CollegeVine

by Alena Viarenich

CollegeVine

Discover

Discover majors and careers based on you interests and skills. Get notifications for application deadline
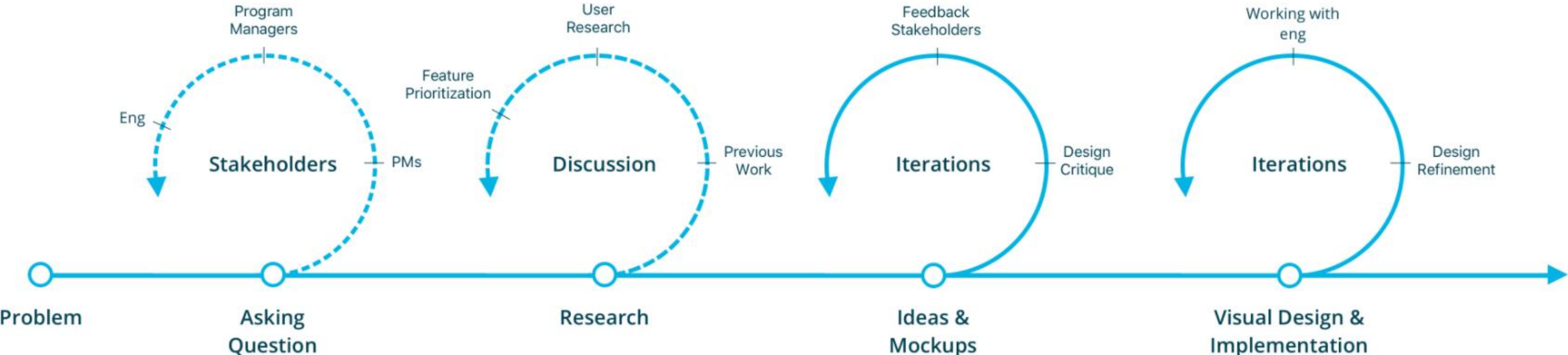
Skip
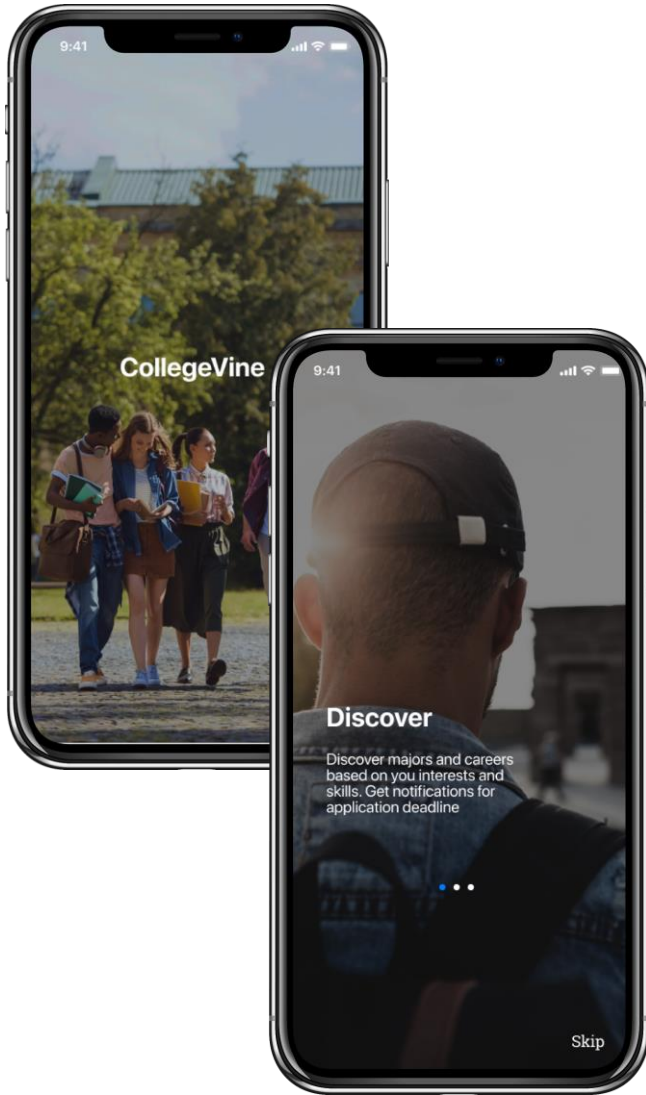
Mobile Expert App

Problem Statement

A lot of students get overwhelmed when it comes to applying for a school in the USA. There are a lot of options and they can easily miss a deadline. For international students, the process can be intimidating since they need to transfer their school credits and get introduced to a completely new school system. They need a tool that can help them choose and apply for a school in a timely manner. Sometimes the right school choice can affect someone's life.

Introduction

CollegeVine is a mobile app that helps students planning to attend a college in the US to find the right school and choose the best major. Users can research schools, save them and connect with experts for professional advice.

Role: UX/UI designer   Tools: Adobe XD, Figma, UsabilityHub, Optimal Workshop   Duration: 10 months

Program Managers

Feature Prioritization

User Research

Feedback Stakeholders

Working with eng

Eng

Stakeholders   PMs

Discussion   Previous Work

Iterations   Design Critique

Iterations   Design Refinement

Problem

Asking Question

Research

Ideas & Mockups

Visual Design & Implementation

Understanding the User

To understand people's initial behavior around searching and applying for schools, and to document their pain points using existing apps I run an online survey. Then, I conducted several user interviews to learn more about my potential users' experiences first-hand.

AFFINITY MAP

I analyzed carefully each interview session and documented all significant findings and sorted the data into clusters based on information relevancy. The affinity map helped find points where participant data was overlapping.

Key Insights

4 Participants

Age range 18-35

8 Questions

All looking to attend a school in the US

Organization Tools & Practices

Many students choose online tools

Excel table, Google search, Phone notifications, etc.

There are no similar products on the market.

Deciding Factors

Rating, location, programs and cost are the most popular deciding factors among students.

Attitude Towards Expert Service

Only 1 student had experience using expert app before. All students find it useful to be able to get expert advice and don't mind to pay $ for it.

User Persona

To better understand the characteristics of **CollegeVine** potential users, I created 2 user personas Danny and Ana. Danny will need help of experts and to be reminded when application deadline is due. In addition, Danny will need help transferring his credits to US schools, as he had studied in Poland. So, he needs a lot of hand-holding as lot of things are new to him.

