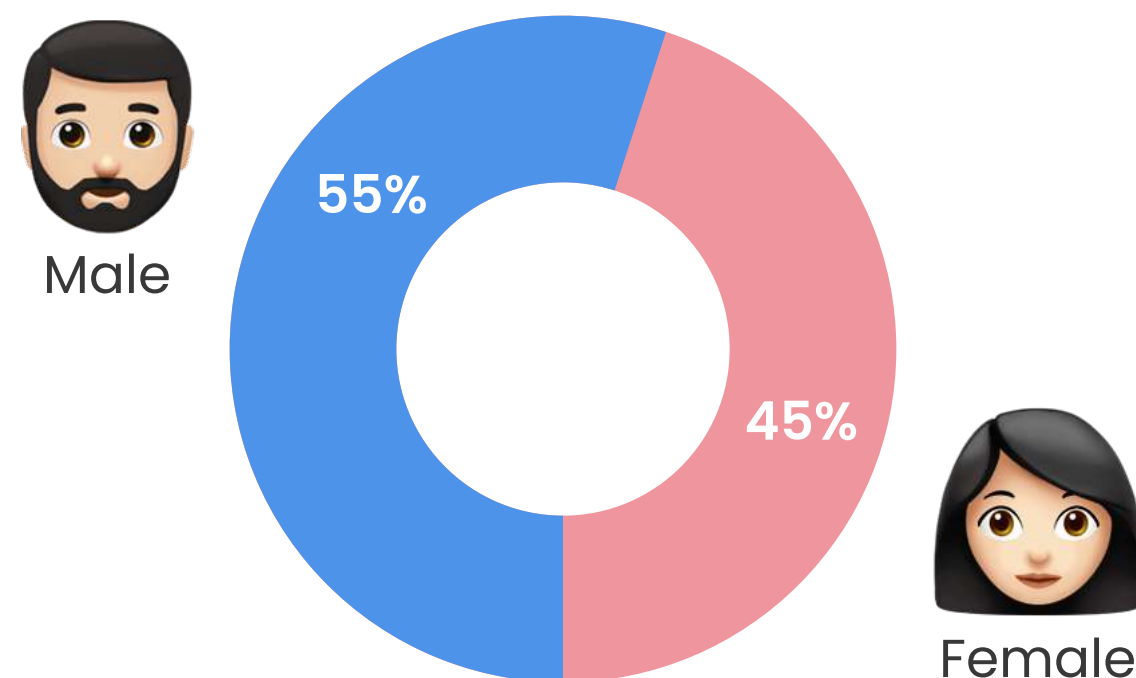
participants would use this website again to search for programs.

60%

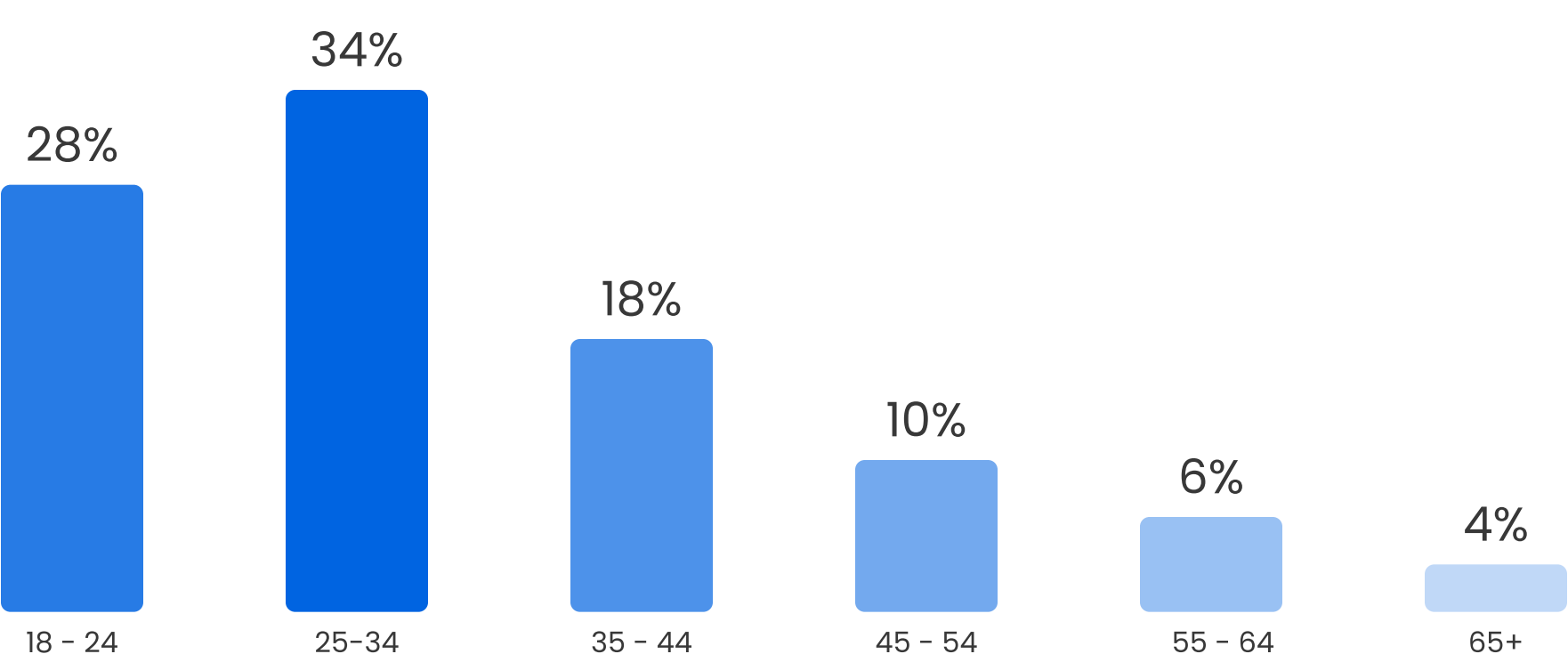
participants didn't want to give too much personal info on the first visit.

