Empathy & Design Thinking

How Becoming Student-Focused Improved UX, Busted Silos & Built Bridges

This is the story of how we:

Organized a thousand disordered program pages

Overcame tense inter-team dynamics

Employed empathy for students and each other

Discovered a process called Design Thinking

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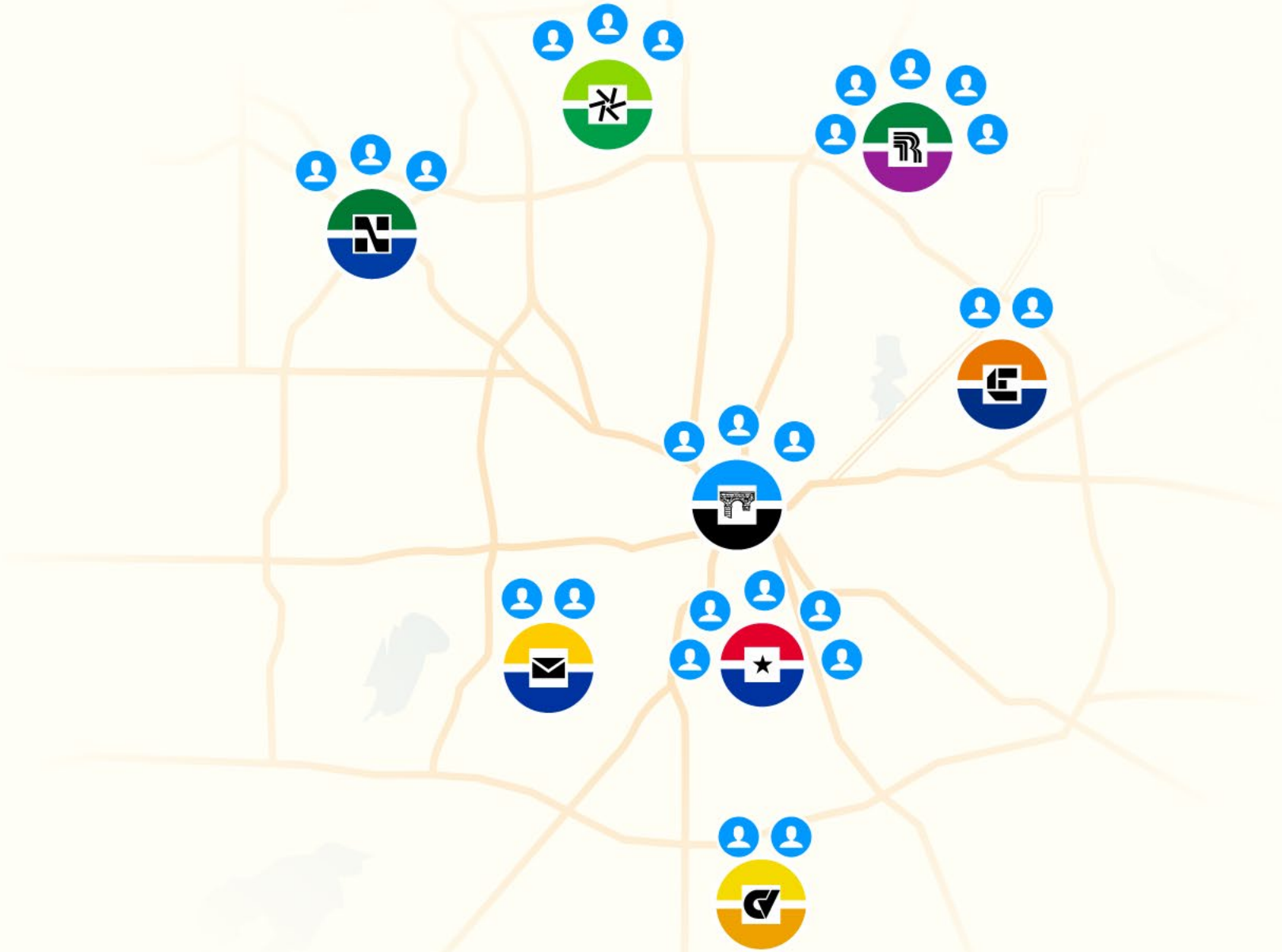
Assistant Director, Digital Experience
Dallas College

Dallas County Community College District → DALLAS COLLEGE

Some Background...

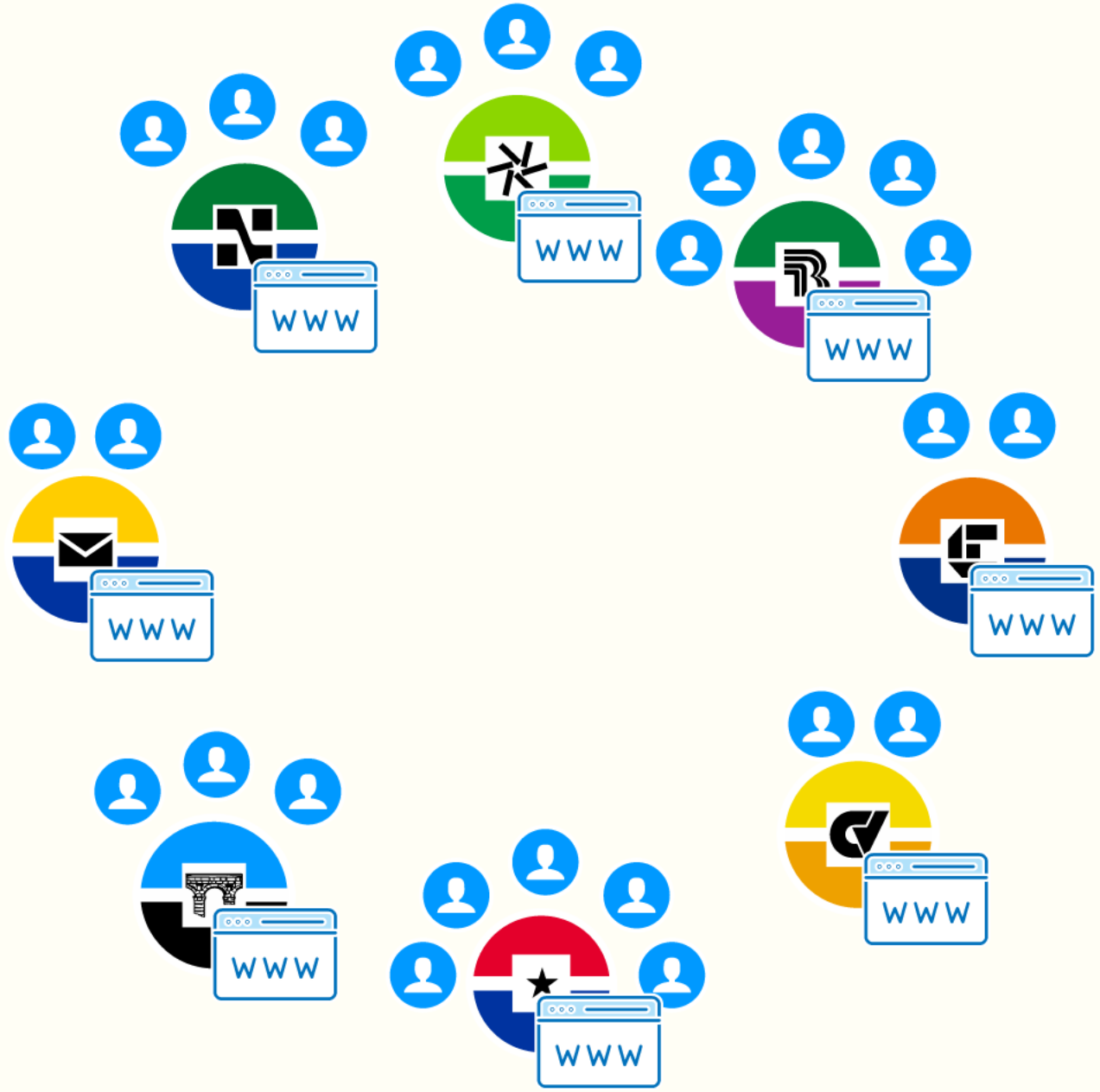
2016

- 7 independently accredited colleges
  - marketing depts
  - directors
  - web teams



2016

- 8 websites with separate:
  - Language/style
  - Design/layout
  - Navigation
  - Content management systems
  - Servers



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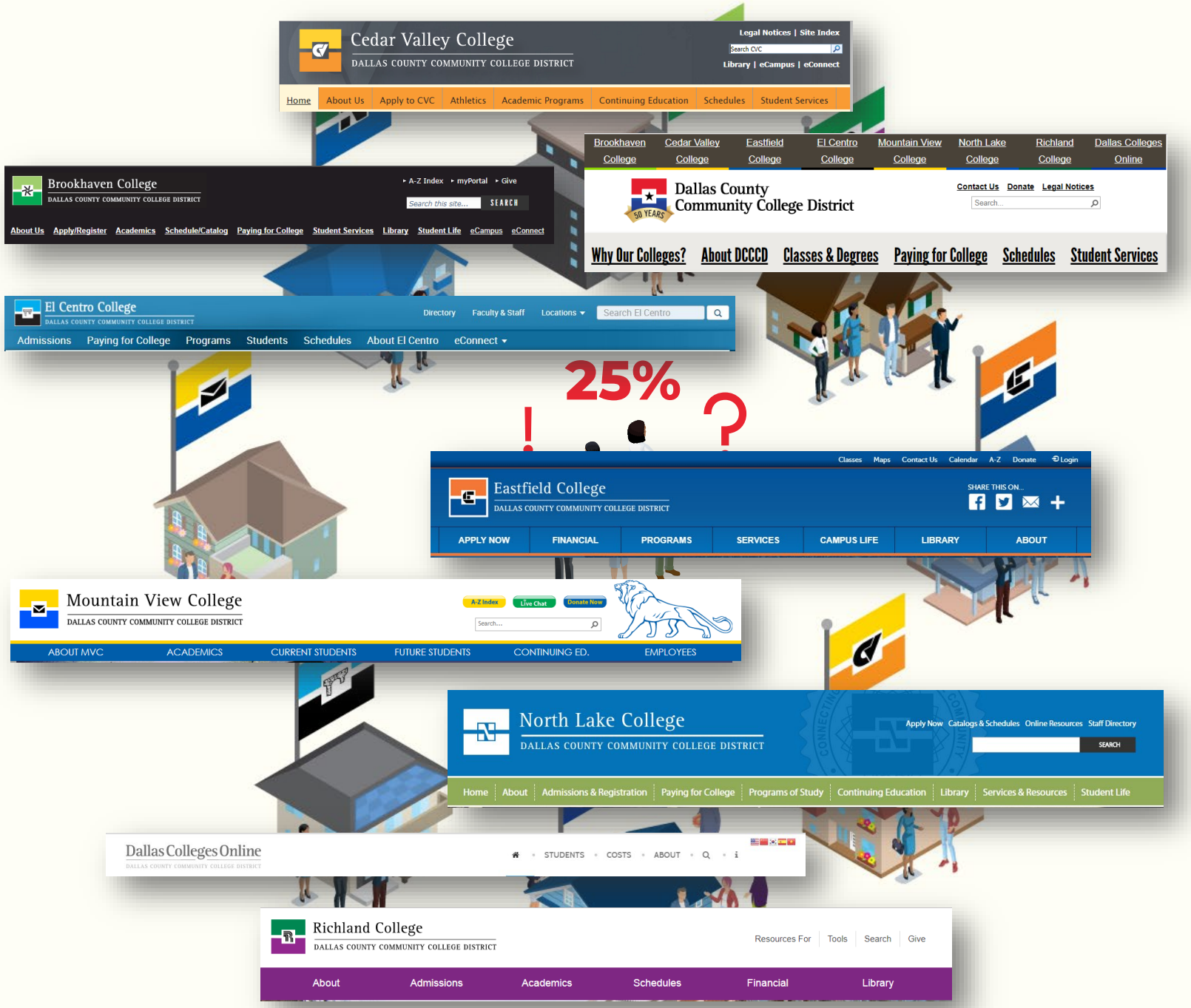
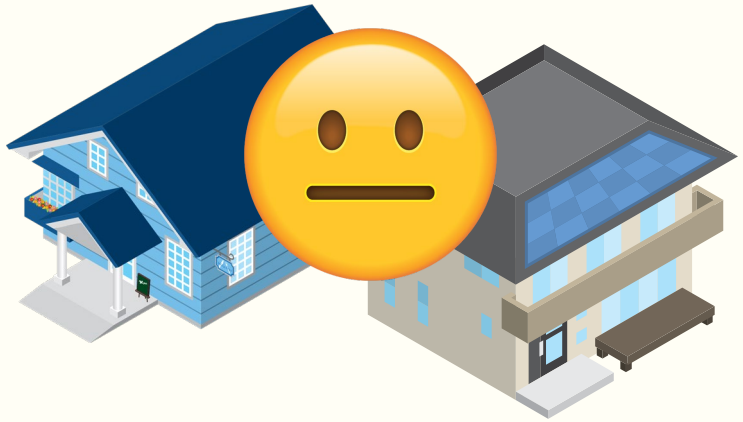


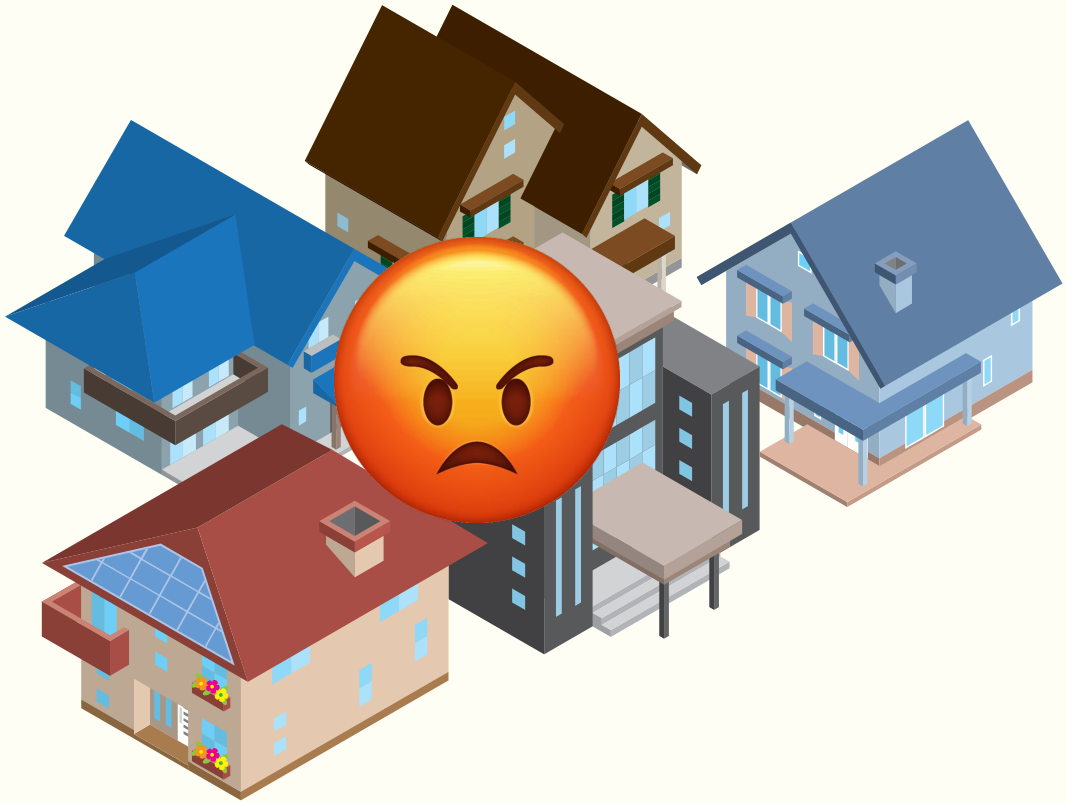
Fall 2016

- Student experience study recommends alignment among websites
- Move to one platform to serve all colleges and students

Fall 2016



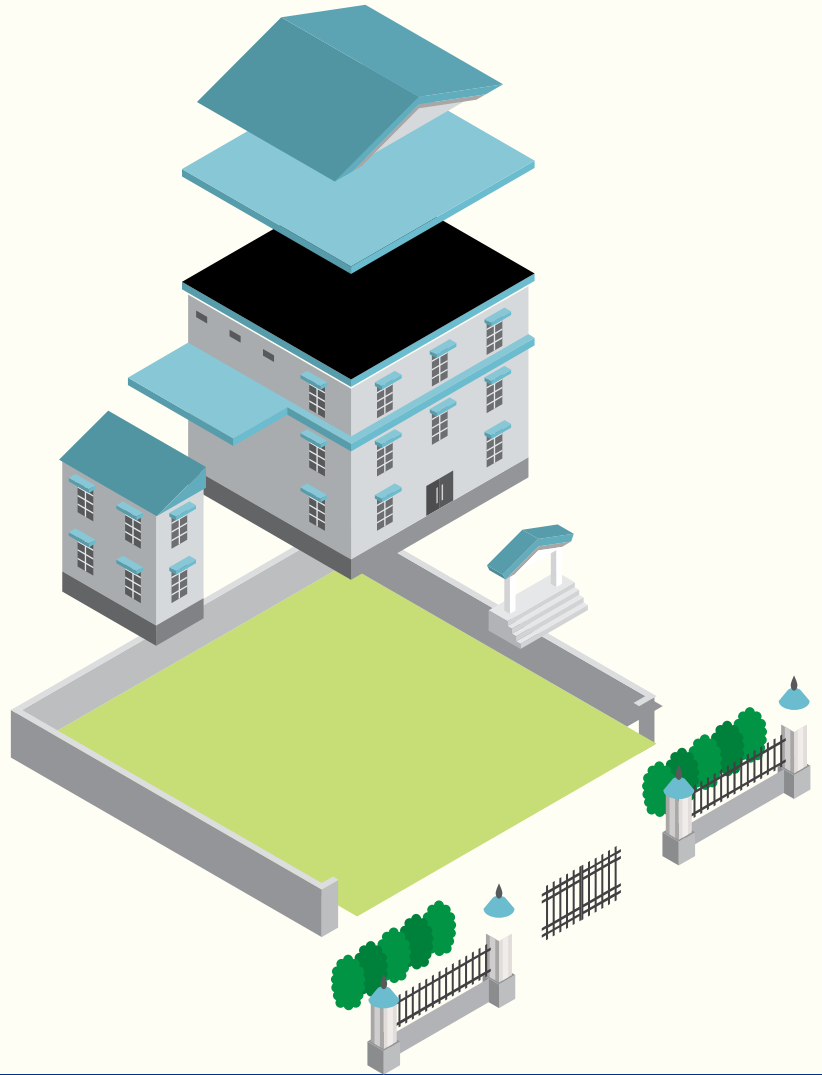
- Some colleges were okay with the announced changes