Danny, 18 years old
Lives in Warsaw, Poland
Single
Barista

Goals & Needs
➢ He wants to study in the US
➢ He needs help choosing a school that has low tuition for international students

Motivations
➢ He has been to the US before and wants to move here permanently
➢ He wants to get a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science
➢ He wants to meet people from other countries

Frustrations
➢ He does not know where to start with a school search
➢ He is concerned if he will be able to score high enough on tests

Danny's Everyday Activities
➢ He likes bicycling
➢ He works 5 days a week at the coffee shop, sometimes he has to work overtime
➢ Danny likes to spend time outdoors

Quotes
➢ "I always wanted to see NYC and maybe mover there"
➢ "I would love to have someone I can come for advice and trust their opinion"

Device & Internet Usage

User Persona

Ana will need the app to stay organized during school search process, with little guidance. She likes to do her own research. She might still need to text experts for clarifications.

Ana, 23 years old
Lives in Boston, MA
Single
Uber Driver

Goals & Needs
➢ Ana wants to get a Master's Degree. She is considering online options, this way she can work and study
➢ Ana's goal is to get into school ASAP
➢ Ana is looking for a school with a high reputation and low cost

Motivations
➢ Ana wants to get a graduate degree to make better $
➢ She is motivated to quit Uber
➢ Her motivation is to find a major that will help her develop her skills

Frustrations
➢ Ana is frustrated because she does not have much time to sit down and research information about schools
➢ She cannot find apps or websites that will help her choose a school
➢ She does not trust school rankings on the internet

Ana's Everyday Activities
➢ She works long hours, especially on the weekends
➢ She spends a lot of hours in the car
➢ She goes out with her friends 2-3 times a week
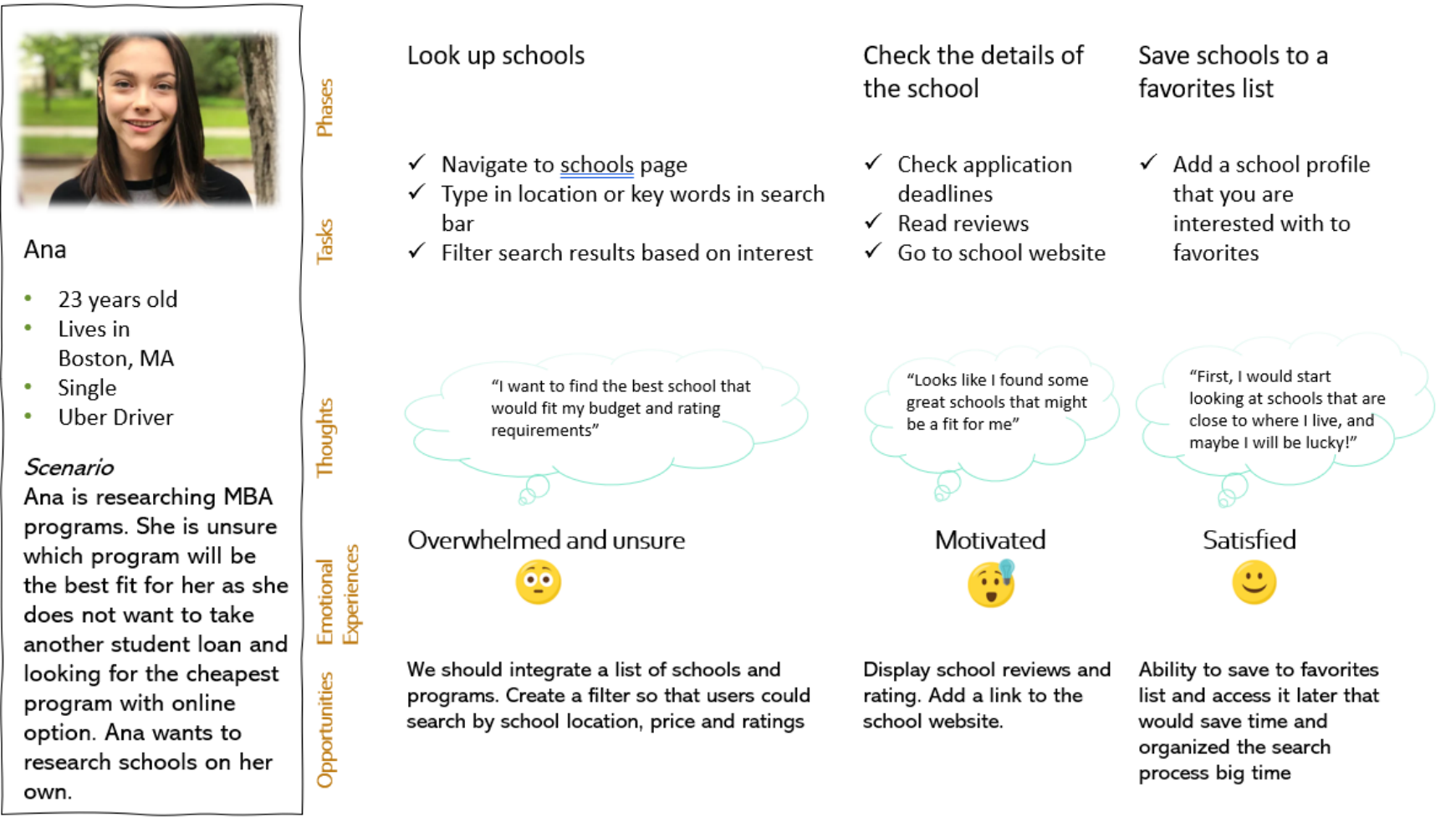➢ She like to hang out with her friends at coffee shops

Quotes
➢ "Even though I have a bachelor's degree, I still want to get Master's to get a higher paid job"
➢ "I don't have time and patience to sit at my desktop looking at school profiles"
➢ "Would be great to have a tool that will show me information about schools that I can rely on"

**Device & Internet Usage**

User Journey Map

To gain a better understanding of how Ana can use **CollegeVine**, I created a journey map to showcase the steps Ana would need to take to find a school and save search results to favorites to access them later when she has more time for a research.

Ana

- 23 years old
- Lives in Boston, MA
- Single
- Uber Driver

Scenario
Ana is researching MBA programs. She is unsure which program will be the best fit for her as she does not want to take another student loan and looking for the cheapest program with online option. Ana wants to research schools on her own.