Quantitative Analysis

Gender Distribution



Age Distribution



Traffic & Engagement
(Nov 2023)

Total Visits
805.6K

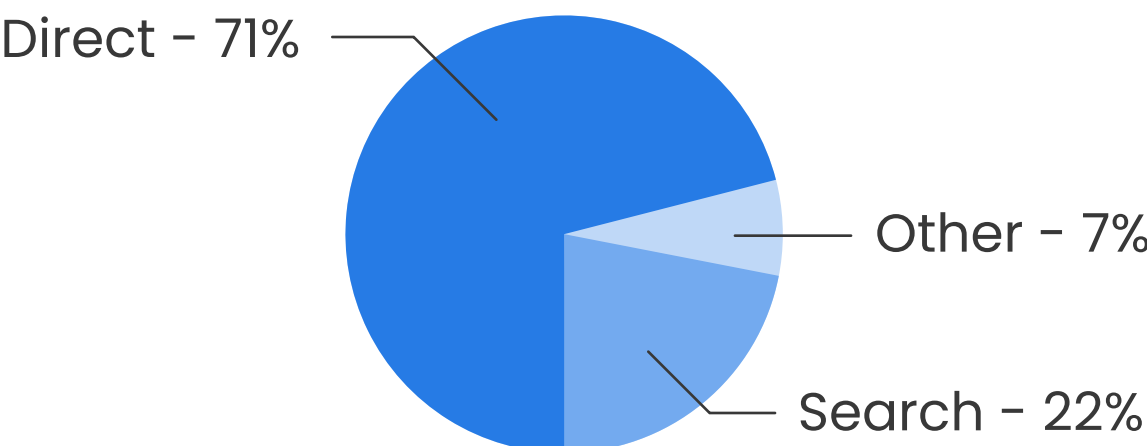
Avg Visit Duration
8 min 33 sec

Bounce Rate
38.64%

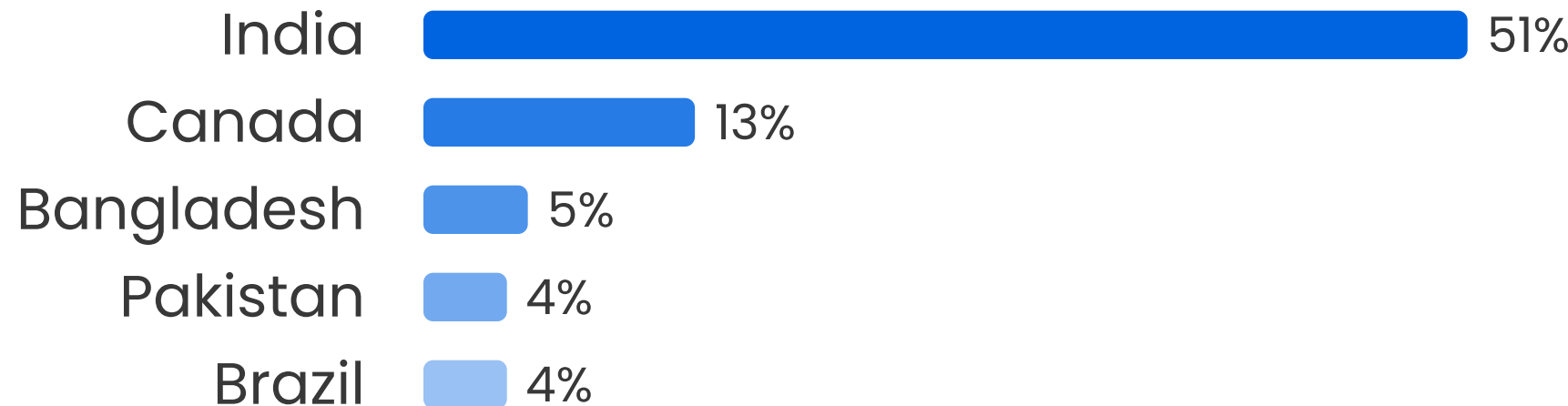
Pages per Visit
8.55

Source:
SimilarWeb.com

How do users get to the website?



Top 5 Countries



Participants

Selection Criteria

According to the traffic statistics from similarweb.com, the largest group of users are 25–34 year old Indians; over half of which are males. The participants for this study were selected to match this demographic.