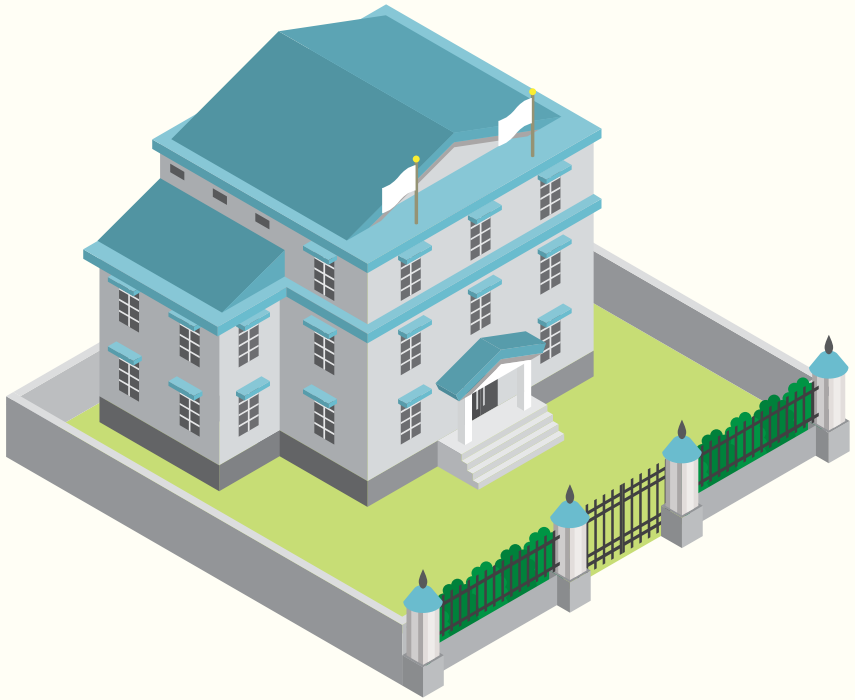


- Others understandably offered some resistance

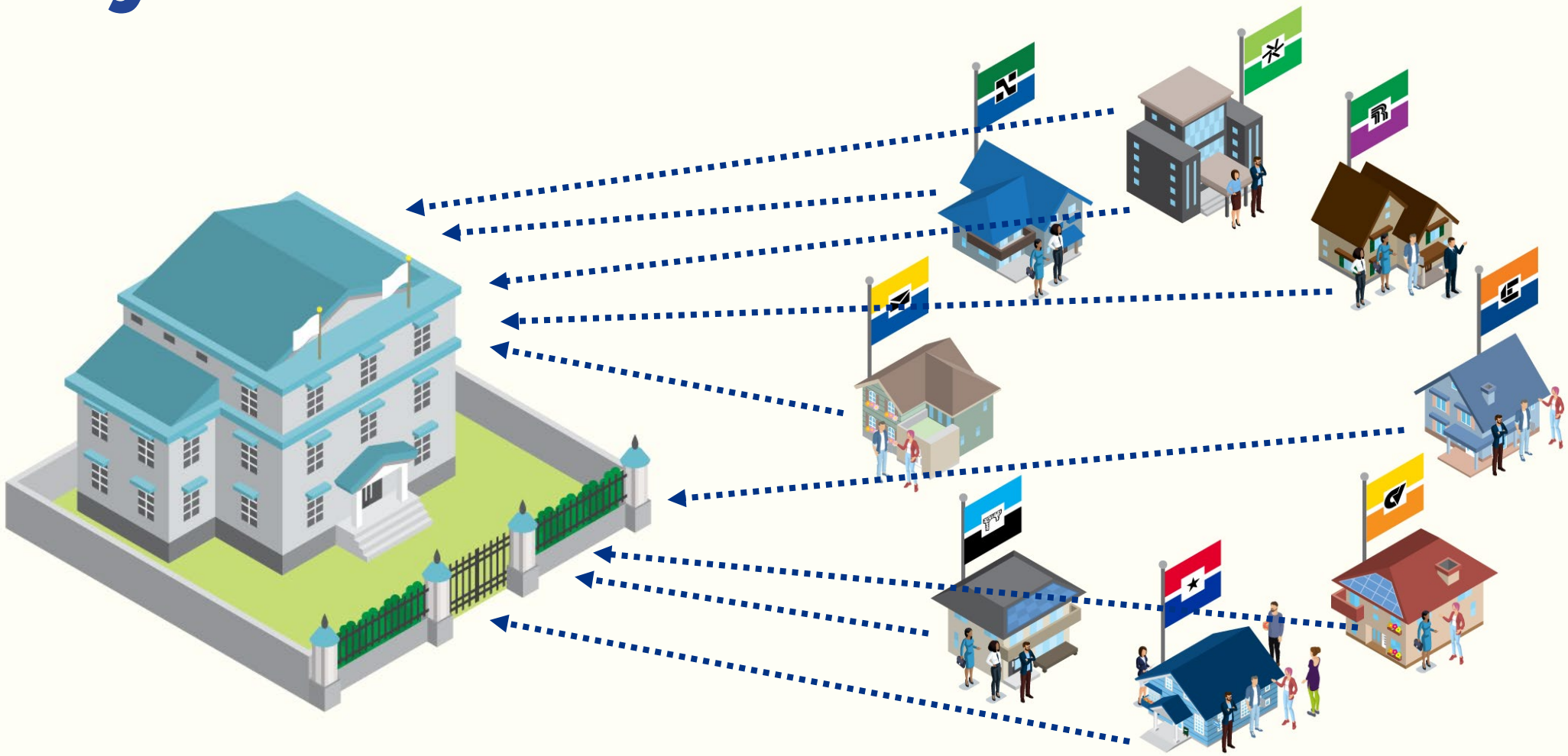
Meanwhile, we still had a six-month timeline to adhere to. And in order to move nimbly and quickly, the district web team had to make most of the design and planning decisions. It was a move that while not collaborative in nature, was done out of necessity of meeting the timeline and possibly contributed to some mistrust.

Winter 2016





Early 2017



If you've ever had to make a super fast move with nearly no warning, you know the result of that is messy.

Photo credit: dailydoseofcharm.com

March 2017

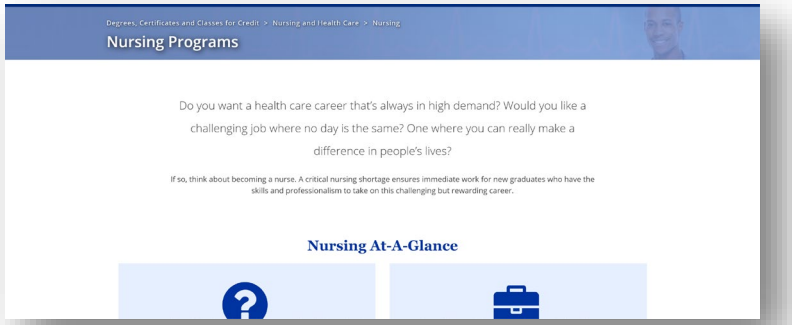
- New single-platform website
- still operated from all eight domains
- We made mistakes and it wasn't smooth
- Employees were angry.
- So we would need to spend a lot more time finessing the house.

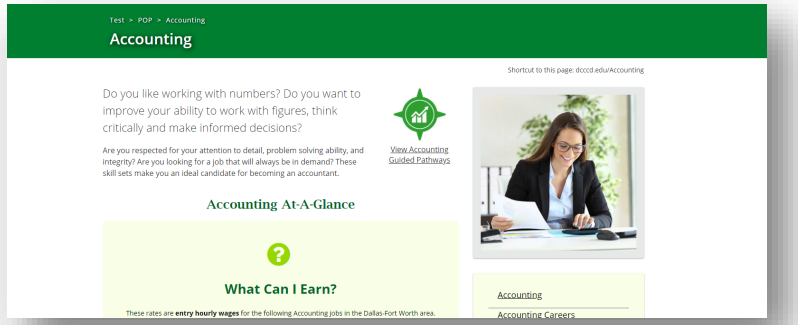
A year and a half later...

Our Story Begins

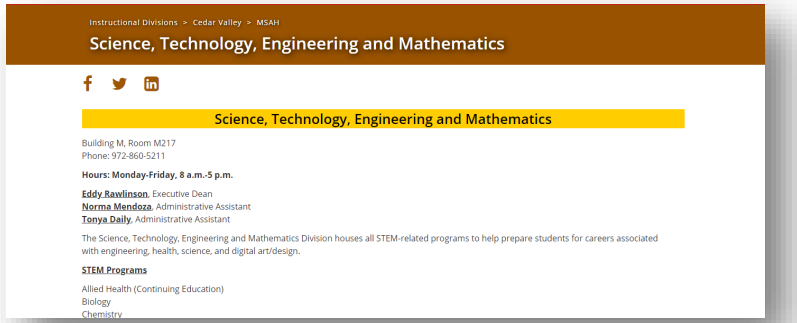
Summer 2018

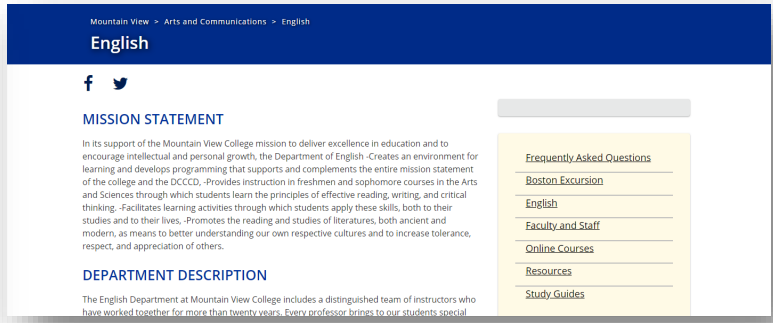
- Dust had settled and we were used to working together
- Time to go back to some our messy rooms that were hastily thrown together
- The messiest part of the house: where we marketed our programs.

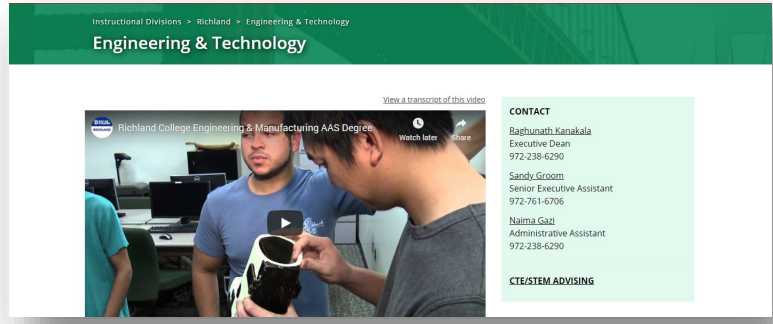


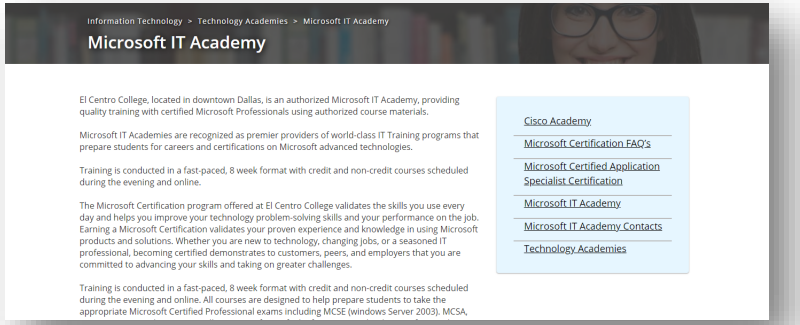


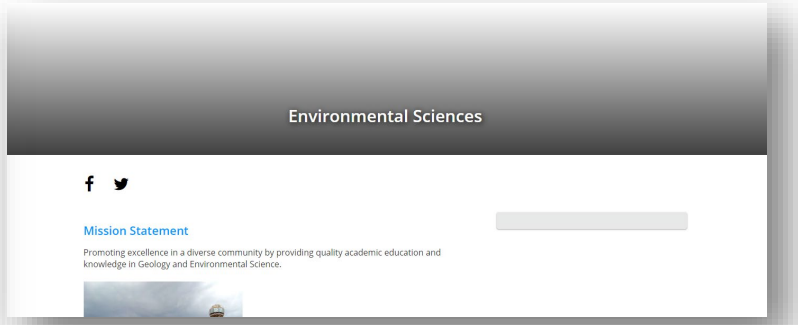
- No consistency
- No focus
- Not student-centered

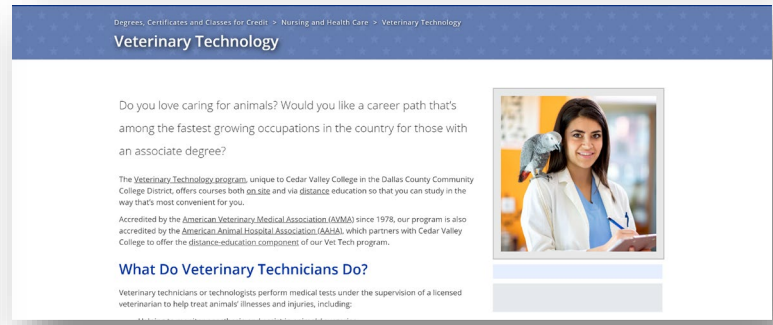












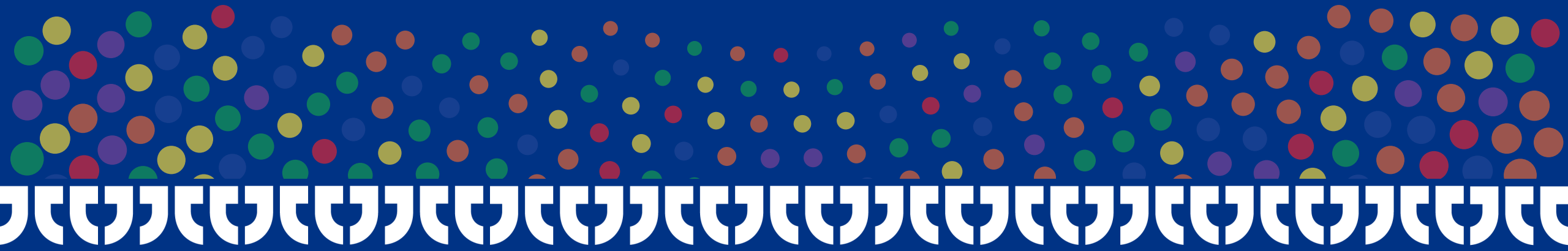
The Problem

Our messiest, most visited rooms were our program pages.

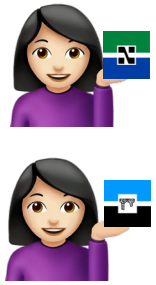
They need to be organized, cleaned and made presentable for students.

The solution to this problem needed to come collaboratively.

So, where do we start?