Phases

Look up schools	Check the details of the school	Save schools to a favorites list

Tasks

✓ Navigate to schools page ✓ Type in location or key words in search bar ✓ Filter search results based on interest	✓ Check application deadlines ✓ Read reviews ✓ Go to school website	✓ Add a school profile that you are interested with to favorites

Thoughts

"I want to find the best school that would fit my budget and rating requirements"	"Looks like I found some great schools that might be a fit for me"	"First, I would start looking at schools that are close to where I live, and maybe I will be lucky!"

Emotional Experiences

Overwhelmed and unsure 😳	Motivated 😅	Satisfied 🙂

Opportunities

We should integrate a list of schools and programs. Create a filter so that users could search by school location, price and ratings	Display school reviews and rating. Add a link to the school website.	Ability to save to favorites list and access it later that would save time and organized the search process big time

User Journey Map

To gain a better understanding of how Danny can use **CollegeVine**, I created a journey map to showcase the steps Danny would need to take to connect with an expert for professional advice.
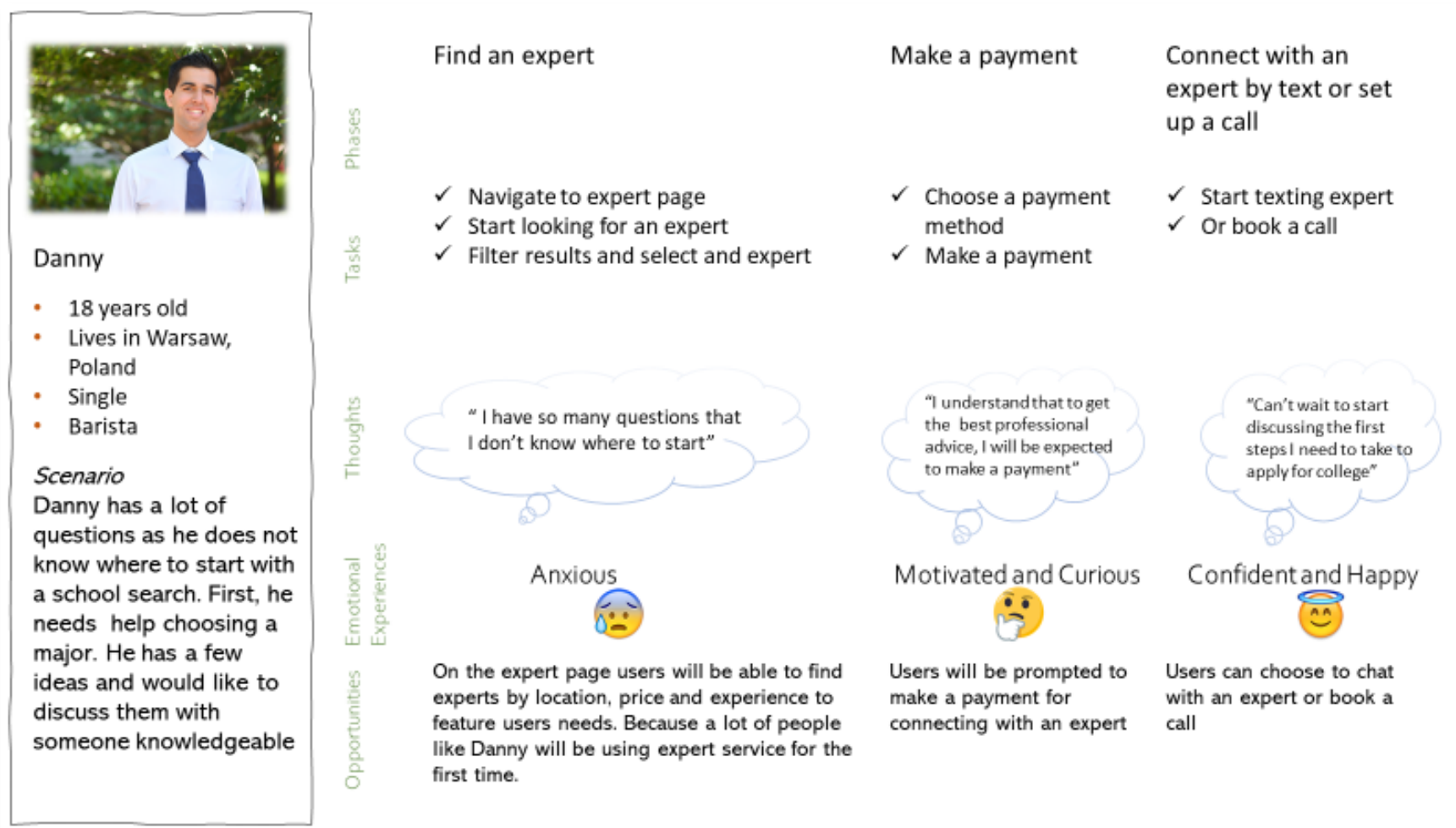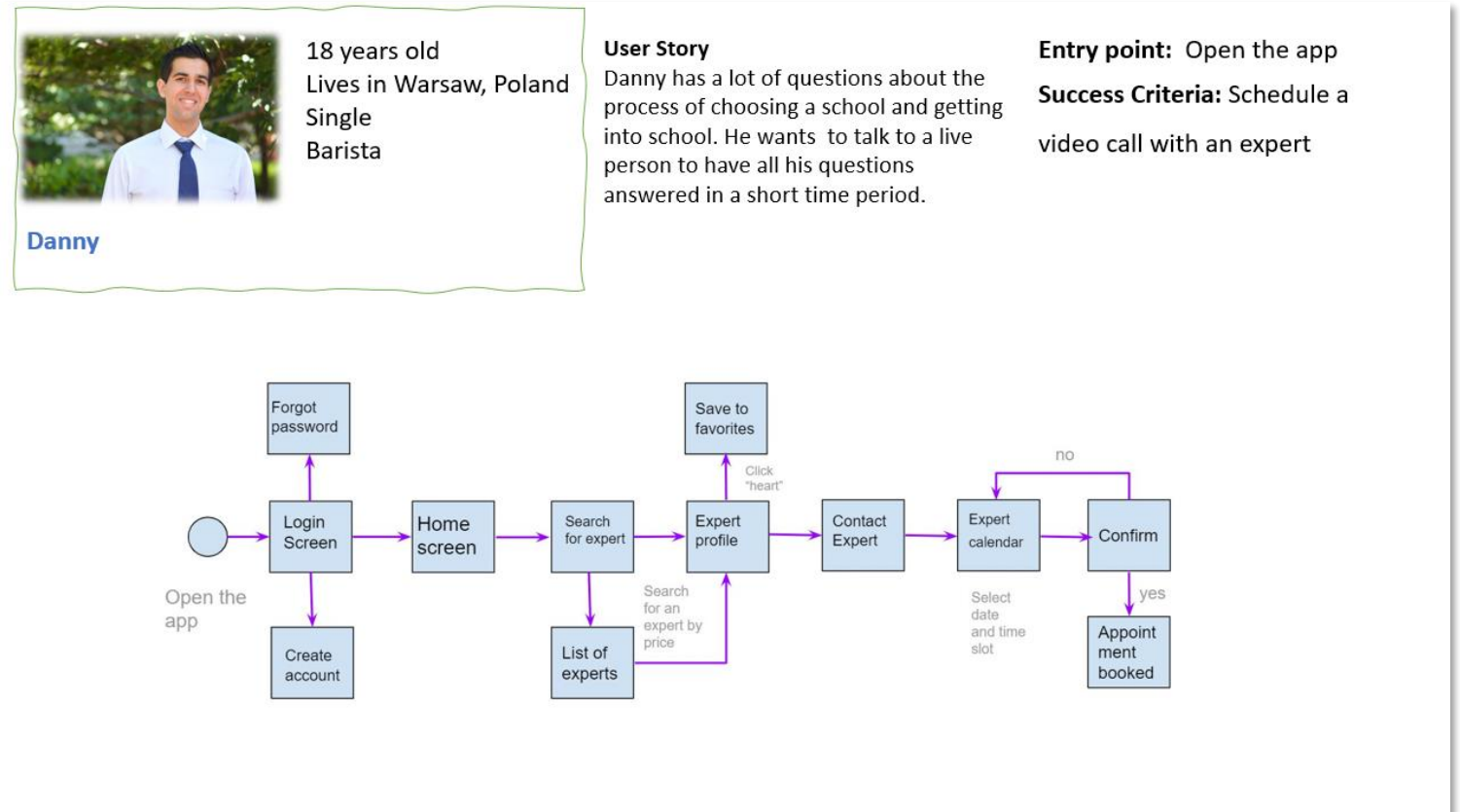
Insights