Participant 1

30 years old – Male

Nationality: Indian

Education: Master's Degree (Canada)

Former international student



Participant 2

28 years old – Male

Nationality: Indian

Education: Bachelor's Degree (India)

Currently enrolled international student



Participant 3

27 years old – Female

Nationality: Indian

Education: Masters Degree (Germany)

Former international student



Participant 4

29 years old – Male

Nationality: American

Education: Master's Degree (USA)

Studied in home-country



Participant 5

30 years old – Female

Nationality: Indian

Education: Bachelor's Degree (India)

Currently enrolled international student

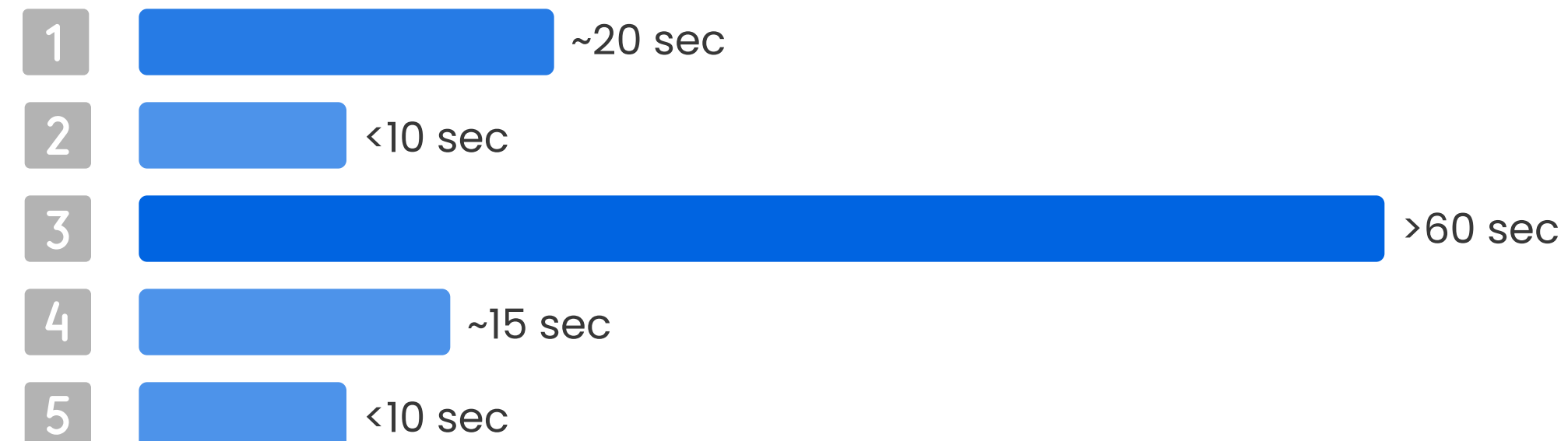
Task 1

Navigate to the page/section where you can discover study programs.

Why this task

The current homepage gives equal importance to its 3 categories of users – students, schools and recruiters. However, the largest user group would be students and I suspected that the current layout makes navigation confusing for them.

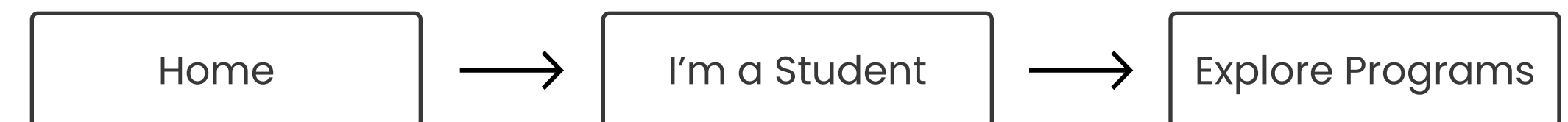
Time Taken by Each Participant



Avg. Perceived Difficulty



Quickest (Intended) User Journey



Observations & Insights

- The intended user journey was apparent to only 2/5 users. Most users found the navigation confusing as the buttons didn't exactly tell what they did.
- 3/5 participants first clicked on the hamburger menu.
- 2/5 participants clicked on 'Schools' assuming it will show the schools they can apply to.
- One participant scrolled all the way down to the footer to click on 'Discover Programs'.