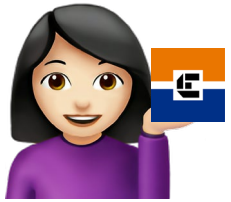


The problem



College Web Teams

District Web Team



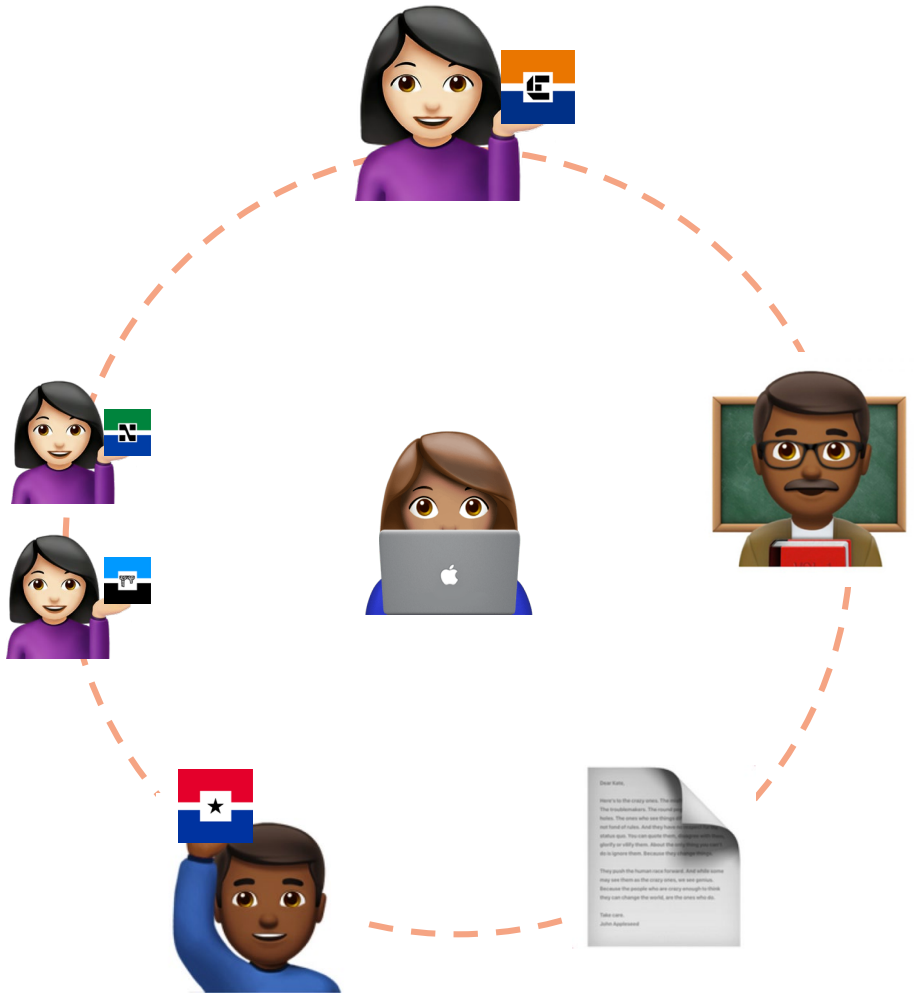
College Marketing Directors

Faculty and Program Leads

Future Students

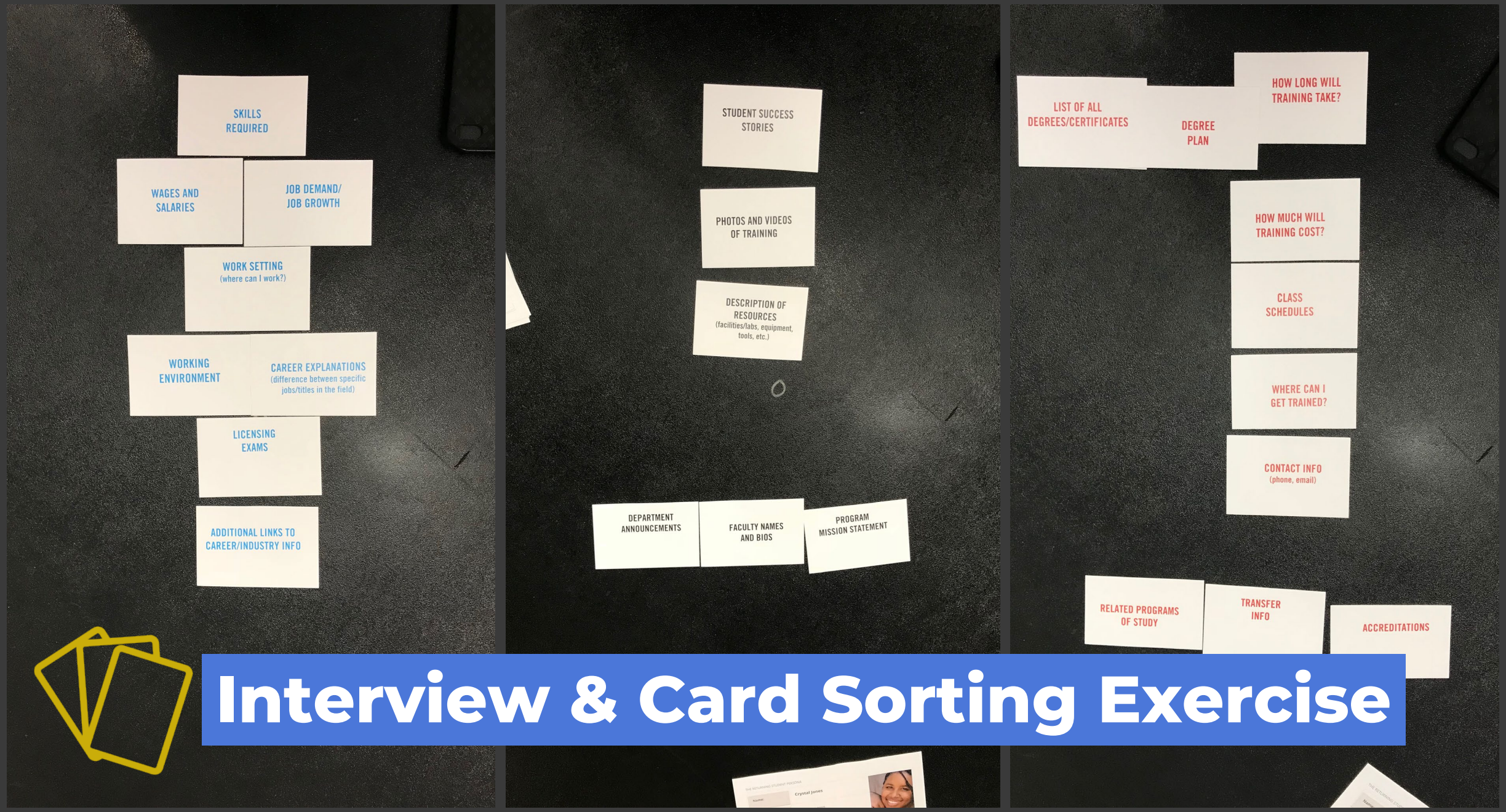
The Content

Empathy



- We needed to align ourselves on what the goal was, who the audience was and all orient ourselves toward that:
- We put the student at the center of this process.
- We knew we needed to better understand the student.

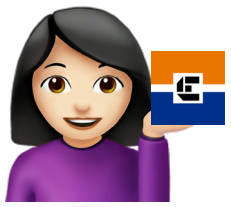
Persona Profiles



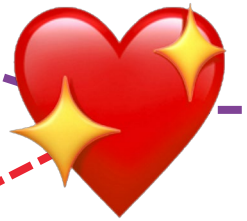
Interview & Card Sorting Exercise

		Reuben	Christina	Preston	serdar
ity	in-person split			physical, in person	
	classes	go to actual in-person, visit, face to-face	considered the same	all of it, tests, homework	
	courses	online, not F2F, more appealing	course # or name but		
				laying out of weekly sch.	
	day-to-day split but No	day-to-day	list of things available, more comfortable w/term	general term, thinks clothing catalog	
	schedule				
	catalog	search for classes, name, desc. of courses, like the online catalog	really huge version of everything more detailed		
	more less			all coursework completion	
	degree	diploma, higher pay	longer to attain, spec. major		
	cert	more of an accomplishment, less pay	shorter	piece of paper	
	counts doesn't count			for a program or degree	
	credit	regular degree plan	toward college degree or transfer		
	non-cred	does not give credit to degree plan optional, just for fun	toward GED or nontransfer	broaden horizons + personal interest	
	for fun	no credit toward degree plan	activity for fun, hosted by another school	just what yo[illegible] to do	
	general continuum				
	non-cred				
	CE	additional courses or convenience options	older adults, teens, further your education	further educat[illegible] professional CE	
	list of classes + program options	layout, outline of classes for degree, desc. of classes, helpful but sometimes no summary	core, what DOCCD expects, options, other majors	list of degrees yo[illegible] choose from, area of	
	degree plan				
	browsable class schedule	search for classes	semester, winternester, teaching times	list of some sort, co[illegible] links	
	catalog				
	list/variety of program options	variety of programs to choose how long, who to contact	diff. things available to students	same thing, list of programs	
	program				

District
Web Staff

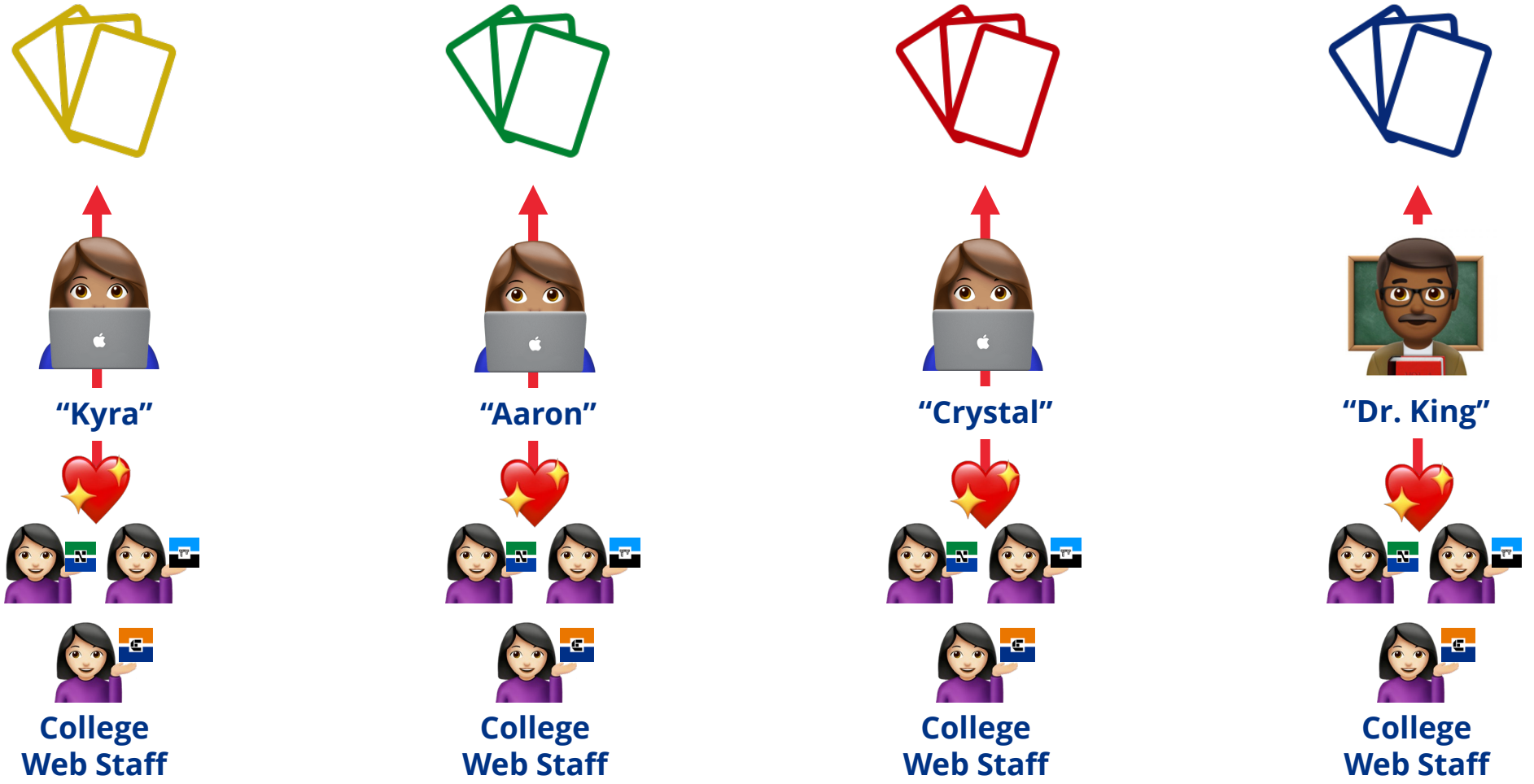


College
Web Staff

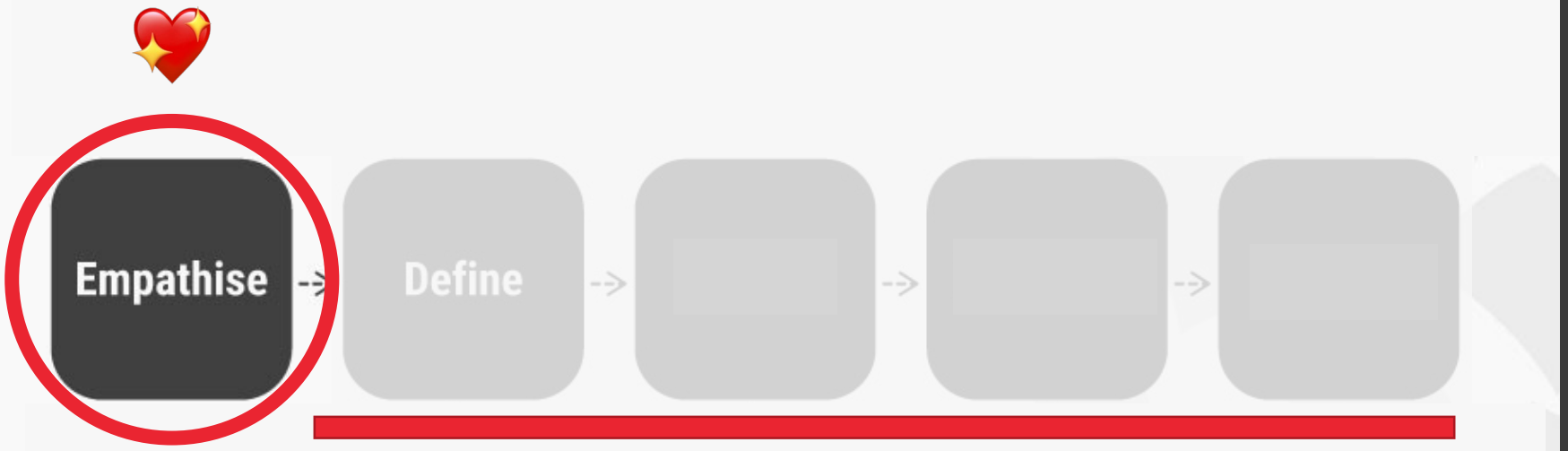


Prospective
Student

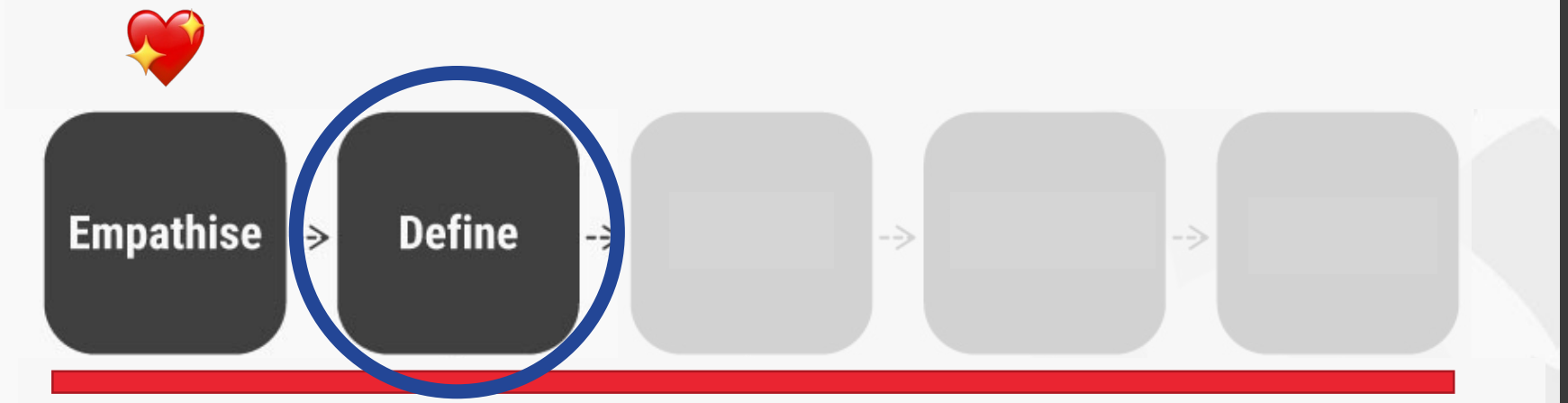
Kickoff Meeting (Summer 2018):

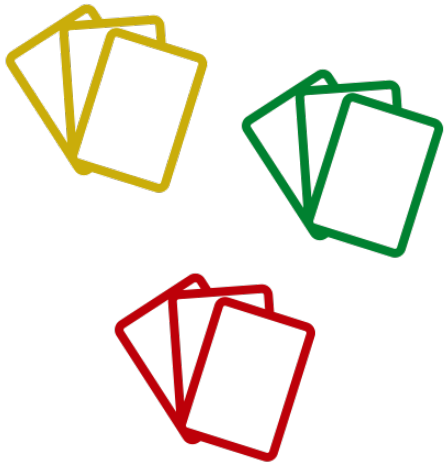


- We knew empathy was first step and would underscore process.
- There were steps ahead and we weren't quite sure what they were.



- The closer we could come to defining the problem, outlining our goals and restraints, the more effective our solution would be.





Empathy card sorting exercise

=

Our findings from real card sorting

We had buy-in.

Creative Brief Doc

Goals & Objectives

Target Audiences

Requirements

Timelines

Creative Brief: New Program/Department Profile Pages

Project Overview

The disparity of the process, goals, location, structure and usability between the district's "Program Profile Pages" (PPP) and colleges' "Instructional Divisions" (ID) pages causes the following issues:

- Confusion for the student
- Breakdown of communication between district web team, college web teams and the client
- Lack of overall clarity as to how specific instructional divisions correlate with specific programs
- Lack of content consistency between PPP and ID; duplicated content/work between PPP and ID

Digital Communications Team is reexamining not only the layout, structure and placement of these pages and sites, but also the processes behind creating and maintaining them.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of this reexamination are:

1. To improve the experience, usability, consistency and relevance of program and career content for the student
2. To make the process for creating and maintaining these pages more efficient by:
    - collaboratively developing a solution that works for all web teams
    - streamlining communication between clients and all web teams
3. To address the needs and frustrations of college departments, coordinators, deans or faculty relative to how their areas are marketed and represented on all district/college websites

Target Audiences

The primary target audience of these new pages is the **prospective student**, a category which can further be broken down into:

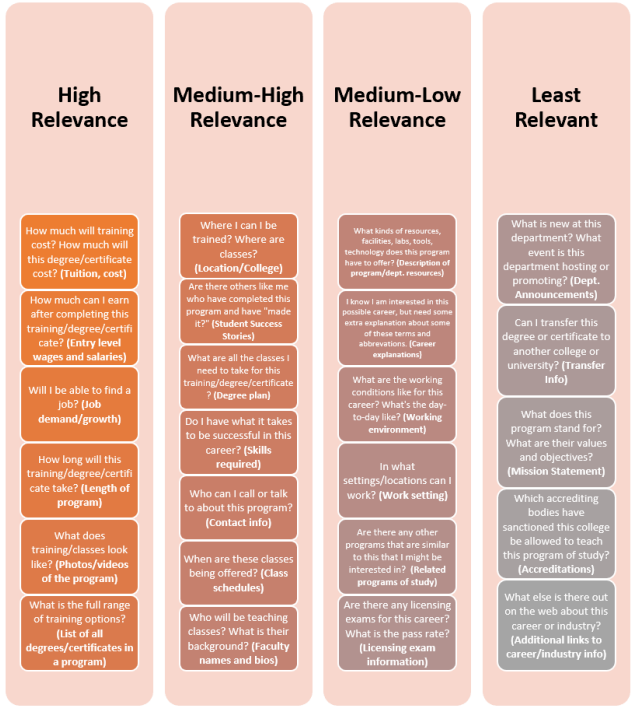
1. **The Returning Student** – After years of absence from any sort of formal education, they are seeking to improve their employment by earning a degree or certificate and know that the colleges of DCCCD are the way to go.
2. **The Non-Consumer (of Higher Education)** – They never had any aspirations to attend college. None of their family ever went to college so the idea is scary and intimidating. However, they are unemployed or underemployed and really need a better paying job. The colleges of DCCCD can help them but college jargon and processes are difficult for them to navigate.
3. **The Traditional Student** – Fresh out of high school, this student is primarily seeking to take core classes at their local college with the intent to transfer after the first or second year.