- ✓ Some of the users will need a lot of hand-holding. We will introduce them to school experts who can provide a consultation on all questions, including transferring credits from international schools.

- ✓ Students will feel more confident when they know their school search processed is organized. We will add a filter, on the search screen so that they can look up schools and programs by cost, location and rating. And then save their choices to favorites list which they can always access later.

- ✓ As school search might be time consuming, we will add a link to the school website on the school profile page.

Foundational Design

To understand people's initial behavior when searching for a school to attend I run an online survey. Then, I conducted several user interviews to learn more about my potential users' experiences first-hand.

USER FLOW

To determine which tasks the user needs to complete to successfully achieve their goals, I created a user flow for each user objective I've defined before.

18 years old
Lives in Warsaw, Poland
Single
Barista

Danny

User Story
Danny has a lot of questions about the process of choosing a school and getting into school. He wants to talk to a live person to have all his questions answered in a short time period.

Entry point: Open the app

Success Criteria: Schedule a video call with an expert

After exploring possible paths Ana and Danny could take to achieve their goals searching for a school and saving results to access them later, it was time to create an overall navigational structure of **CollegeVine** sitemap.
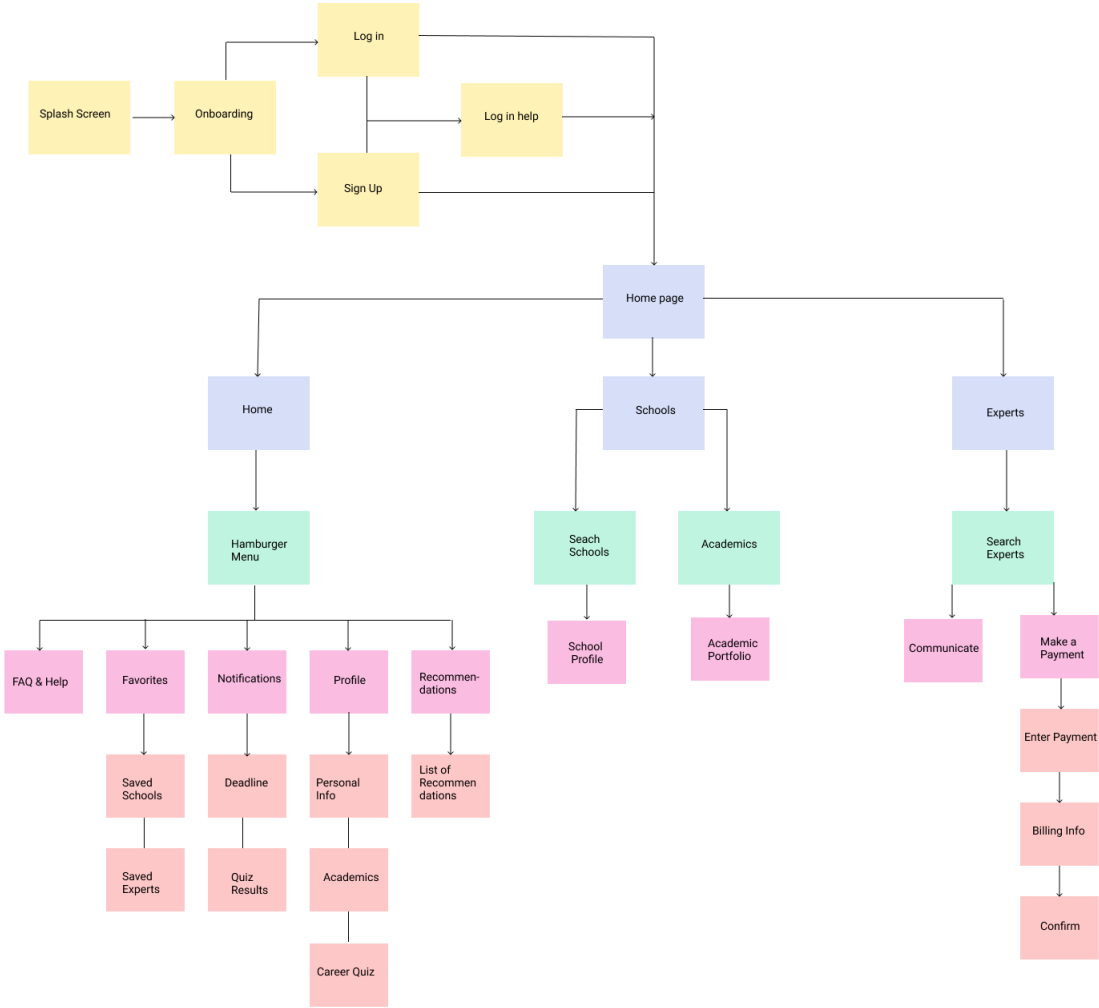
SITEMAP

To better understand how to organize data and label categories for navigation of **CollegeVine** I ran a Card Sorting via Optimal Workshop that helped me to improve early IA sketches.