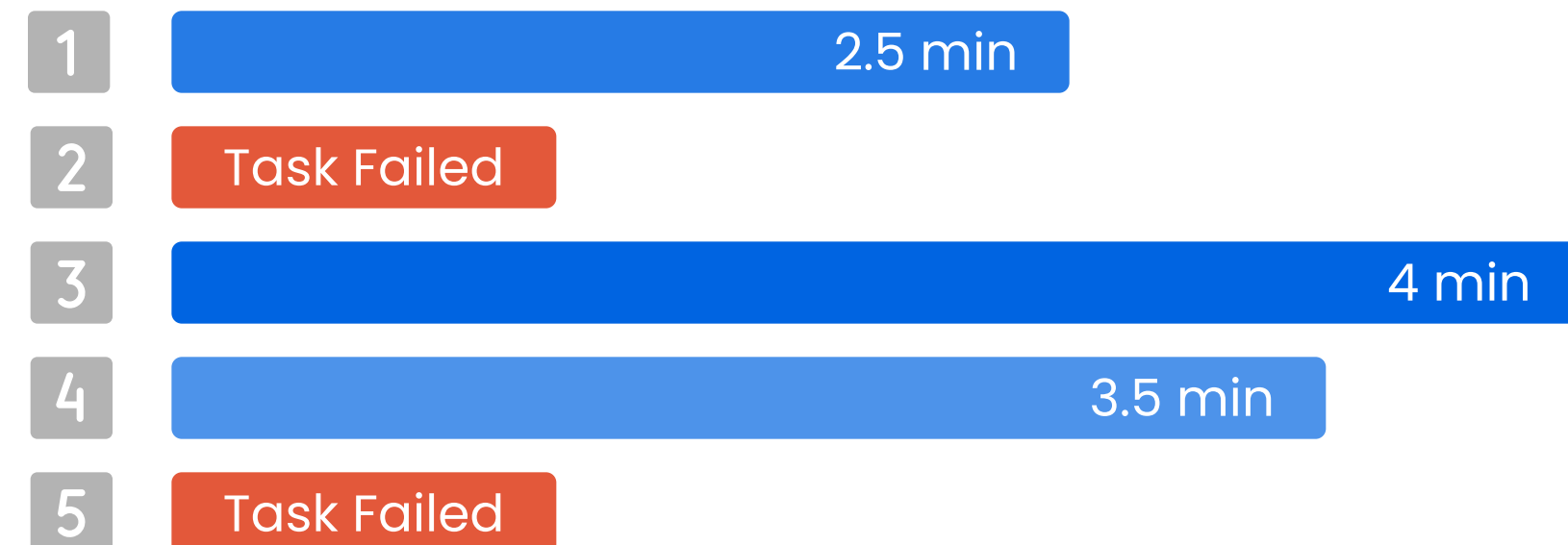
Task 2

Search for a study program (by answering the pop-up quiz).

Why this task

There are two ways to search for programs – one is through the pop-up quiz which the website shows first. My hypothesis was that some users wouldn't want to go through the long questionnaire and would prefer it as an option.

Time Taken by Each Participant



Avg. Perceived Difficulty



Observations & Insights

- 3/5 participants' first reaction was to closed the pop-up questionnaire.
- 2/5 participants felt uncomfortable giving so much of their personal information due privacy concerns.
- 3/5 participants felt that the questionnaire was too long. They would have preferred if they could give information in increments as required.
- 2/5 participants couldn't find their preferred program in the "What would you like to study section", resulting in task failure. Since new fields of study keep coming up, categorizing can become ineffective.
- 1/5 participant preferred the pop-up quiz over the search as they found the search to be complicated.

Task 3

Search for another study program using the search bar and filters.

Why this task

This task would help draw a comparison between the two ways of exploring programs – questionnaire vs search/filters – and would answer the following questions:

- Do users prefer one method over another?
- Is this preference based on anything? If yes, what?
- How can we improve this experience

Task Success Rate

5/5 participant completed the task successfully.

**Time Taken for task completion isn't noted here as it would vary greatly by personal preferences and the stage of research.*

Avg. Perceived Difficulty



Observations & Insights

- All participants were happy with the information available on the search page about each program.
- At first, 2/5 users didn't realize that they could scroll down to reveal more filters in addition to the eligibility section.
- 2/5 participants would have preferred if there was less scrolling involved.
- 3/5 users had trouble clearing filters.
- 5/5 users felt that the search results loaded too slow.
- The search algorithm didn't understand partial keywords. For example, "Real Estate" showed zero results while "Real Estate Management" showed many.

Design Recommendations

While every aspect of a digital product can be improved through continued iterations, the following three are the most important according to the findings of this research.

01

Rethinking User Journey

Make the study program search obvious and easy to find.

02

Simplifying Hero Section

Make the value proposition clear at first glance, reduce distraction.

03

Redesigning Search

Integrate the questionnaire and search. Make it less intimidating.