A secondary target audience would be the **current student** looking for department-specific information maybe about the program they're currently enrolled in.

Requirements and Considerations

Content Prioritization

The priority of content on these new pages should roughly follow this recommended order (as determined by card sorting exercises with actual students and college web teams):



Note: While we have recommended the relevance levels of all the content, we leave the specific order within each level to *your* discretion and best judgment.

Goals and Objectives

- Improve experience and usability **for student**
- Improve process for maintaining sites through collaboration and communication **for all web teams**
- Help **programs/departments** better meet marketing/communication goals

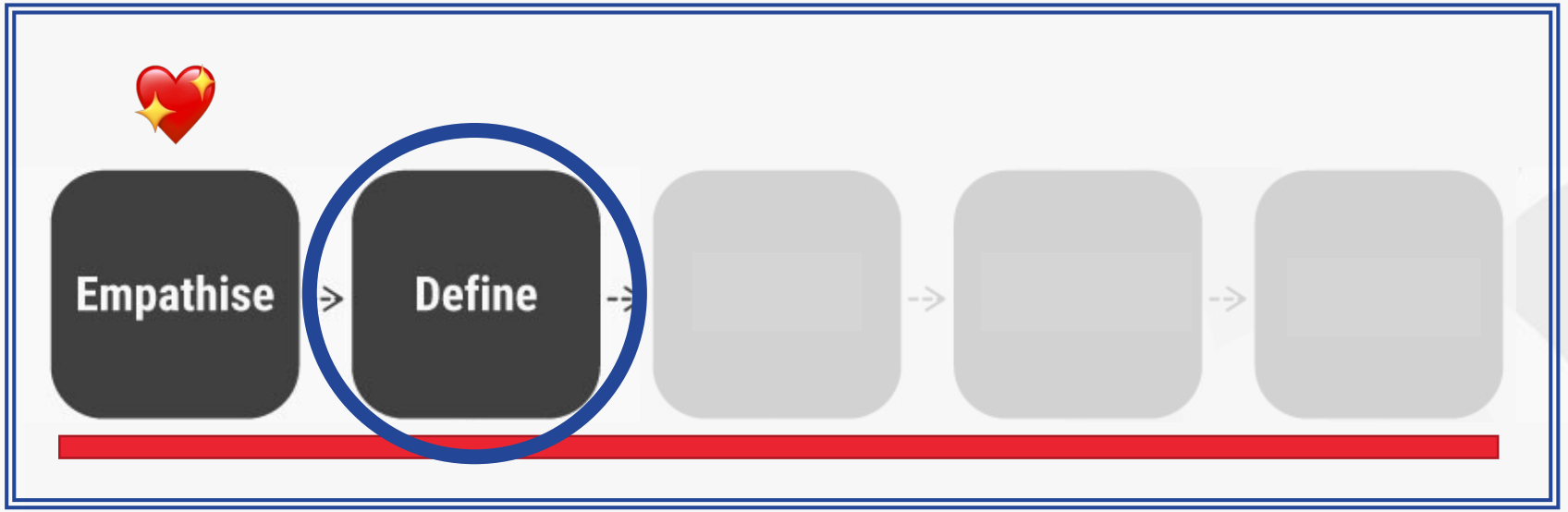
High Relevance

- Tuition, cost
- Entry level wages and salaries
- Job demand/growth
- Length of program
- Photos or videos of the program
- List of all degrees/certificates in a program

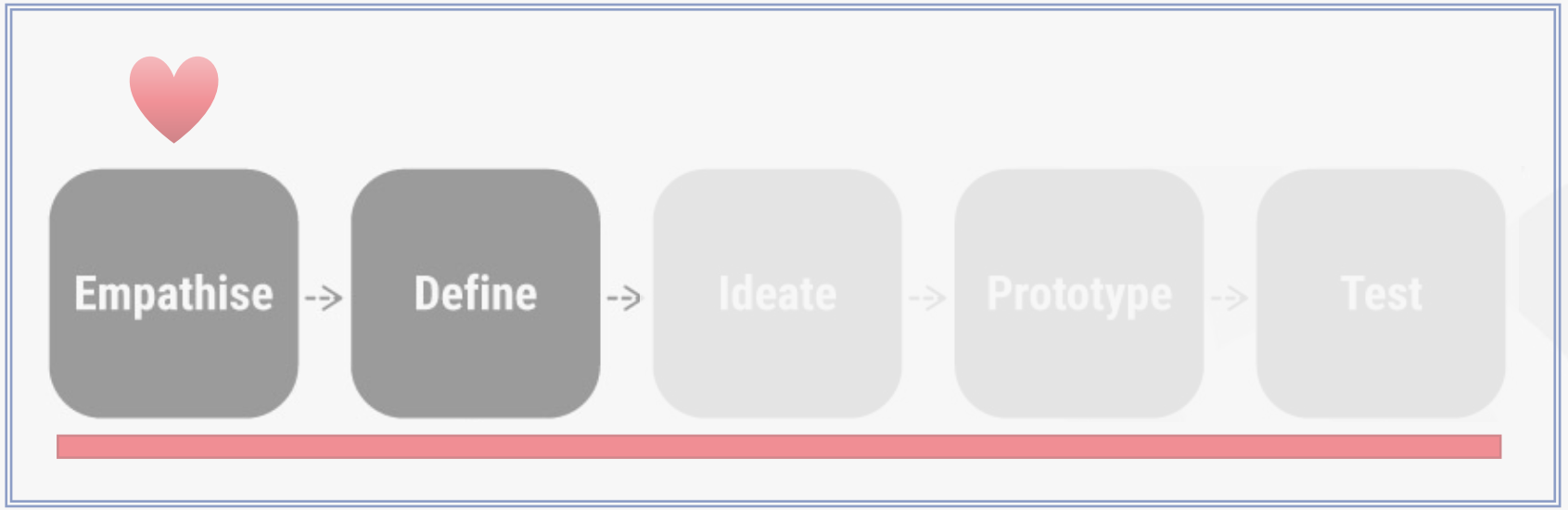
Least Relevant

- Dept. Announcements
- Transfer Info
- Mission Statement
- Accreditations
- Additional links to career/industry info

Through the creative brief, and defining our problem, we framed the process moving forward.



DESIGN THINKING:



So, what is Design Thinking?

Design Thinking is...

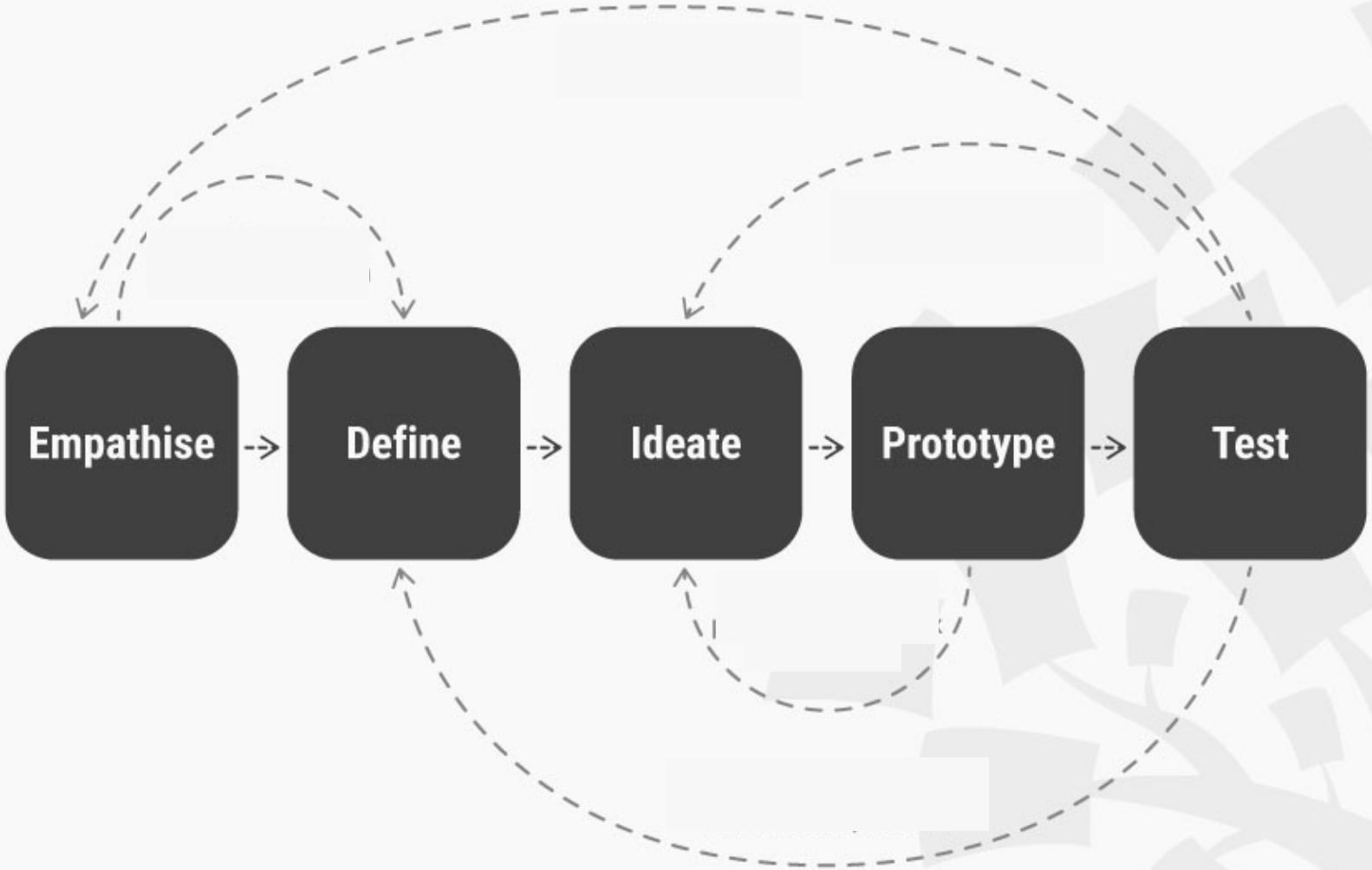
A design methodology that provides a solution-based approach to solving complex problems by:

- Understanding the **human needs** involved
- **Re-framing the problem** in human-centric ways
- Creating many ideas in **brainstorming** sessions
- Adopting a hands-on approach in **prototyping and testing**

SOURCE: Interaction Design Foundation (www.interaction-design.org)

DESIGN THINKING:

DESIGN THINKING: A NON-LINEAR PROCESS

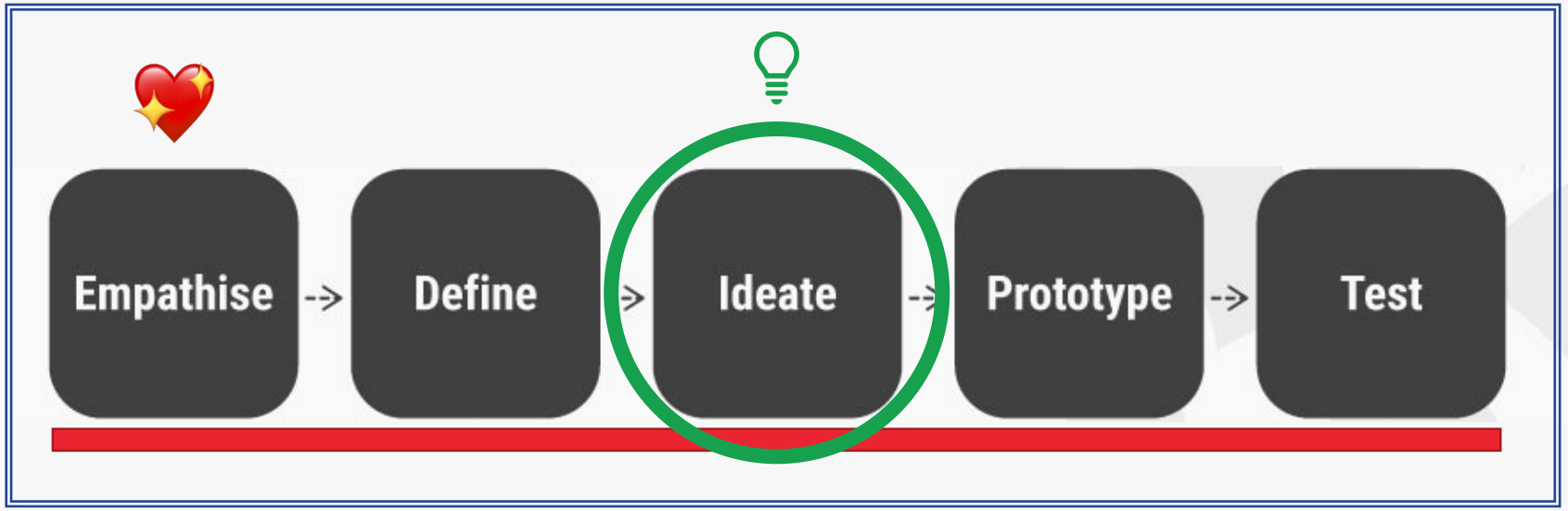


Design Thinking isn't just for websites or digital projects.

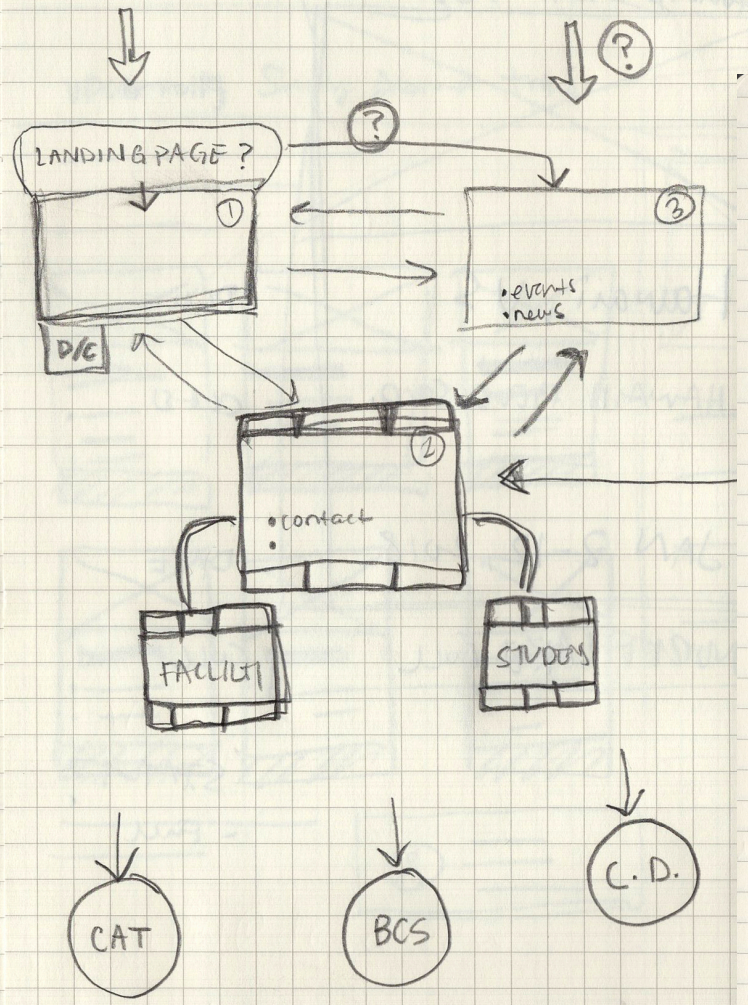
It is a process.

Back to our story...