Ideation

Now, it's time to start wireframing. I wireframed the steps user would take to choose a school and connect with an expert, as these are one of the most important features of the **CollegeVine**.

WIREFRAMING

To highlight only the high-level functionality of the rapid sketches for **CollegeVine** I hand-drawn low-fi wireframes in black and white. I used Figma to portray a bit more detail and to create medium-fidelity wireframes.
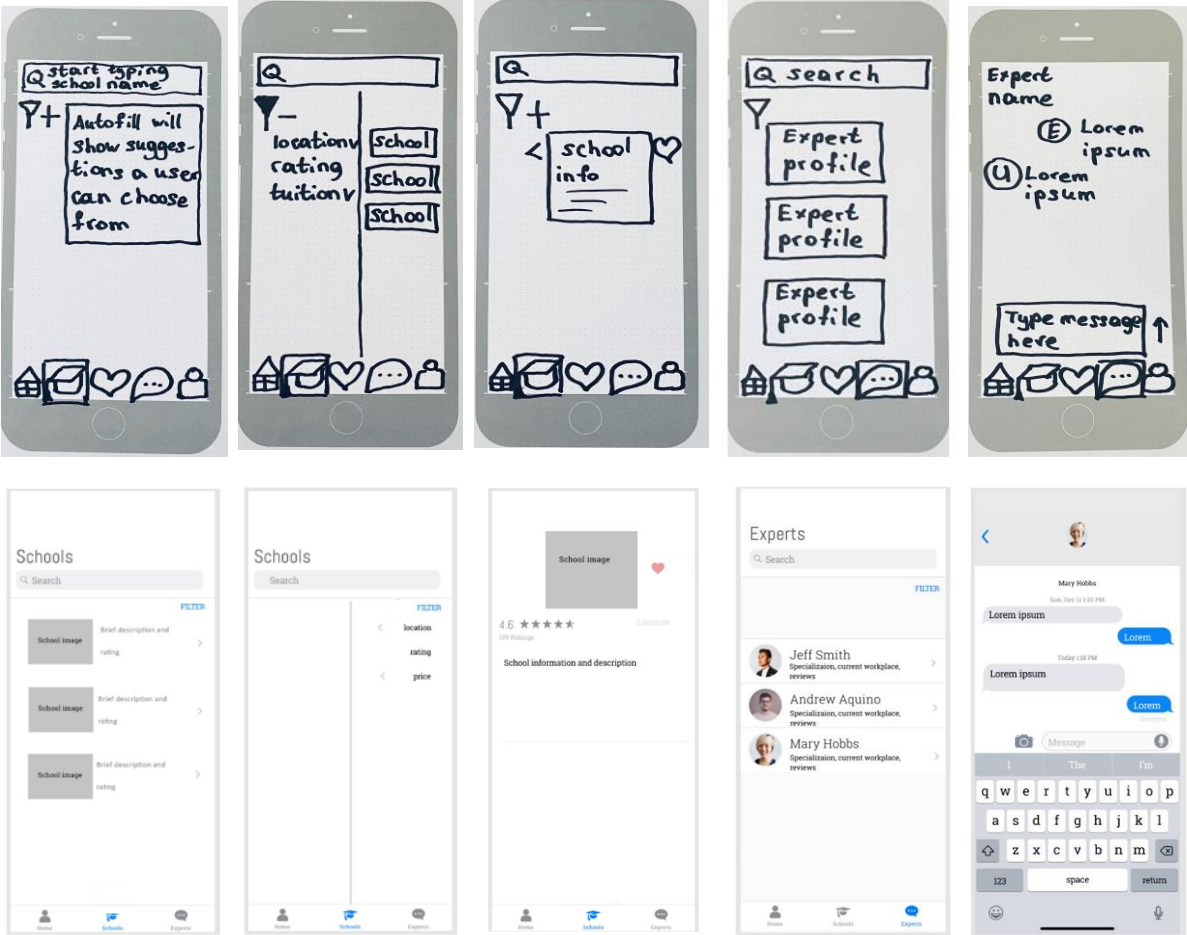
Hi-fi prototype