01. Rethinking User Journey

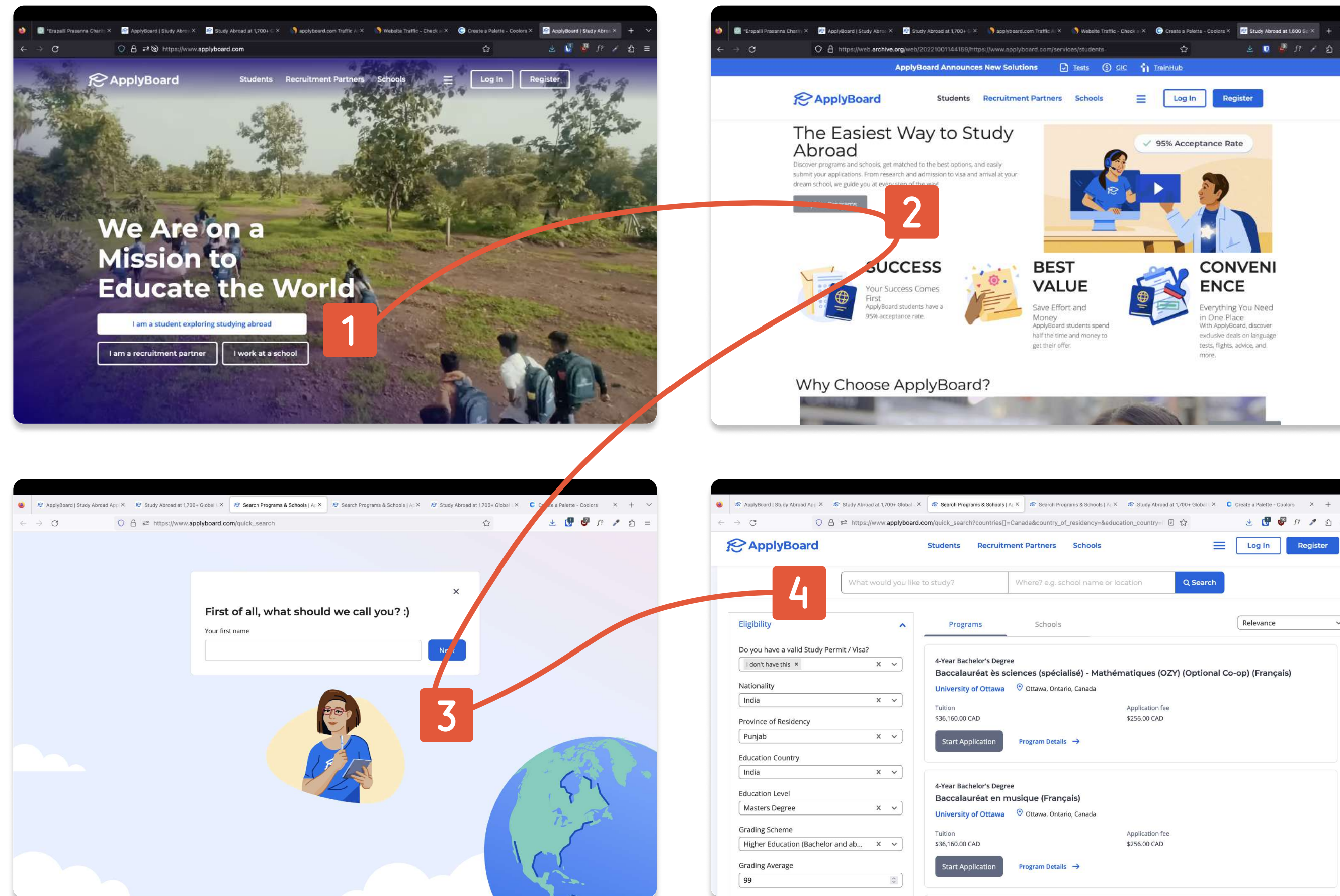
Current User Journey (Students)

1. Click “I am a student exploring studying abroad”. This button confuses the users as it doesn’t tell what it does.
2. More information about how this website can help. However, this step can be skipped – *Show, don’t tell.*
3. Answer a long questionnaire.
4. This is what students are here for – to discover programs.

Suggested User Journey

Directly go from Step 1 to Step 4.

Instead of forcing users through Steps 2 & 3, these can be optional links which a user visits if needed.



02. Simplifying the Hero Section

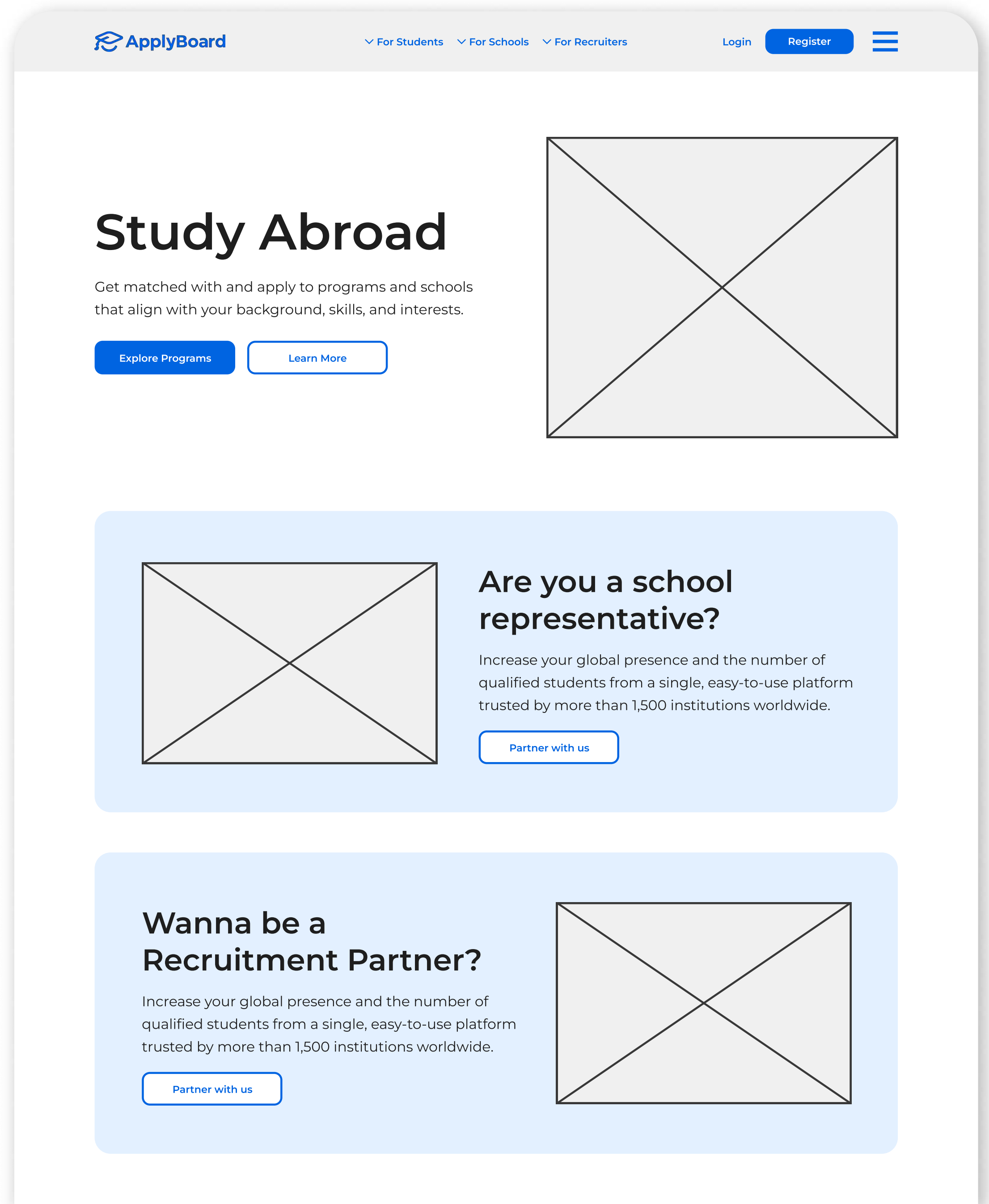
The new Hero Section is dedicated to the **largest user group** of the website – students.