DESIGN THINKING:

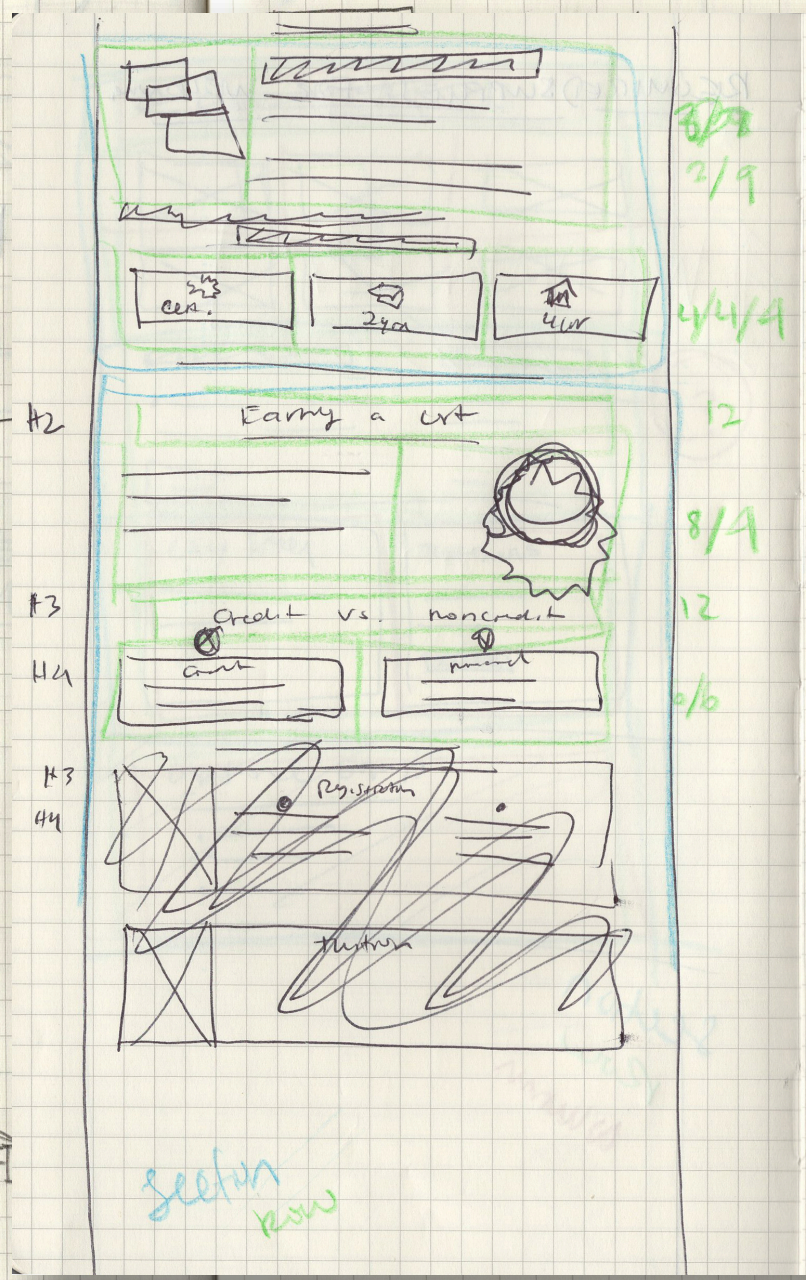


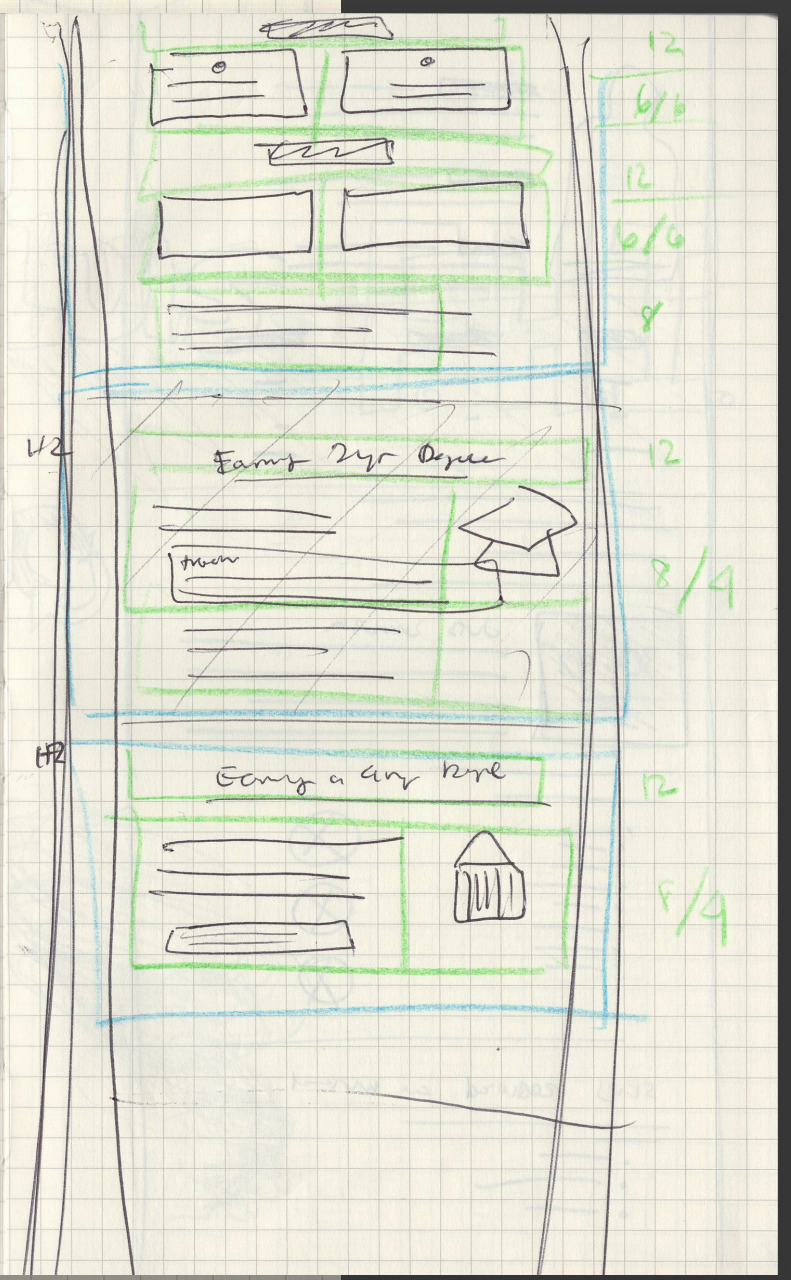
- All needed to have a chance to contribute and ideate
- With the Creative Brief in-hand, colleges web teams went back to their campuses and began brainstorming and ideating.

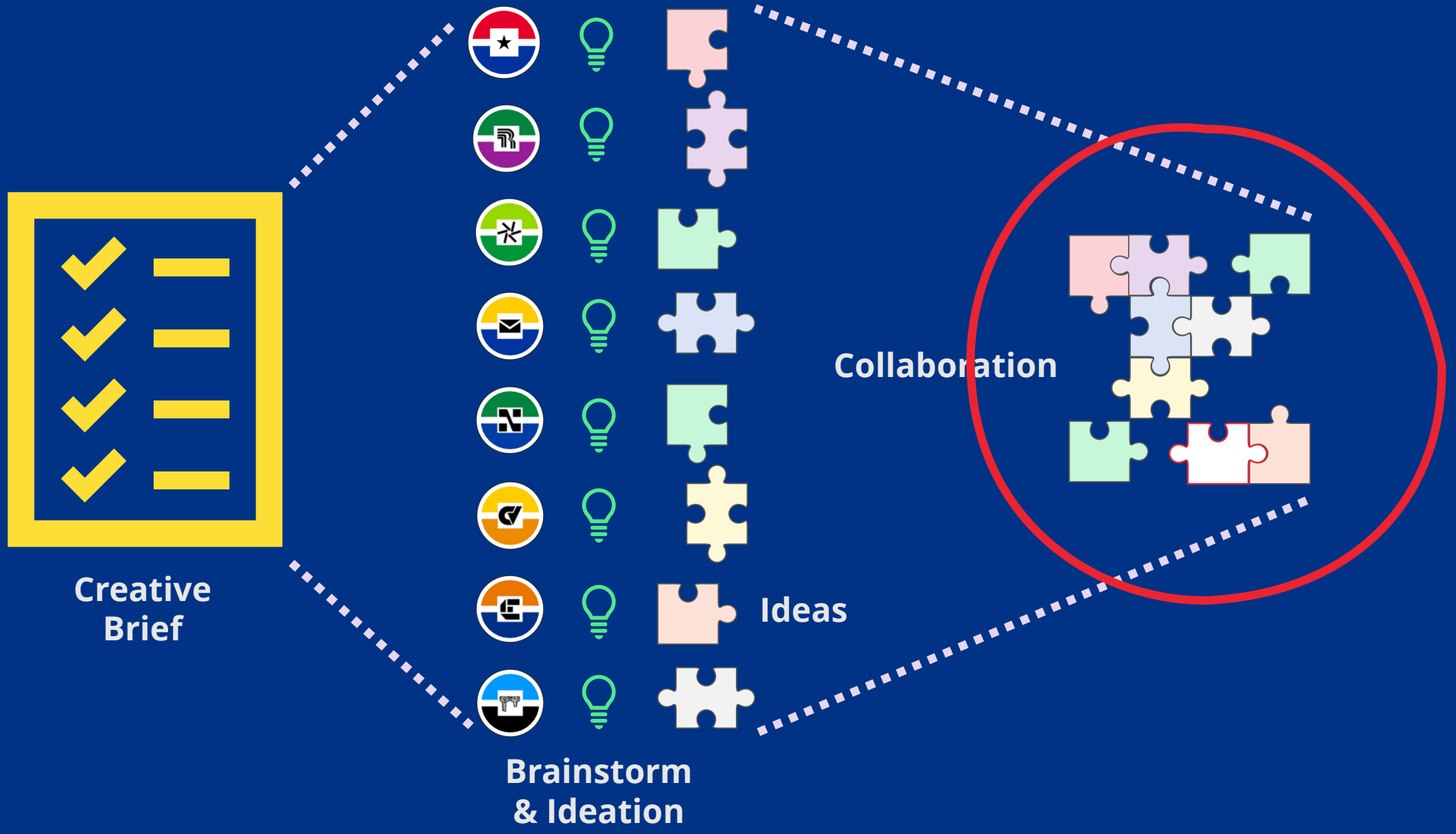


User flow:

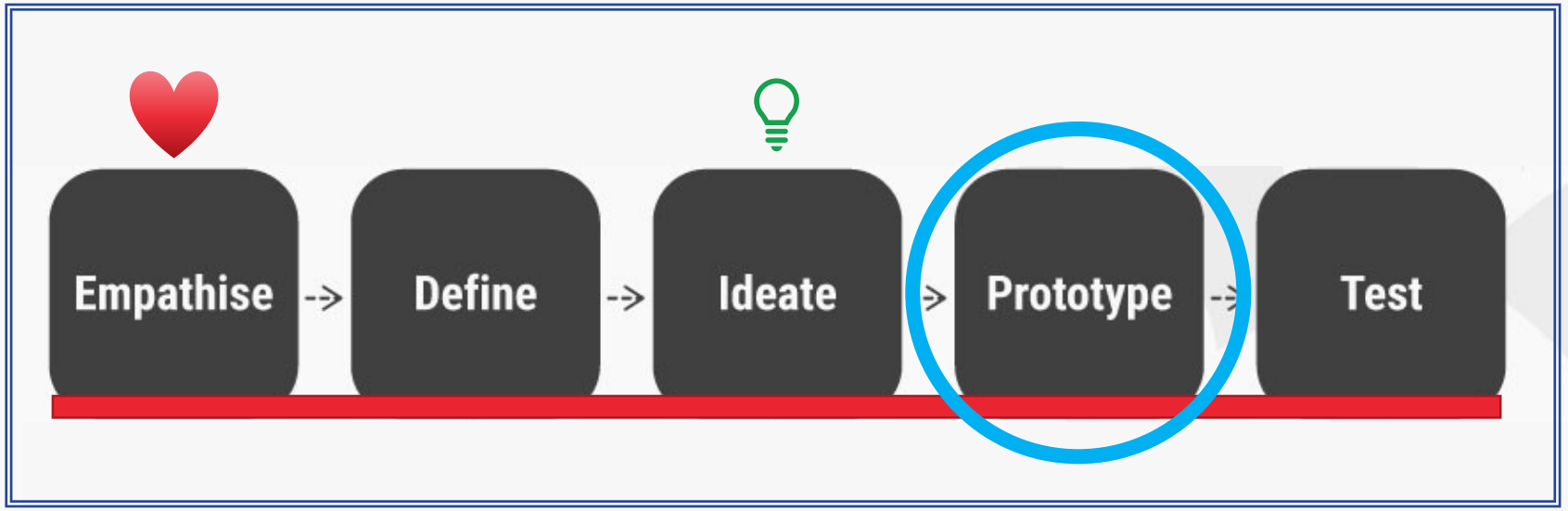
- prospective student →
- current student / in-program →
- community / faculty / staff →