Building an interactive prototype is a quick way to produce a user-friendly MVP in which users can complete selected tasks, share their feedback and help to improve the project on the early stage. Based on the research, deciding factors for Ana would be school location, price and rating. We integrated those categories into filter.
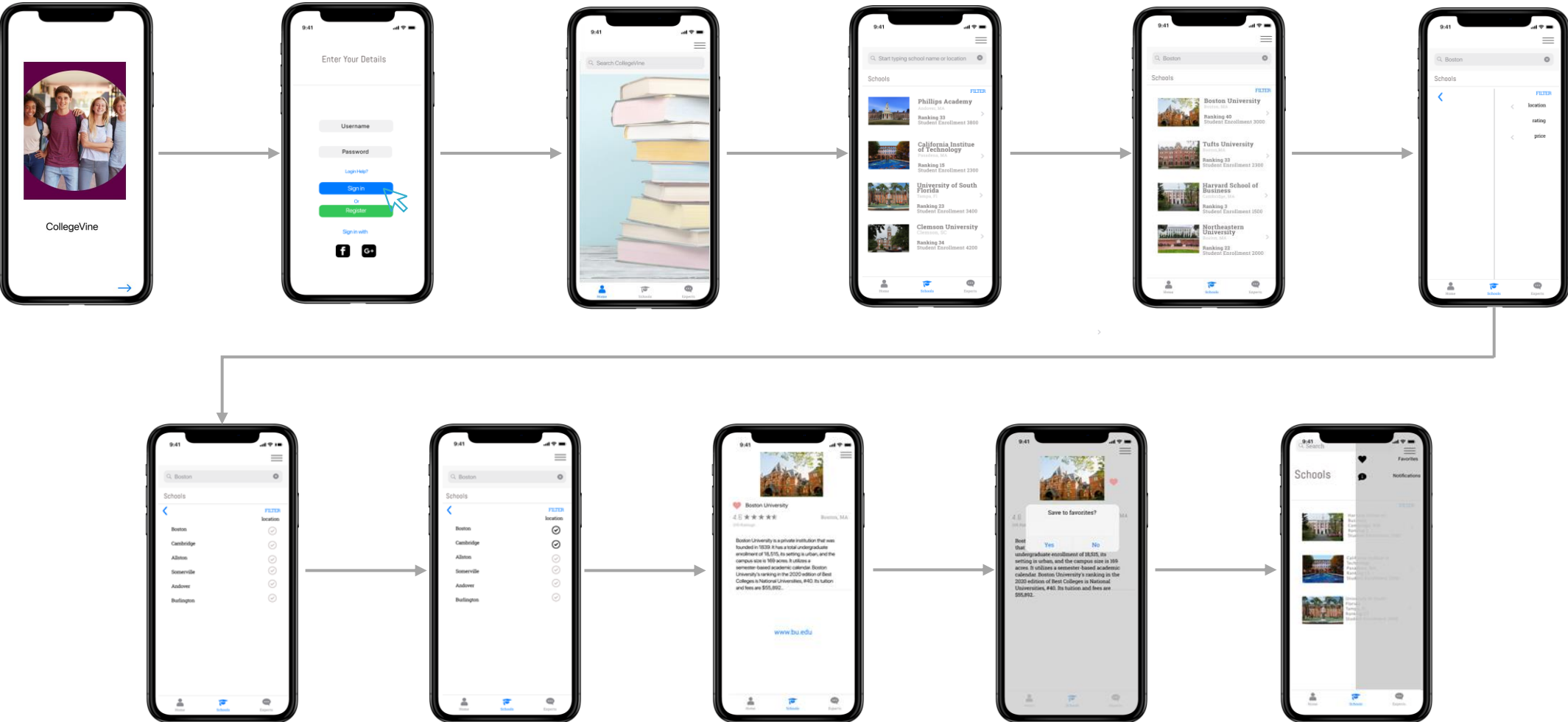
Hi-fi prototype

Danny would need to contact experts the most as he needs a lot of hand-holding. **CollegeVine** allows users to connect with education experts for professional advice. In this prototype we show how the user connects with an expert and makes a payment before setting up a call or sending a message.

Got stuck

At this step I got stuck, as I did not know how to implement the payment system, where it would live. In the image below you can see that I added "make a payment" step after user chooses to connect with an expert. Further down, I made sure to test this feature.
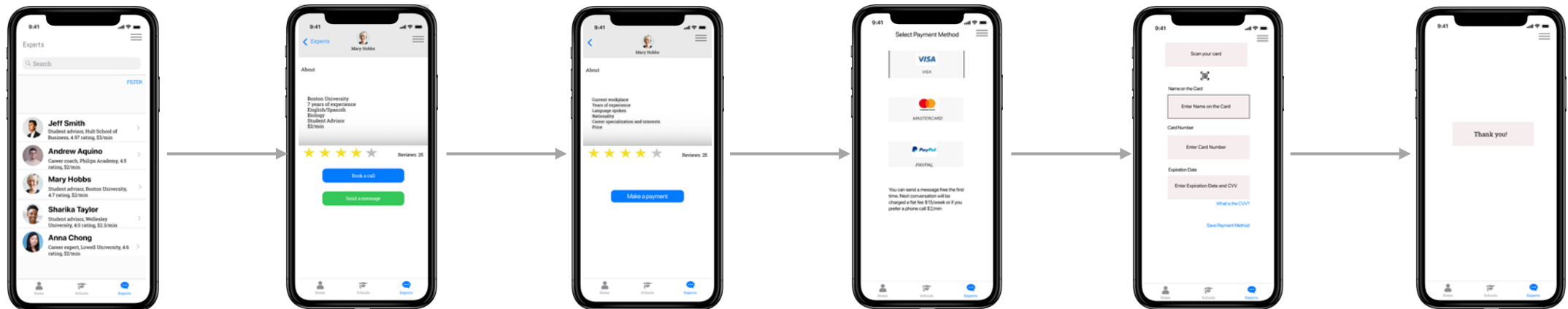
User Testing

It's time to determine if the initial functionality of **CollegeVine** is truly understandable for the target users and to see how they interact with it. In order to do so, I conducted several usability tests (luckily, I managed to do it before lockdown). Feel free to explore the complete Test Plan and Test Script for more details.

Test Goal   To identify potential errors in the prototype and assess the level of learnability and efficiency.

Test Objectives
- ✓ Onboarding
- ✓ Search for a school
- ✓ Save to favorites
- ✓ Communicate with an expert

Methodology   Moderated in-person and remote

Test Results Key Insights

👤 4 participants   ↑↓ 19-35 age range   ☑ 4 tasks   🕐 15-20 min task duration

✓ Users had different ideas about what 5 icons on the bottom menu represented.

✓ Users seemed to be lost when asked to access saved schools and experts.

✓ When asked to text an expert, user did not know where to navigate.

✓ On the payment screen, there was no price showing how much user needs to pay to connect with an expert.

✓ Users found it reasonable to be prompted to make a payment prior to connecting with an expert.

Test Results

I created an affinity map to analyze usability test results. Next step, I created a Rainbow sheet to evaluate the data and to create recommendations for further design improvements.

Issues & Solutions

- User looked puzzled when asked to use a filter on the school screen.

- User had to look on the bottom tab to see which screen they are on.

- "The onboarding screen looks unbalanced".

- The user was confused when asked to chat with an expert. Tried to click on "profile" instead of "chat" icon.

- "What if I am not sure whether I really need assistance of an expert?"

→ ✓ Move filter to the upper right corner instead of left.

→ ✓ Add "Schools" next to the search bar so that user can always see what screen they are on.

→ ✓ Change the picture to fit the whole screen.

→ ✓ Eliminated "profile" and "favorites" and left just 3 icons on the bottom tab. Added a hamburger menu instead, that will have the options "favorites", "profile", "help & FAQ", etc.

→ ✓ On the expert screen, added a feature "send a message" , in addition to "book a call", so that the user can text an expert first, before having make a call.

Implementing changes

To optimize layouts of **CollegeVine** and to tune its visual designs so customers will love it, I run several preference tests and feedback sessions with my peers. Gathering valuable opinions from other people helped me to assess the design and bring it to the next level.