The title and subheading make the **value proposition** instantly clear.

The video background has been replaced with a static image to **reduce distraction**.

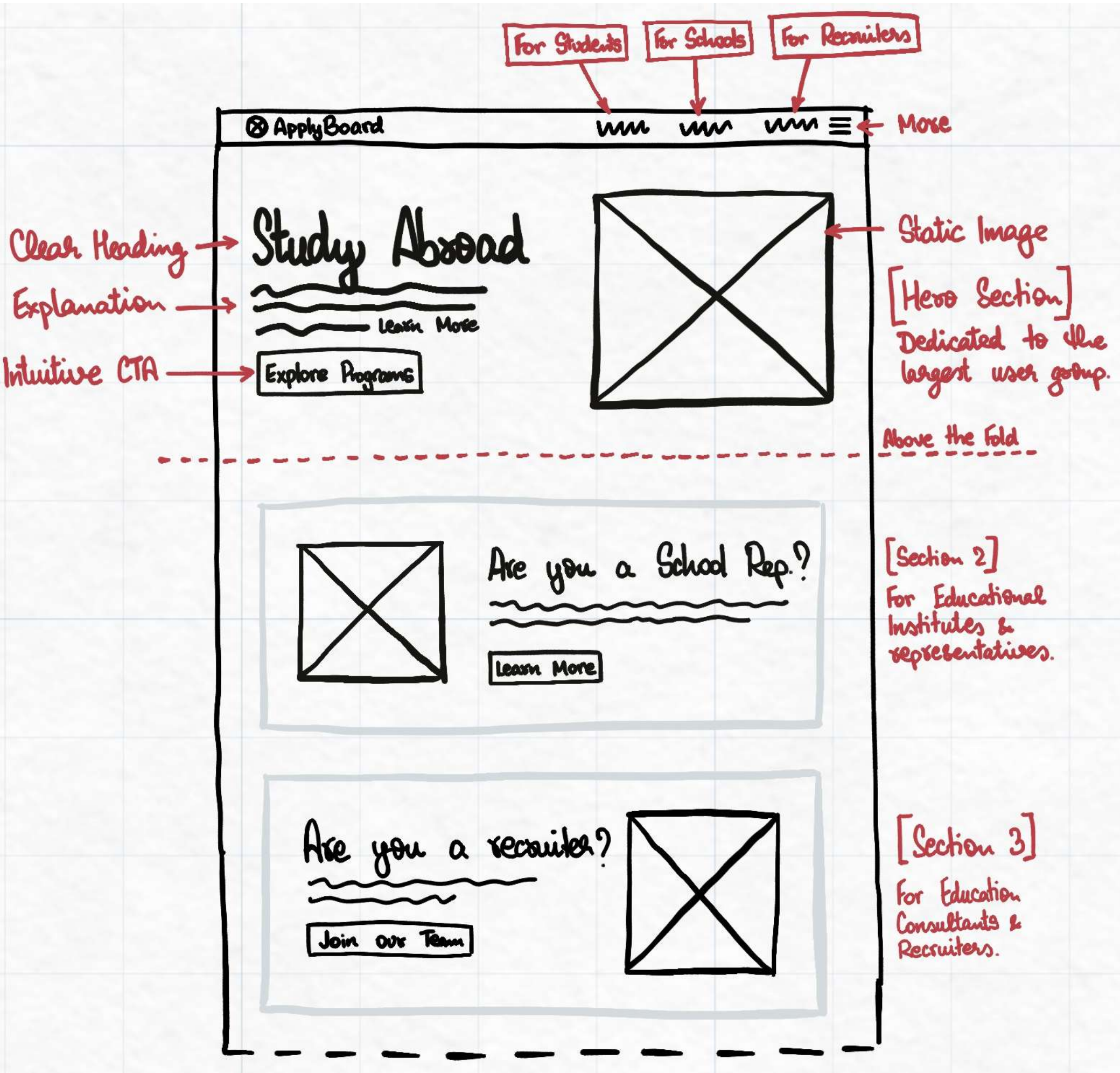
The **buttons** clearly state what they do – for example, “Explore Programs”.

The **navigation** in the header has also been changed to say “For Students”, “For Schools” and “For Recruiters” as the labels weren’t clear before.