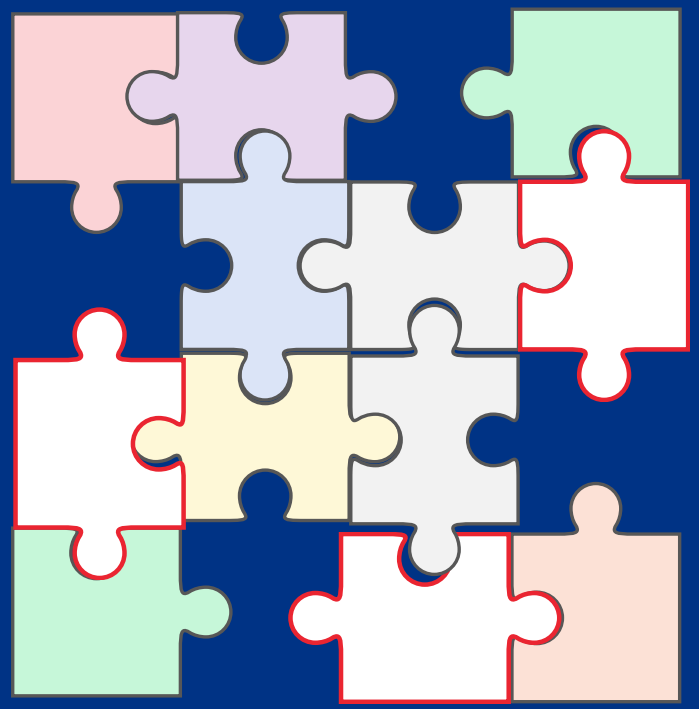




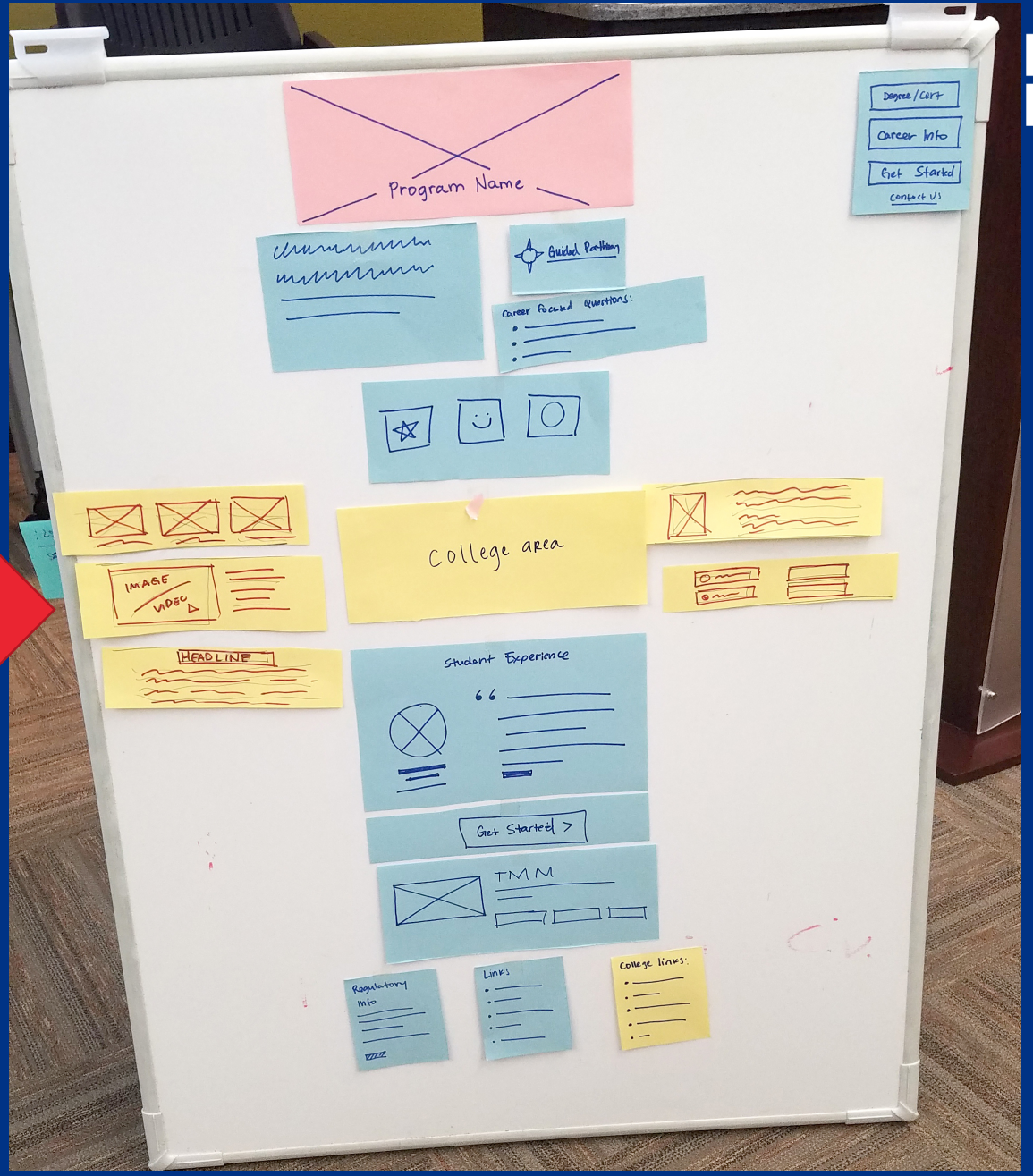

Creative Brief
Brainstorm & Ideation
Ideas
Collaboration

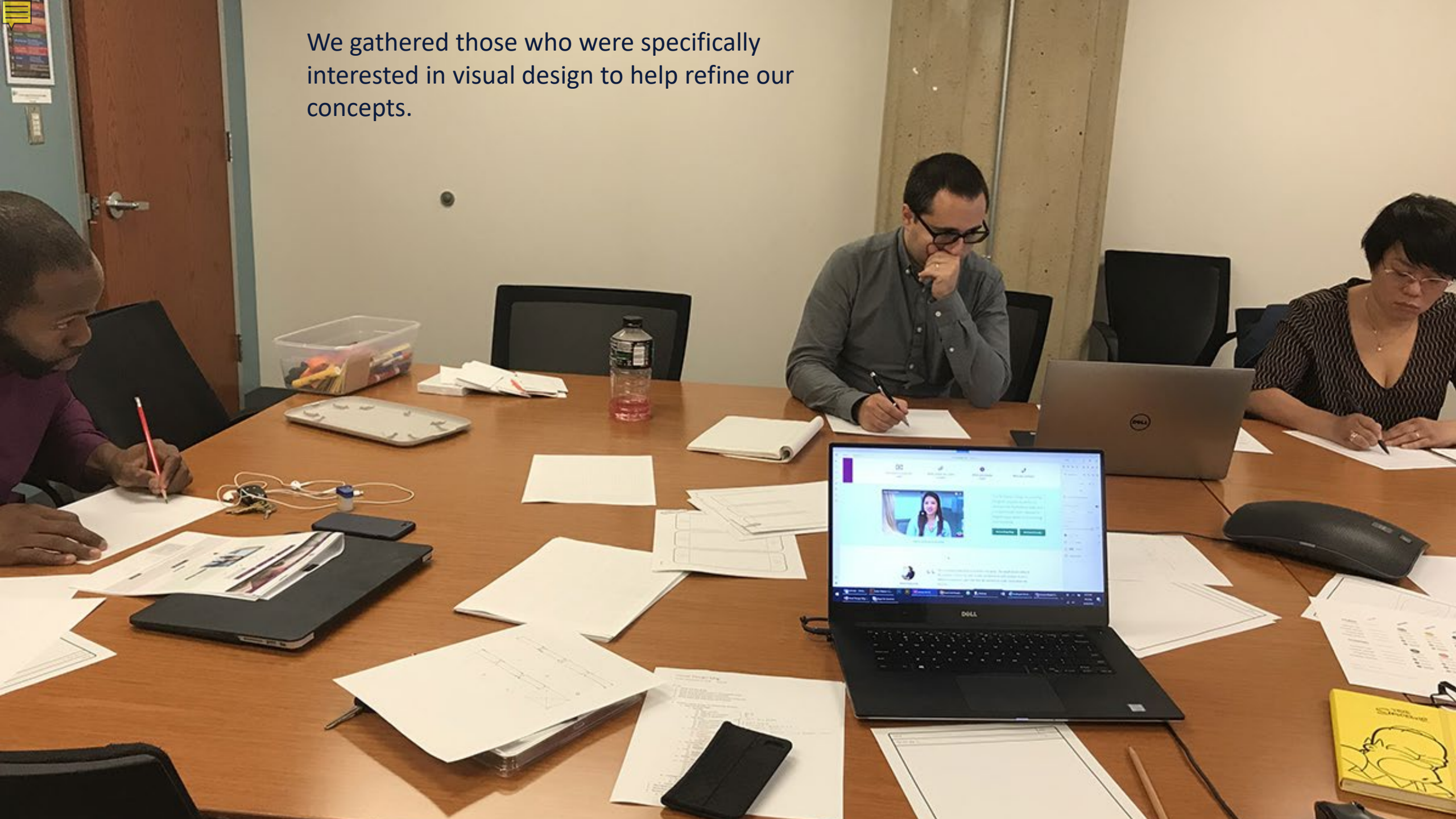
DESIGN THINKING:





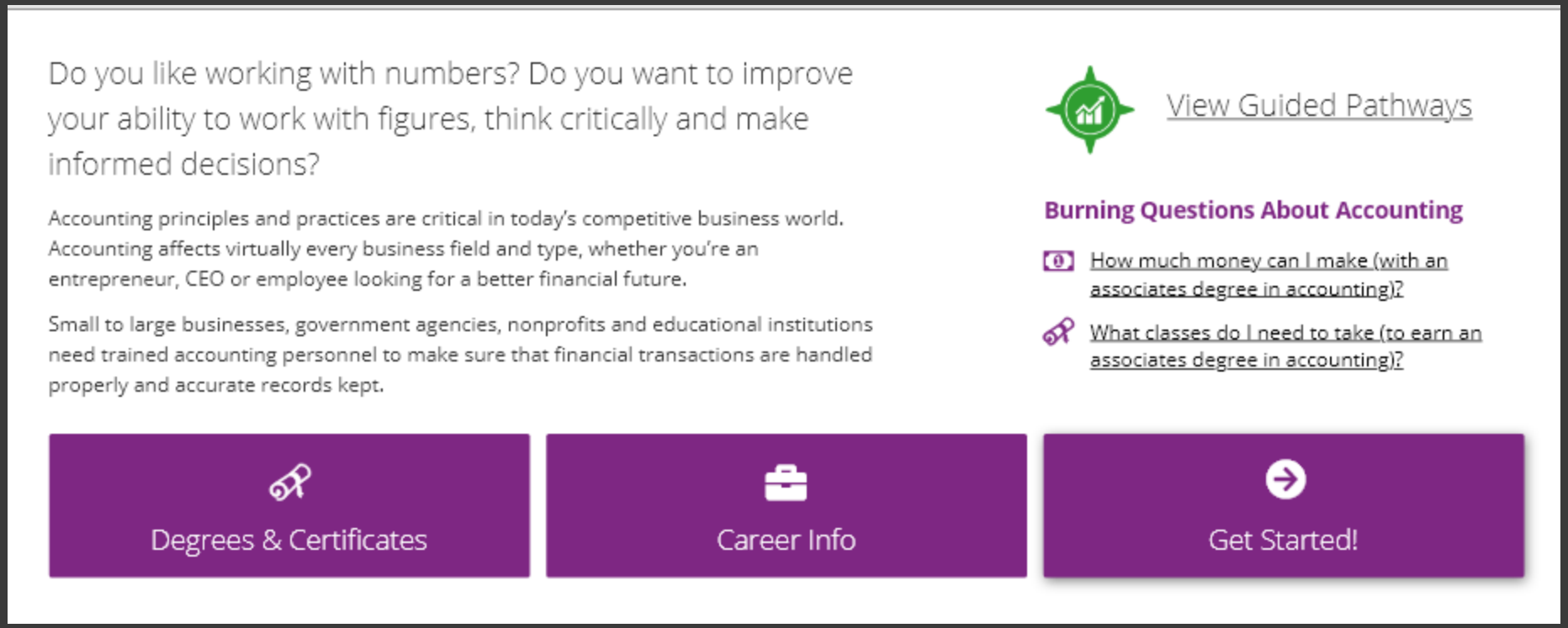
Collaborative Ideation





We gathered those who were specifically interested in visual design to help refine our concepts.

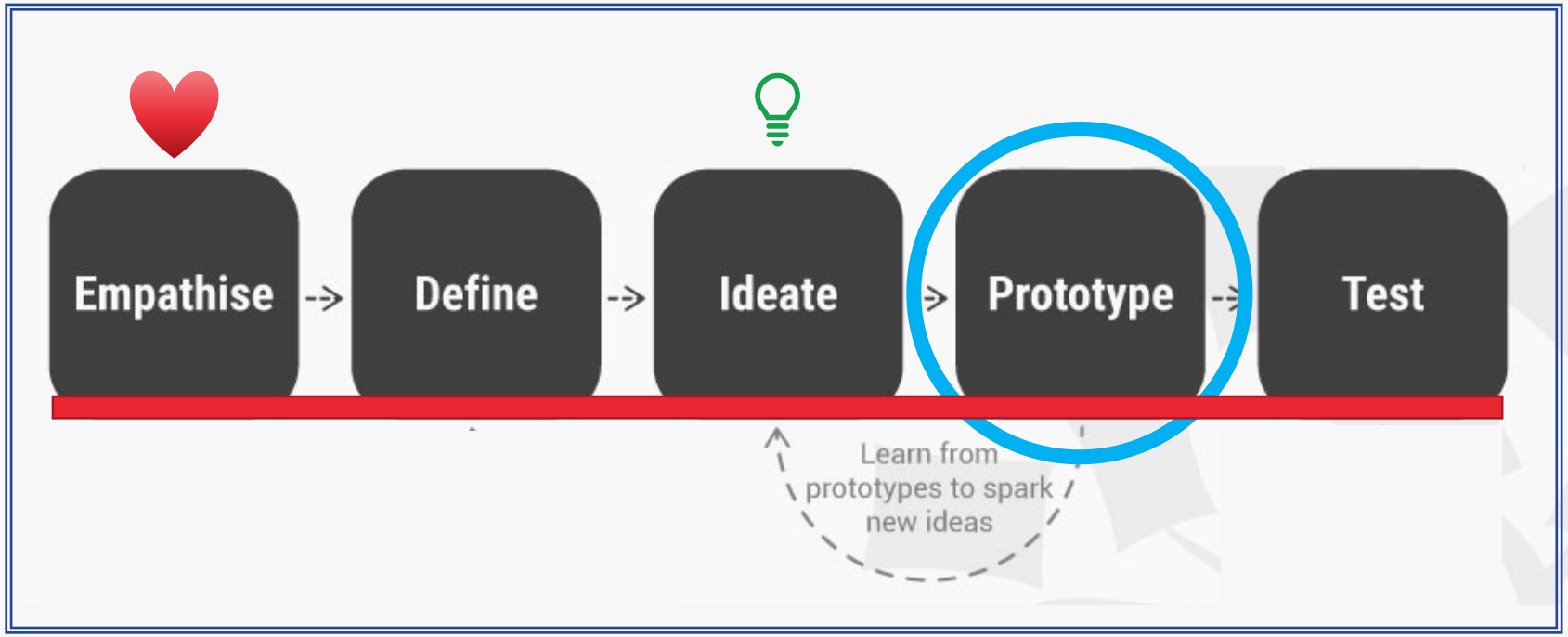
Prototype A



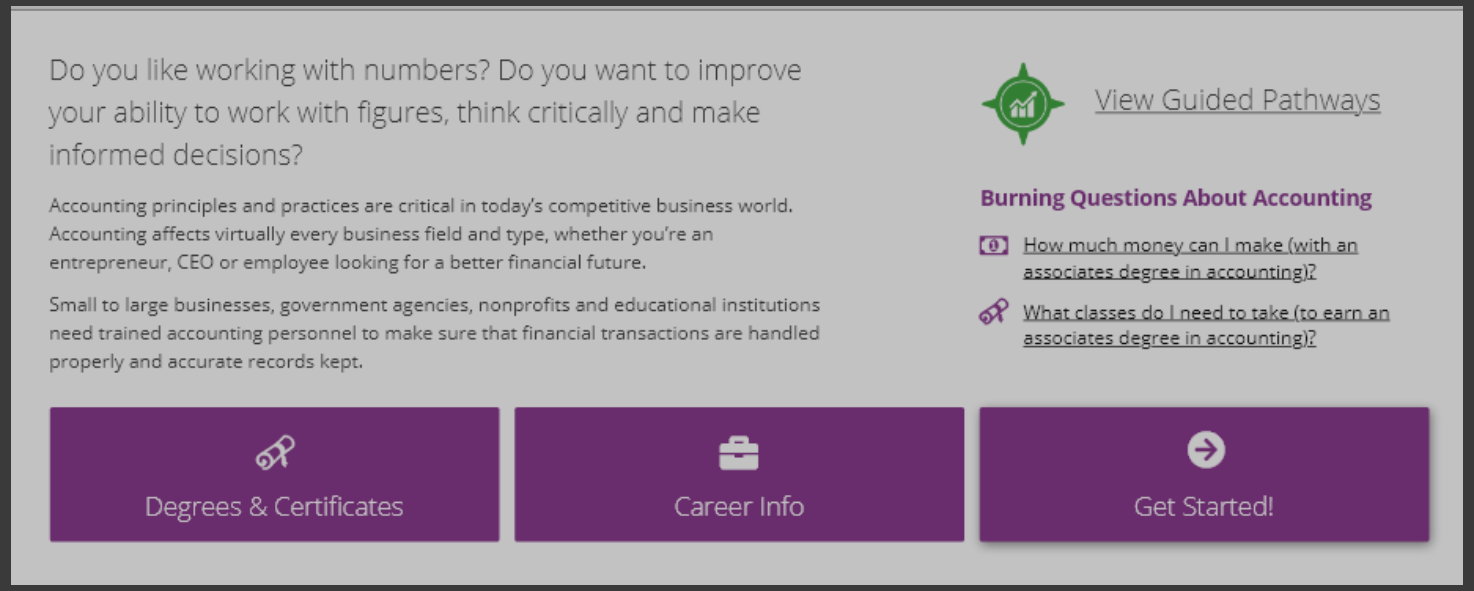
It's also possible to create higher fidelity prototypes. For web/digital, we can use Adobe XD, Axure, Figma or Sketch.

DESIGN THINKING:

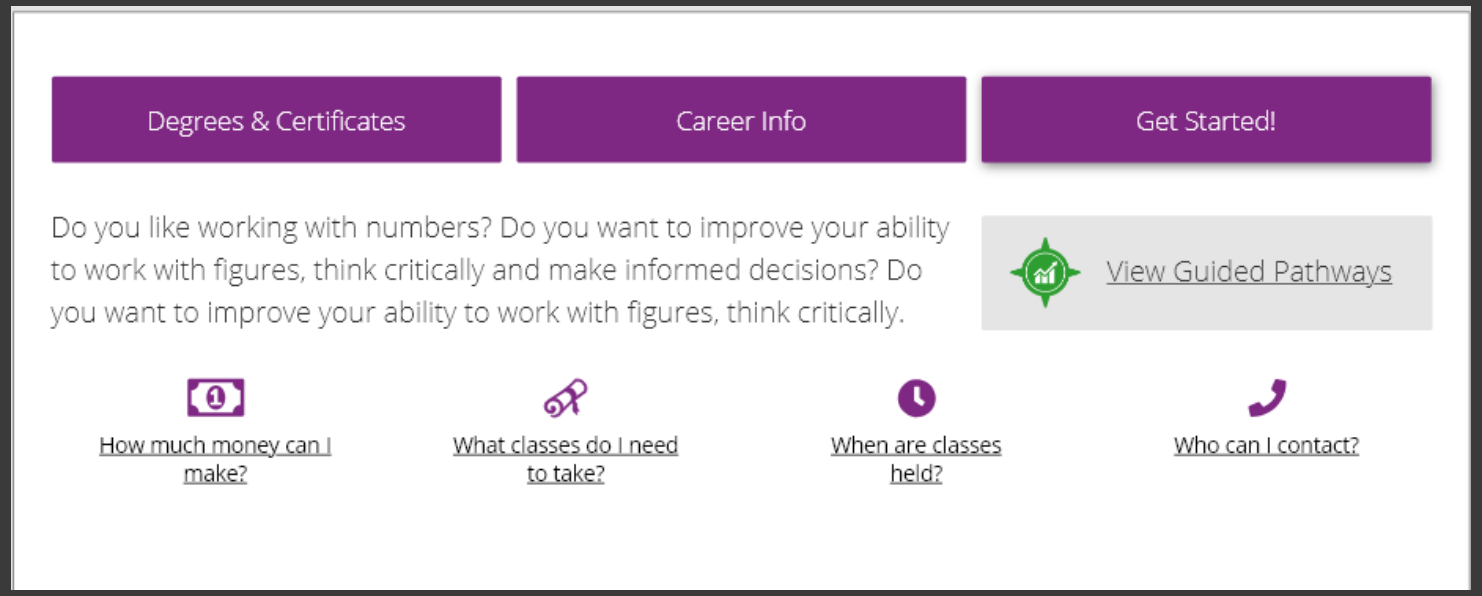
Again, this is not at all a linear process. And because prototypes are so easy to change, we were able to do so:



Prototype A



Prototype B



Shortcut to this page: dcccd.edu/Accounting

Degrees & Certificates | Career Information | Contact Us

Do you like working with numbers? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically and make informed decisions? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically.

What is pay like? What classes do I take? When are classes?

Guided Pathways

This program is part of the **Business** career path.

A guided pathway is a one-page document that clearly shows you what courses to take (and when) to best prepare you for success in

View Guided Pathways for this program

Prototype C

Prototype B

Degrees & Certificates | Career Info | Get Started!

Do you like working with numbers? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically and make informed decisions? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically.

View Guided Pathways

How much money can I make?

What classes do I need to take?

When are classes held?

Who can I contact?

Do you like working with numbers? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically and make informed decisions?

Accounting principles and practices are critical in today's competitive business world. Accounting affects virtually every business field and type, whether you're an entrepreneur, CEO or employee looking for a better financial future.

Small to large businesses, government agencies, nonprofits and educational institutions need trained accounting personnel to make sure that financial transactions are handled properly and accurate records kept.

View Guided Pathways

Burning Questions About Accounting

- How much money can I make (with an associates degree in accounting)?
- What classes do I need to take (to earn an associates degree in accounting)?

Degrees & Certificates | Career Info | Get Started!

Degrees & Certificates | Career Info | Get Started!

Do you like working with numbers? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically and make informed decisions? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically.

View Guided Pathways

How much money can I make? | What classes do I need to take? | When are classes held? | Who can I contact?

Shortcut to this page: dcccd.edu/Accounting

Degrees & Certificates | Career Information | Contact Us

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iPhone 6/7/8 – 1

Richland College DCCCD

Accounting

Degrees & Certificates | Career Information

Do you like working with numbers? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically and make informed decisions? Do you want to improve your ability to work with figures, think critically. Do you think this paragraph is long enough?

Guided Pathways are maps that show you what classes you will take, and when. View Guided Pathways

How much does this career pay?

Which classes do I need?

Will classes for this program transfer?

Contact Us

Are you interested in this totally awesome career?

Start Today

The Richland College Accounting Program enables students to develop the foundation skills and competencies most relevant to beginning a career in accounting and business.