DESIGN ITERATIONS #1

I got some good feedback about the onboarding screen, and the picture with people. I ended up changing the picture to a different one that is more casual and fits the whole screen. To make the name of the app more visible I changed the font color to white.
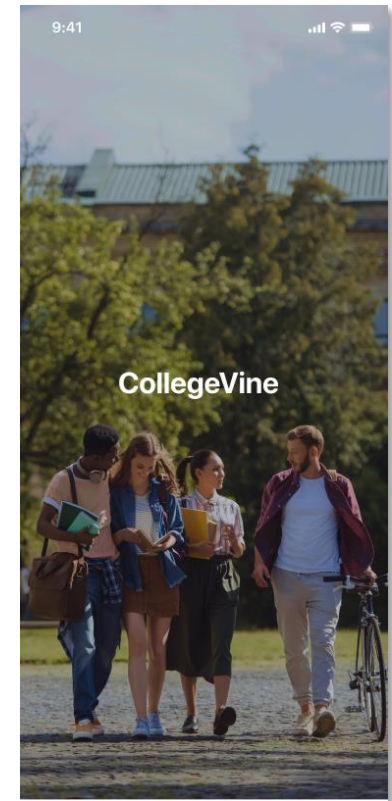
User research showed that my target audience was confused and unsure about what the 5 icons on the bottom menu represent. Ultimately, I left only 3 icons for greater accessibility. In addition, I made some changes to the school search screen.

DESIGN ITERATIONS #2

Initially, on the school search screen the filter was located in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. I moved it to the upper right-hand corner for more convenience and added "schools" so that user can always see the title of the screen.

On the bottom tab, I left only Home, Schools and Experts for cleaner look and better accessibility. Instead, I added a hamburger menu at the upper right-hand corner of the screen. The hamburger menu will have "favorites", "notifications", "recommendations" and "FAQ & help" sections.
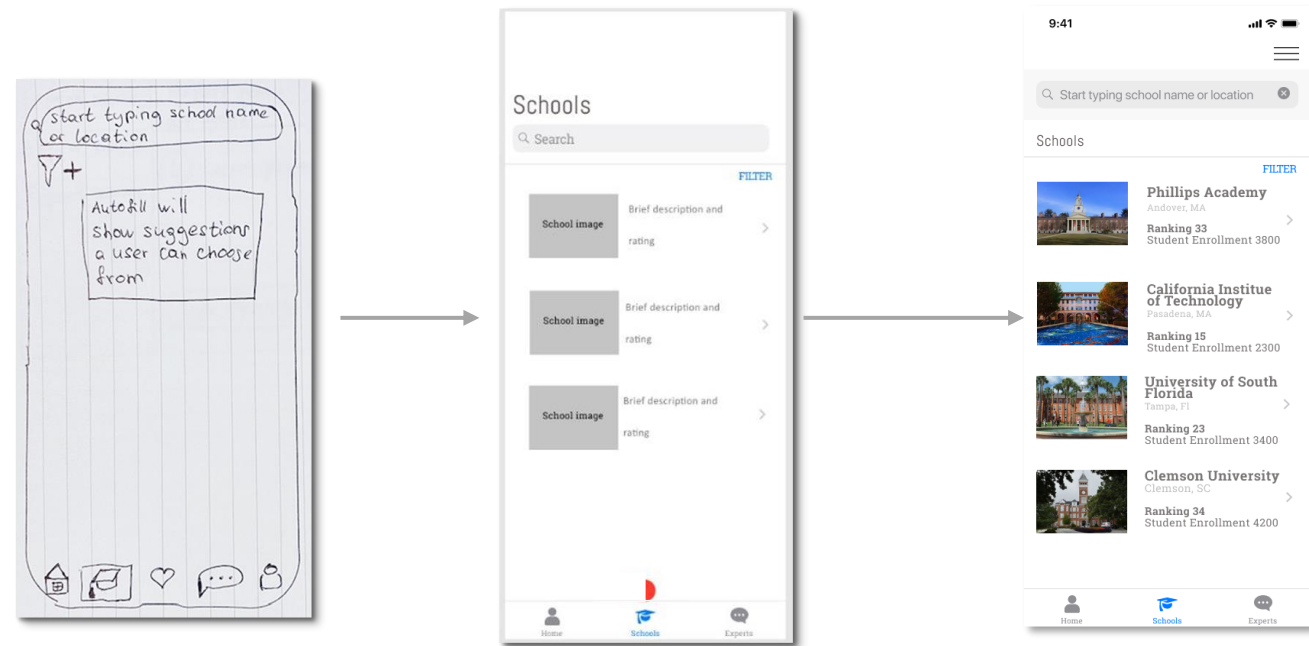
User testing revealed users were lost when asked to access saved schools or experts they were interested to speak with.