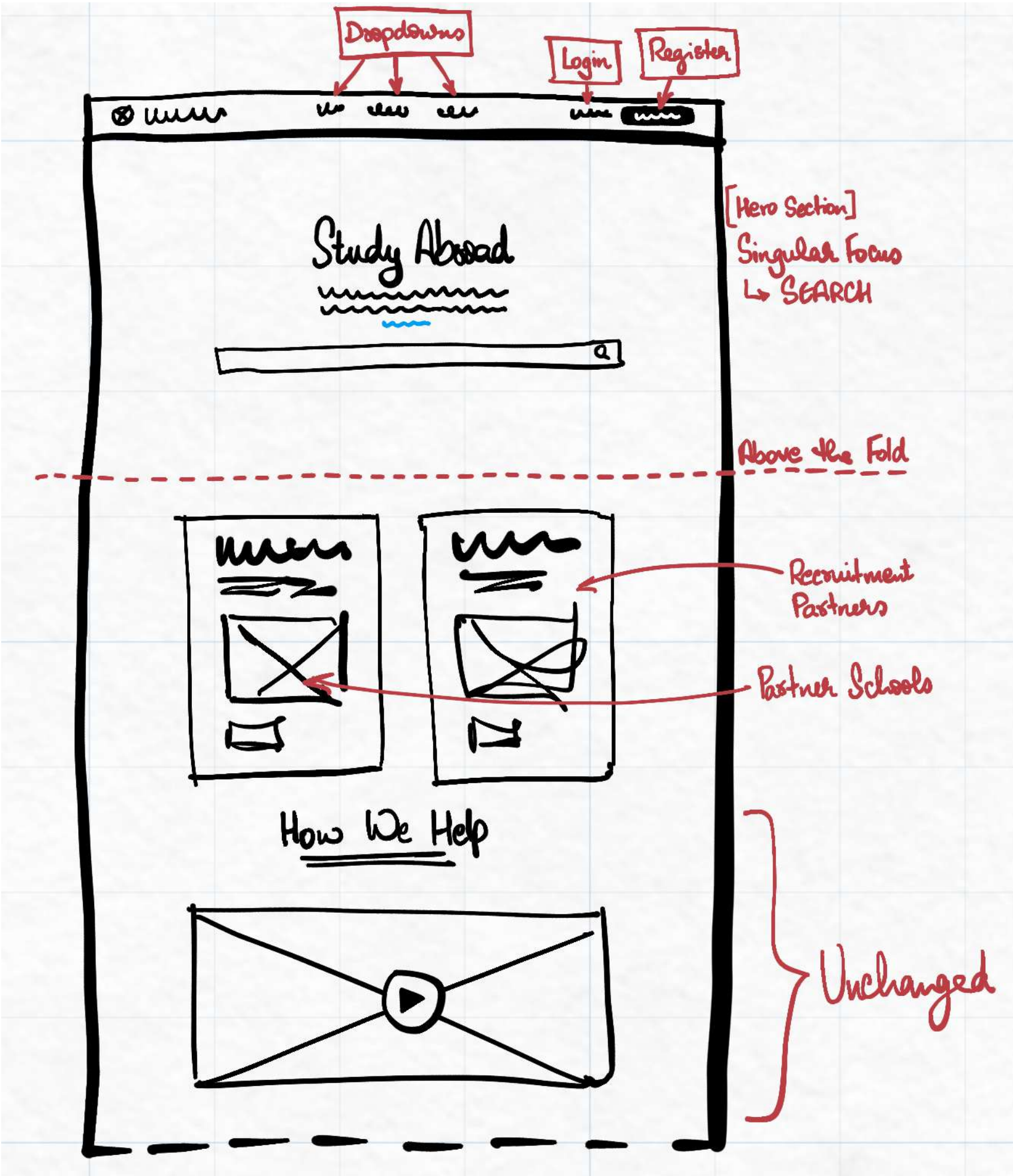
Design A

The hero section has been simplified to make the **value proposition instantly clear** to its largest user group – students.



Design B

This is an even more simplified and hyper-focused version of the design. It's designed to get **straight into program search**.



03. Redesigning Search

The screenshot shows the ApplyBoard website's search interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Students', 'Recruitment Partners', and 'Schools' links, along with 'Log In' and 'Register' buttons. Below this is a search bar with two input fields: 'What would you like to study?' and 'Where? e.g. school name or location', followed by a 'Search' button. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Eligibility' on the left and 'Programs' on the right. The 'Eligibility' section contains several dropdown menus for filtering: 'Do you have a valid Study Permit / Visa?' (with a value of 'I don't have this'), 'Nationality' (set to 'India'), 'Province of Residency' (set to 'Punjab'), 'Education Country' (set to 'India'), 'Education Level' (set to 'Masters Degree'), 'Grading Scheme' (set to 'Higher Education (Bachelor and ab...'), and 'Grading Average' (set to '99'). The 'Programs' section displays two search results for the University of Ottawa. The first result is a '4-Year Bachelor's Degree Baccalauréat ès sciences (spécialisé) - Mathématiques (OZY) (Optional Co-op) (Français)' with a tuition of \$36,160.00 CAD and an application fee of \$256.00 CAD. The second result is a '4-Year Bachelor's Degree Baccalauréat en musique (Français)' with the same tuition and application fee. Both results include a 'Start Application' button and a 'Program Details' link. A large plus sign is positioned between this screenshot and the one on the right.