Read a transcript of this video

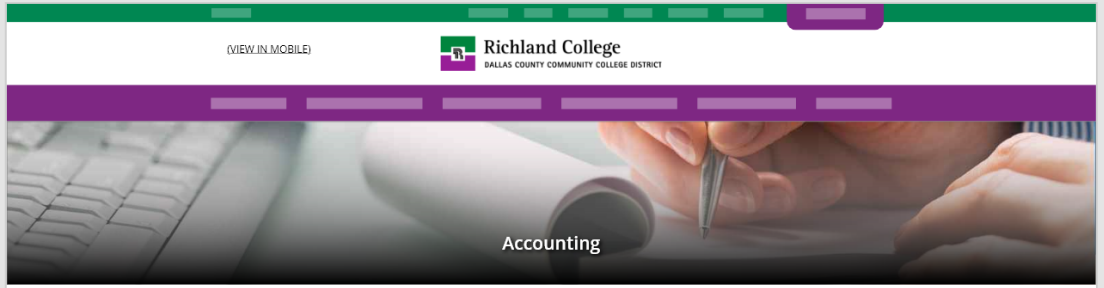
Accounting Dept. at Richland

"My accounting education at Richland was great. The small classes allowed the teachers to have the time to take an interest in each student. It was a fabulous experience, and I felt that the instructors really cared about my success." Read Kevin's story.

POP

(VIEW IN MOBILE)

Richland College
DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Shortcut to this page: dcccd.edu/Accounting

Degrees & Certificates | Career Information

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Contact Us

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Start Today

What makes our program special?

Read a transcript of this video

The Richland College Accounting Program enables students to develop the foundation skills and competencies most relevant to beginning a career in accounting and business.

Accounting Department at Richland College

Kevin Kawanishi
Richland College Graduate

"My accounting education at Richland was great. The small classes allowed the teachers to have the time to take an interest in each student. It was a fabulous experience, and I felt that the instructors really cared about my success." Read Kevin's story.

Tell Me More About Accounting

Sign up to receive a series of five emails with practical information from industry professionals and alumni:

First Name | Last Name | Email Address | College | Tell Me More!

ACCOUNTING PROGRAM

Richland College

Department Home
Faculty

Program Overview

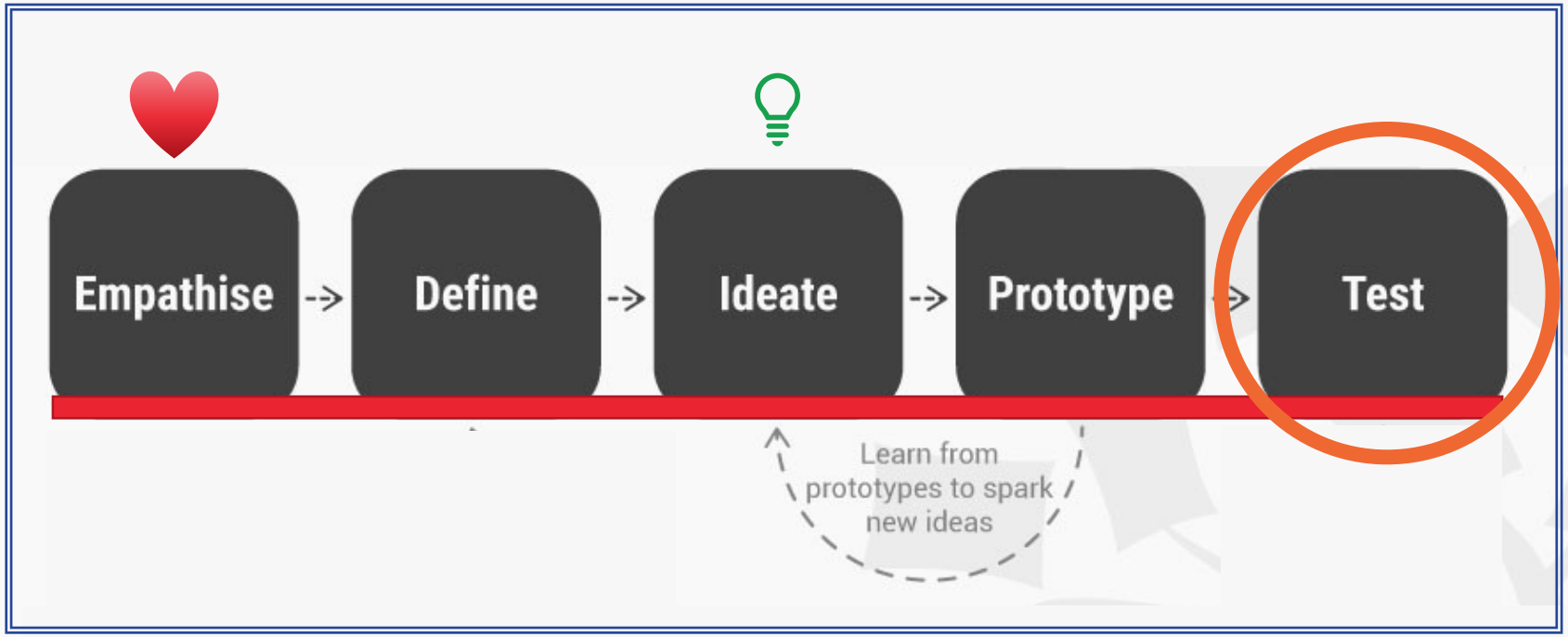
Program Home
Degrees & Certificates
Gainful Employment
Accreditations

HB 1508 Notice

This program may lead to an occupational license for which a prior criminal history may

DESIGN THINKING:

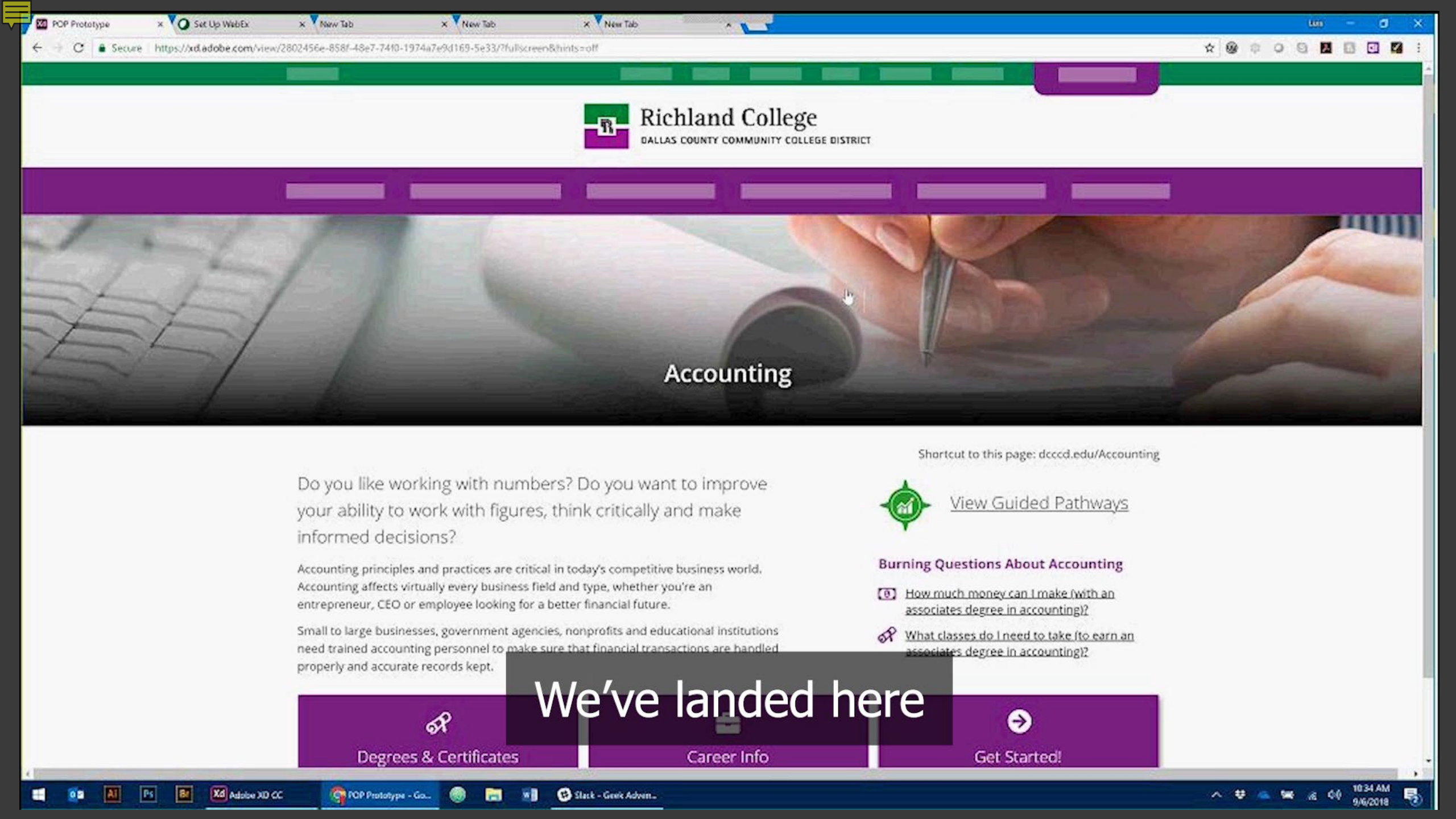
We took our prototype and put it in front of our target audience: the student.



Usability testing

Real users

Carefully observed


POP Prototype
Set Up WebEx
New Tab
New Tab
New Tab
Secure
https://xd.adobe.com/view/2802456e-858f-48e7-7410-1974a7e9d169-5e33/?fullscreen&hints=off
Richland College
DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
Accounting
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View Guided Pathways
Burning Questions About Accounting
How much money can I make (with an associates degree in accounting)?
What classes do I need to take (to earn an associates degree in accounting)?
We've landed here
Degrees & Certificates
Career Info
Get Started!
Adobe XD CC
POP Prototype - Go...
Slack - Geek Advan...
10:34 AM
9/6/2018

The Richland College Accounting Program enables students to develop the foundation skills and competencies most relevant to beginning a career in accounting and business.

Accounting Blog | Richland Faculty

Read a transcript of this video

Kevin Kawanishi
Richland College Graduate

"My accounting education at Richland was great. The small classes allowed the teachers to have the time to take an interest in each student. It was a fabulous experience, and I felt that the instructors really cared about my success."

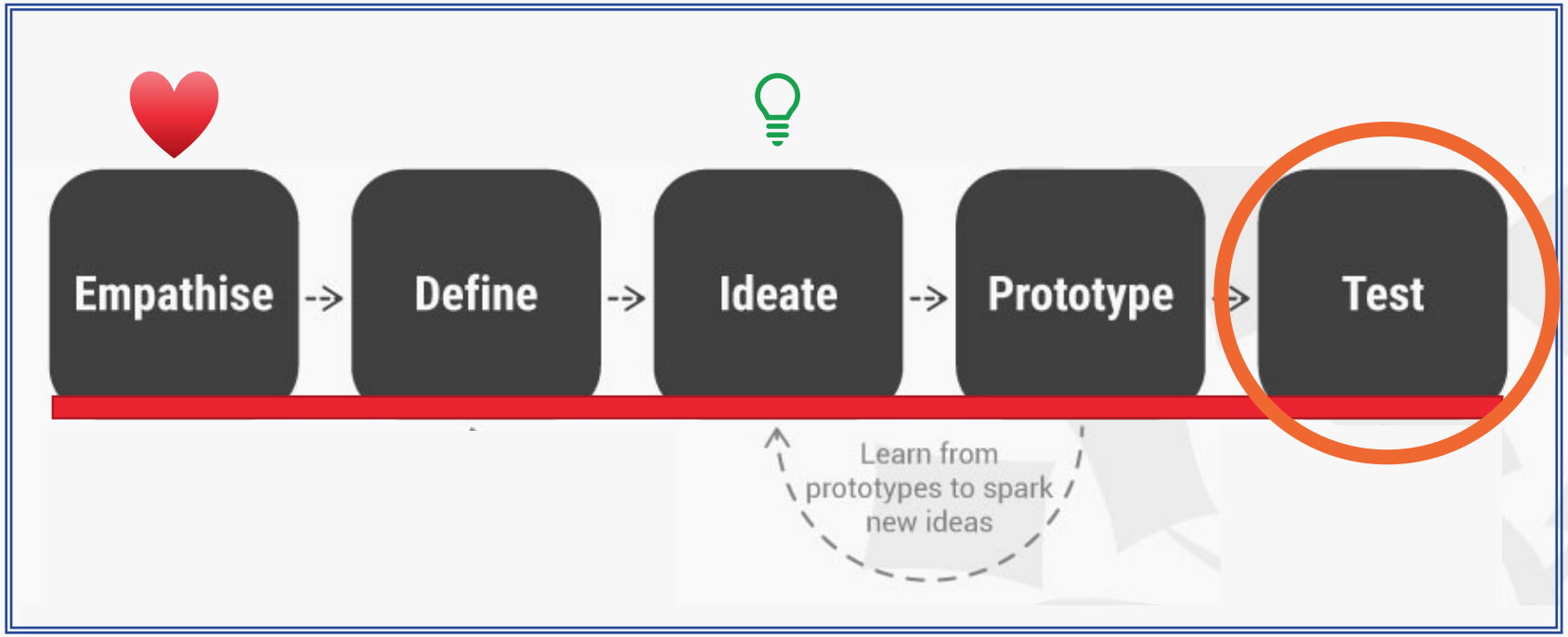
Read more about Kevin's Story | READ MORE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

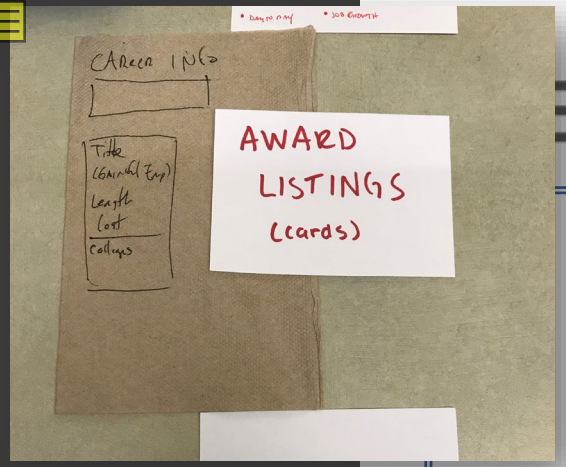
Get Started

What's the likelihood that you would

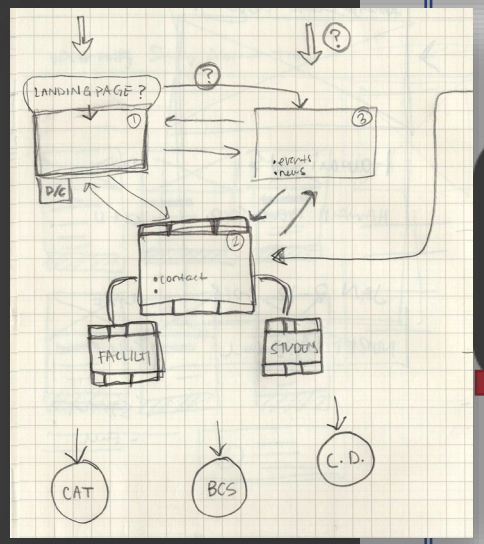
DESIGN THINKING:

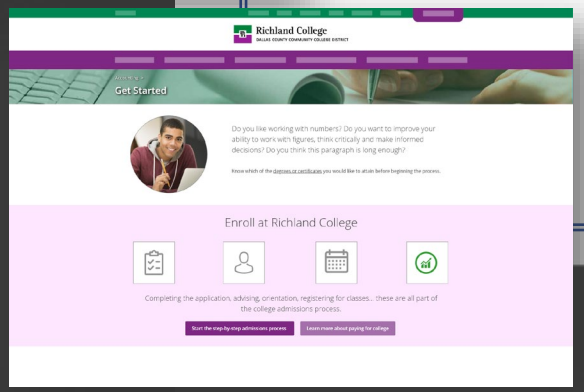
The process did not end here for us.