DESIGN ITERATIONS #3

I did a few iterations for the favorites screen. Users will be able to access favorite schools and experts from the hamburger menu. When users selects a school they are interested in, they can see basic school info and a link to the website and have the ability to save it to favorites.
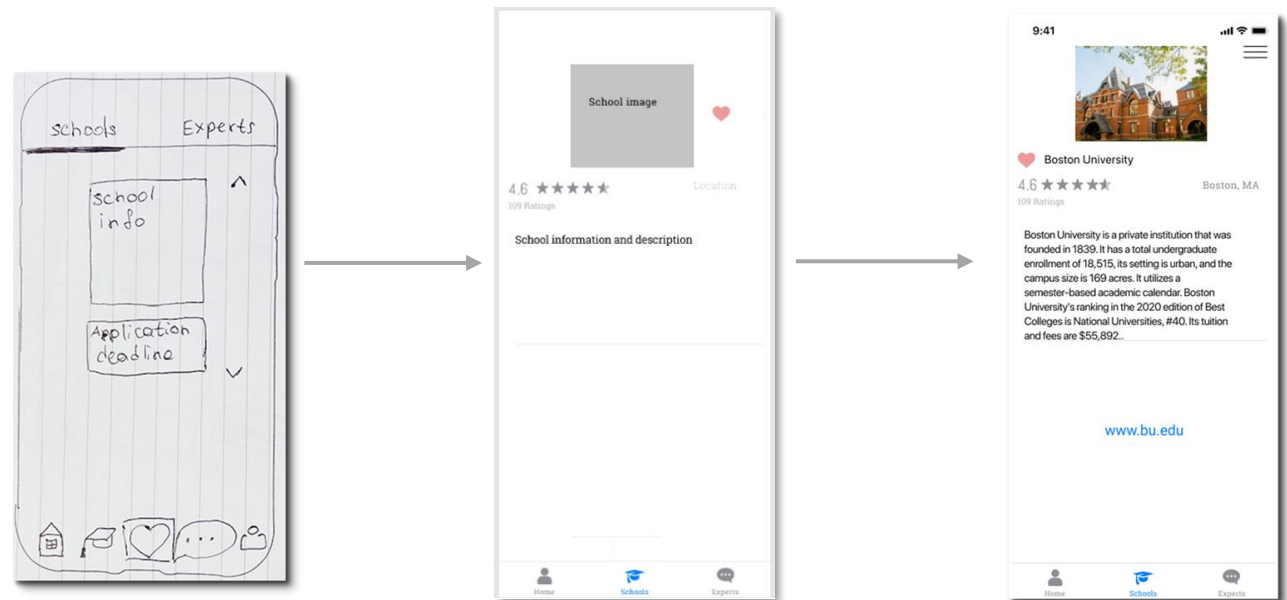
With the help of peer feedback, I made some great changes to the expert profile screen that would benefit target users and business objective of **CollegeVine**. User testing showed that users were confused when needed to text an expert.
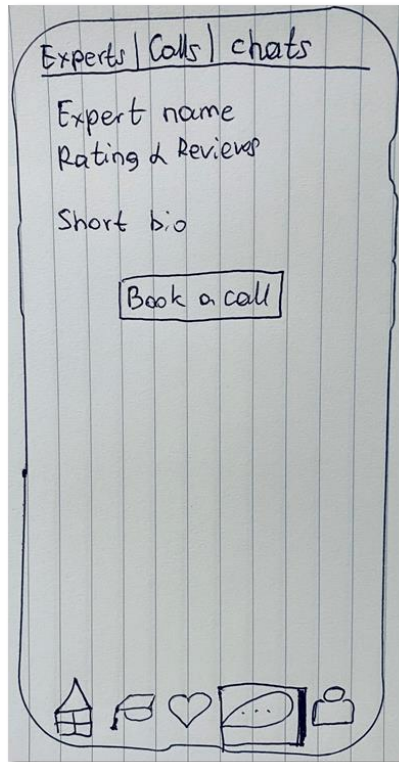
DESIGN ITERATIONS #4

On the initial version of the expert profile screen, I had a tab with calls, chats and recommendations. After a few iterations, that tab was considered unnecessary and changed to a 3-tab bar for a cleaner look and greater accessibility.

Saved recommendations will be available in the hamburger menu in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.

An arrow was added in the upper left-hand corner, so that user can go back to the list of experts to continue search and browsing
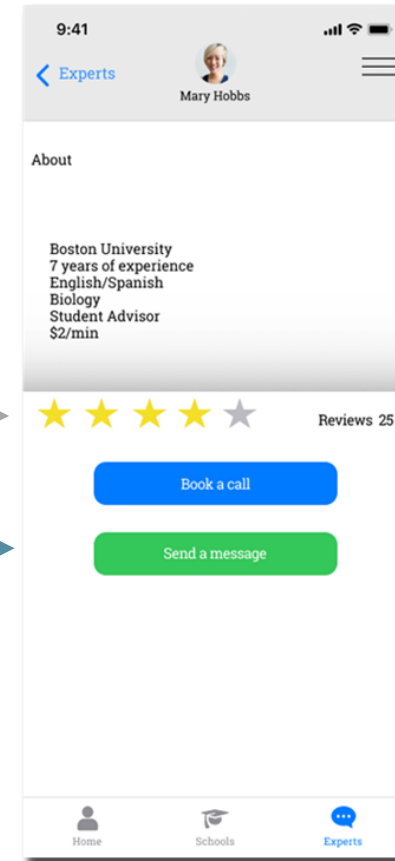
Expert picture was also added in the profile and placed in the middle of the upper bar.

After gathering and analyzing peer feedback, I added "send a message" button on the expert profile screen. The reason for it is that users might want to text an expert first before spending money on a call; some users might be intimidated by calling a live person and they prefer to text instead.

Design language system

To maintain a cohesive user experience across multiple platforms and devices a set of overarching fundamental design rules and standards was built.

Colors

Primary   ■ 007AFF   ■ 34C759   ■ 000000   ■ 8E8E93   □ FFFFFF

Secondary   ■ F6EEEE   ■ F3DF28   ■ EC9A9A

Typography

SF Pro Display and **Roboto Slab** fonts are used throughout the app. The size and weight of the font is adjusted based on hierarchy.

Header 1 SF Pro Display 30

Body 1   SF Pro Display   18

Header 2   Abel 34

Body 2 Roboto Slab 17

Header 3 Roboto Slab 14/caps

Body 3 SF Pro Display 14

Body 3 Roboto Slab 14

Iconography

Icons used throughout the app are gathered from iOS. The icons are minimalistic and self-explanatory. Users wouldn't have to guess what function a particular icon represents as they are commonly used on iOS devices and websites.

Profile

Star rating

Favorites saved

Schools

Back

Favorites

Experts

Select

Info & Help

Experts selected

Onboarding

Clickable Prototype

↓

https://www.figma.com/proto/rzJnriIfh4HBSjmjKbARCx/CollegeVine-app?node-id=1%3A2762&scaling=scale-down&page-id=0%3A1

Summary

Now, I would like to quickly go over my UX process designing CollegeVine. As this was my first project, I had a few things that went well, but I also faced a few obstacles. Overall, this was a great experience that helped me learn what UX is and best practices to create valuable products.

Lesson 1

Understanding the user should always be one of the main goals designing a product. I did multiple interviews to gather information on what users are looking for, what obstacles they are facing and what tools are already available in the market. This was the initial step of my project and it was a crucial step, as I was able to plan on what features the app should have to make it engaging and useful. A few interviews were conducted over a zoom call, so I learned it's good to test systems and internet connection prior to the interview, at the end it will save time and allow the interviews to go more smoothly. One of the important insights was that only 1 user had an app helping students apply to school, all other participants just used google search.

Lesson 2

Hide your ego when you are designing a product. At the initial iterations, when I created paper wireframes, I thought it would be intuitive for the user to have 5 icons on the bottom bar menu. However, user testing proved me wrong. For instance, when I observed user behavior when asked to connect with an expert, they looked puzzled. Instead of clicking on "message icon", they tried to click on "home" and "profile" icons first. It turned out the "message icon" looked to them like a "comment icon". So, I had to make additional iterations described in my case study, to account for the "big" change.

Lesson 3

Effective collaboration leads to great products. My next step would be to do another user testing to find if anything else needs amendment (e.g. accessibility). And meeting developers' team for a final stage.