Existing Search Method 1 – Keywords & Filters

The search screen seems intimidating and requires a lot of scrolling. It can be simplified to be more delightful.

The screenshot shows a simplified version of the search interface. It features a large, light blue background with a stylized illustration of a person holding a tablet and a globe. A white modal box is centered on the screen, titled 'First of all, what should we call you? :)'. Inside the modal, there is a text input field labeled 'Your first name' and a blue 'Next' button. The background of the page is decorated with soft, white clouds.

Existing Search Method 2 – Questionnaire

This method is simplified but too long and requires too much information upfront. It needs to be integrated with Method 1.

Wireframe - Search

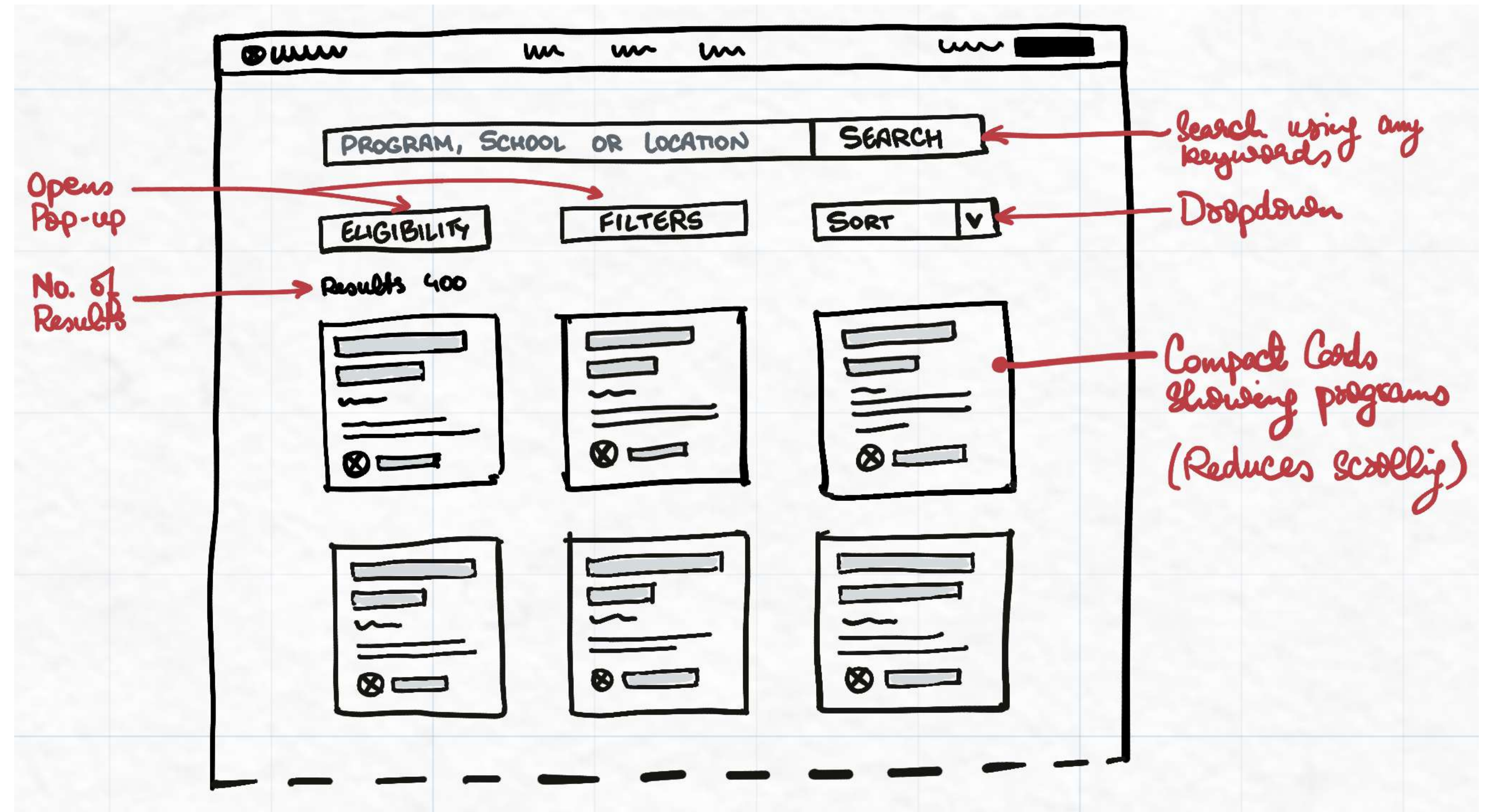
The **Search Bar** has been simplified and can be used to search any keywords – program, school or location.

The **Eligibility Questionnaire** now can be accessed as a pop-up on demand.

The **Filters** also sit behind a button as a pop-up.

Sort search results by deadline, fees, popularity, ranking, etc.

Search Results are shown as compact cards decreasing the need for scrolling.



Resources

Remote usability tests conducted using:
Zoom.us

Traffic analytics from:
SimilarWeb.com

Free Icons/Illustrations from:
Iconscout
Apple Emojis
Storyset on Freepik.com

Infographics by:
Utkarsh Singh

Report compiled in
Figma

Wireframes created in:
Concepts (iPad app)



Thank you!

If you have any questions regarding this study,
feel free to contact me at hi@utkarsh-singh.com