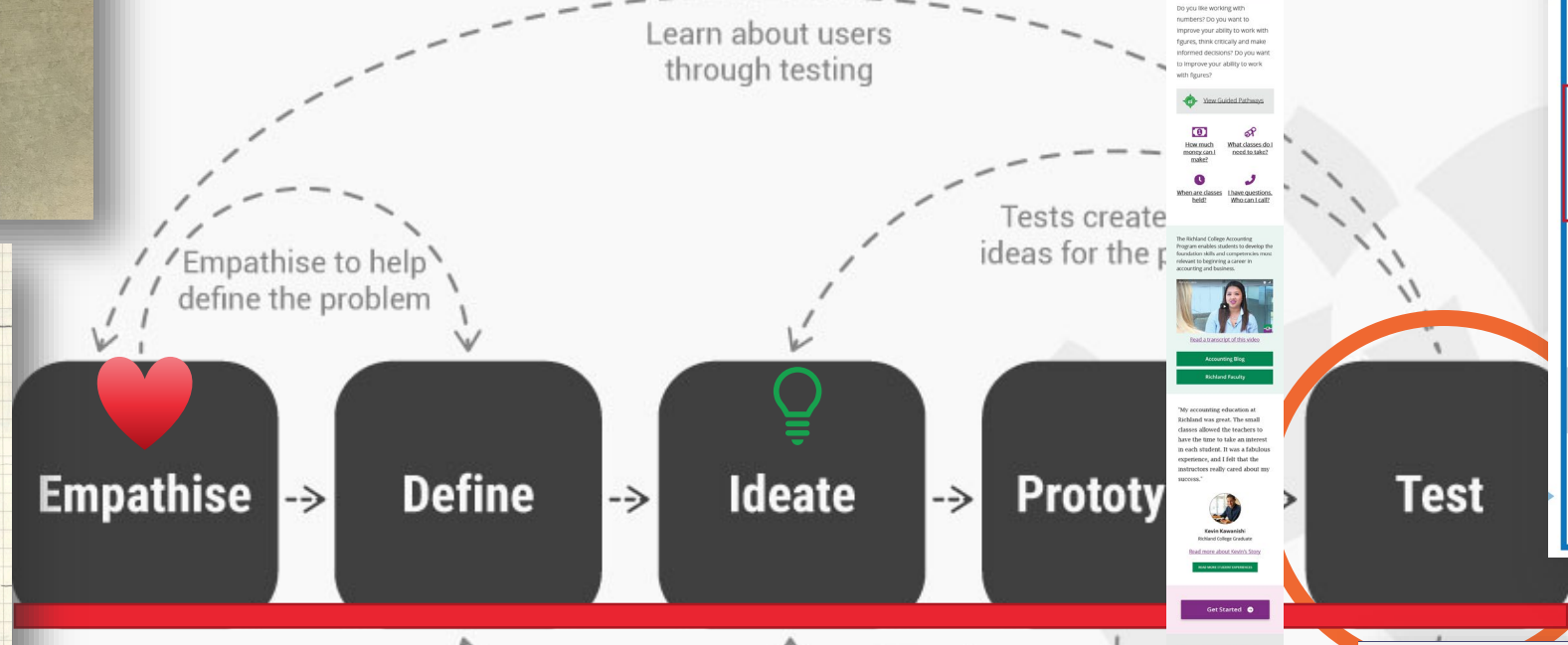


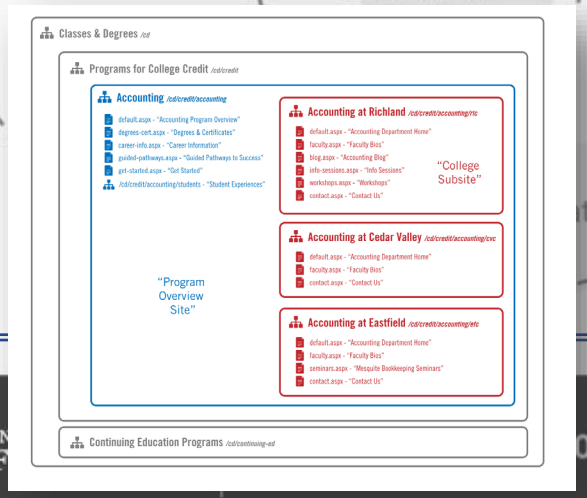


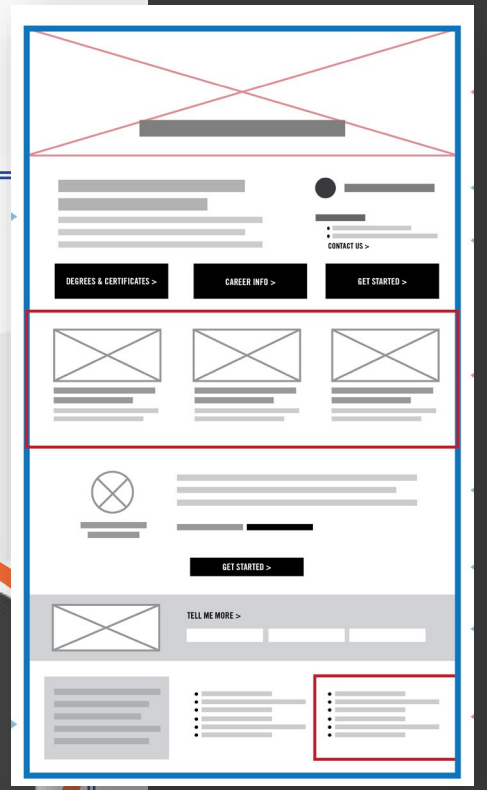
ESIGN THINKING:

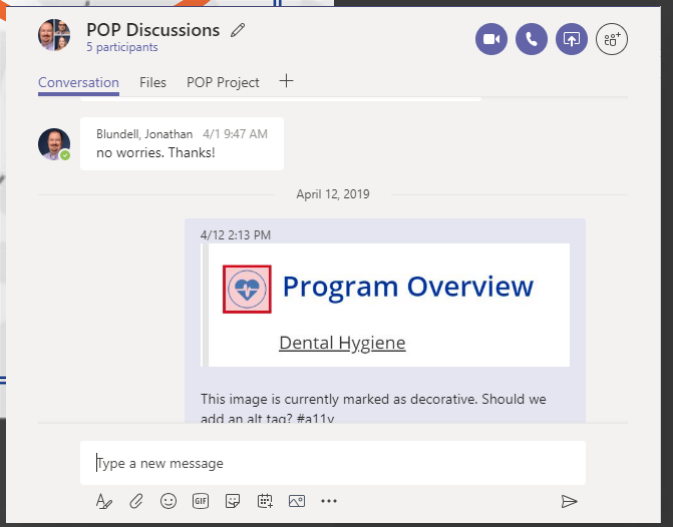




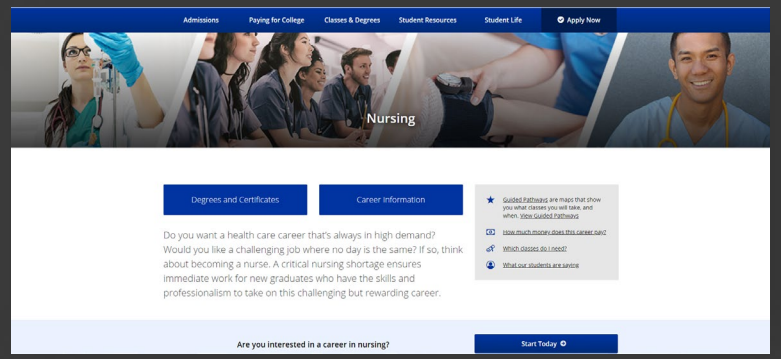


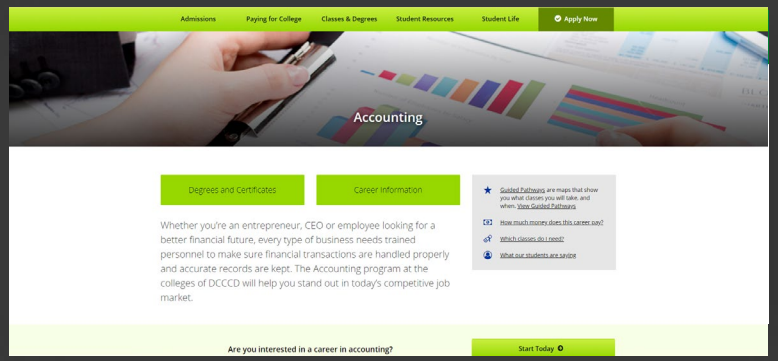




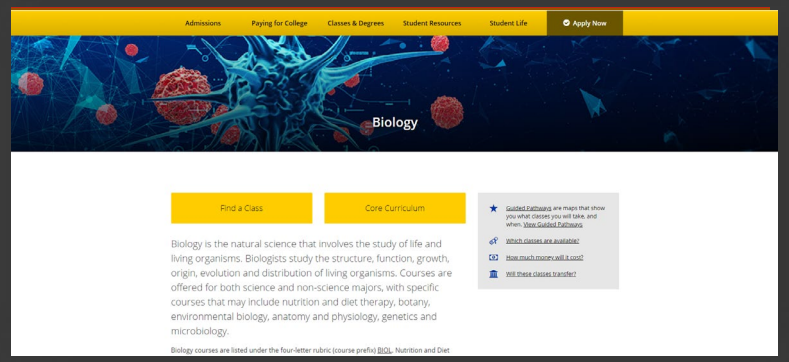


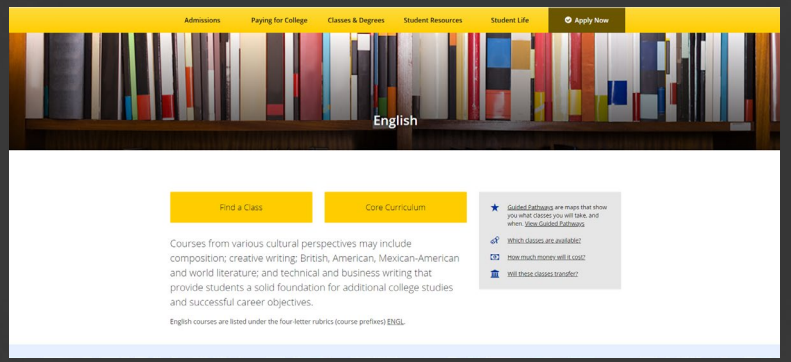
January 2019

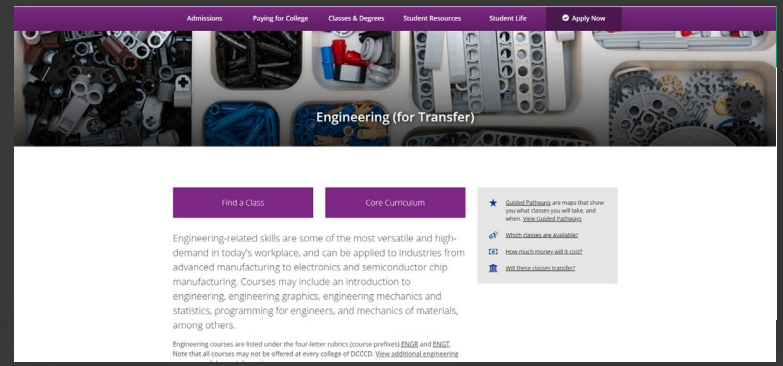


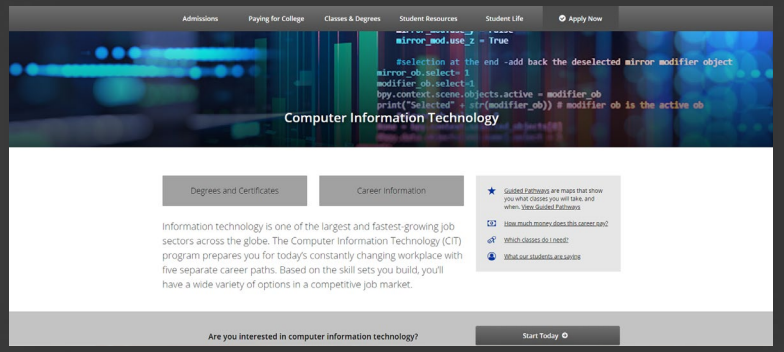


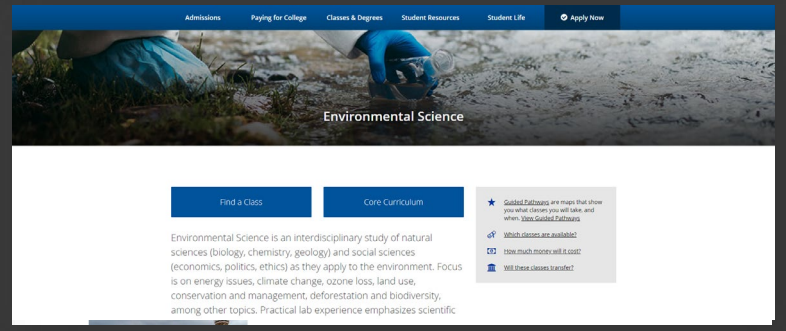
- Consistency
- Focused calls-to-action
- Student-centered design
- Clearer processes

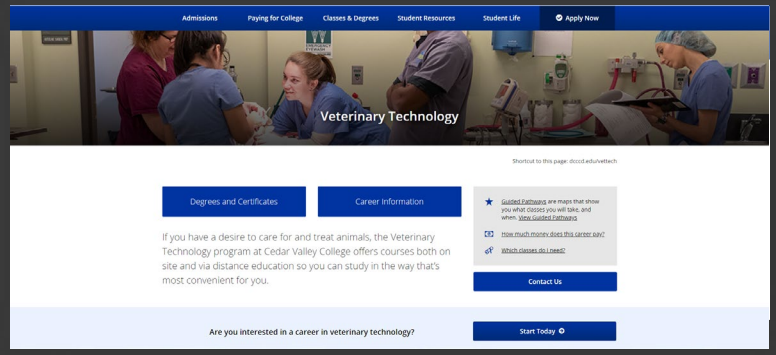












Our outcomes and takeaways...

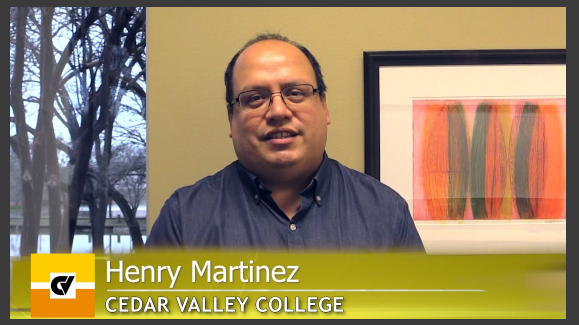
A website further focused on students

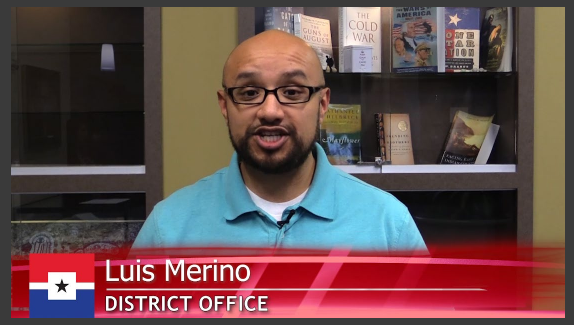
- More visual
- Concise text
- Addresses highest relevant content first
- Flexible college layouts
- Consistent navigation

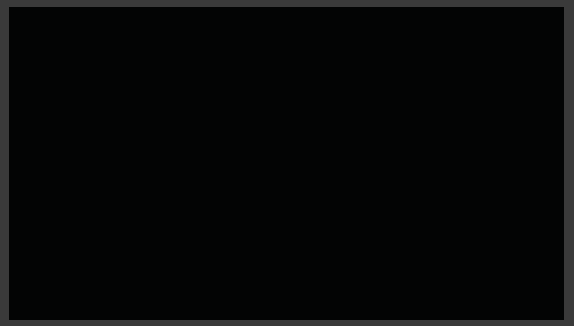
Photo credit: dailydoseofcharm.com

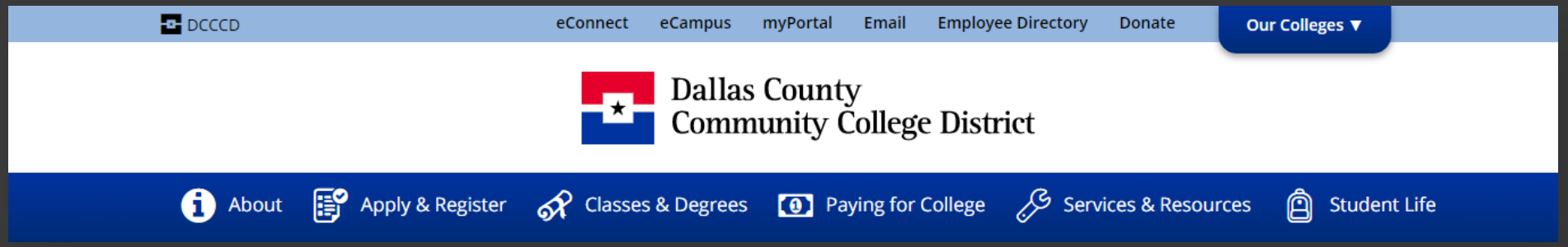
A cleaner, more streamlined process for all web teams

A stronger relationship with the colleges

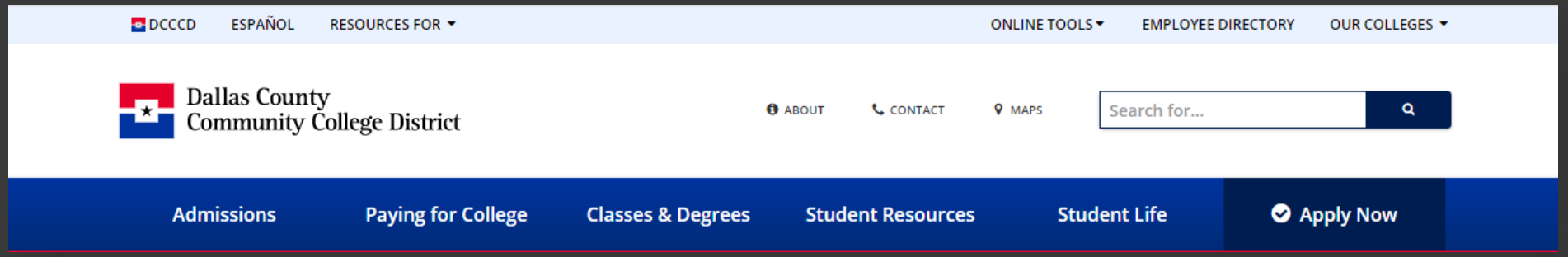




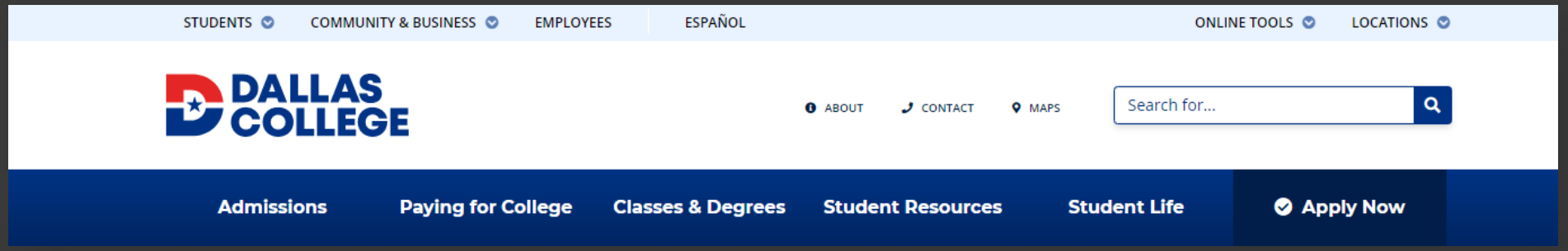


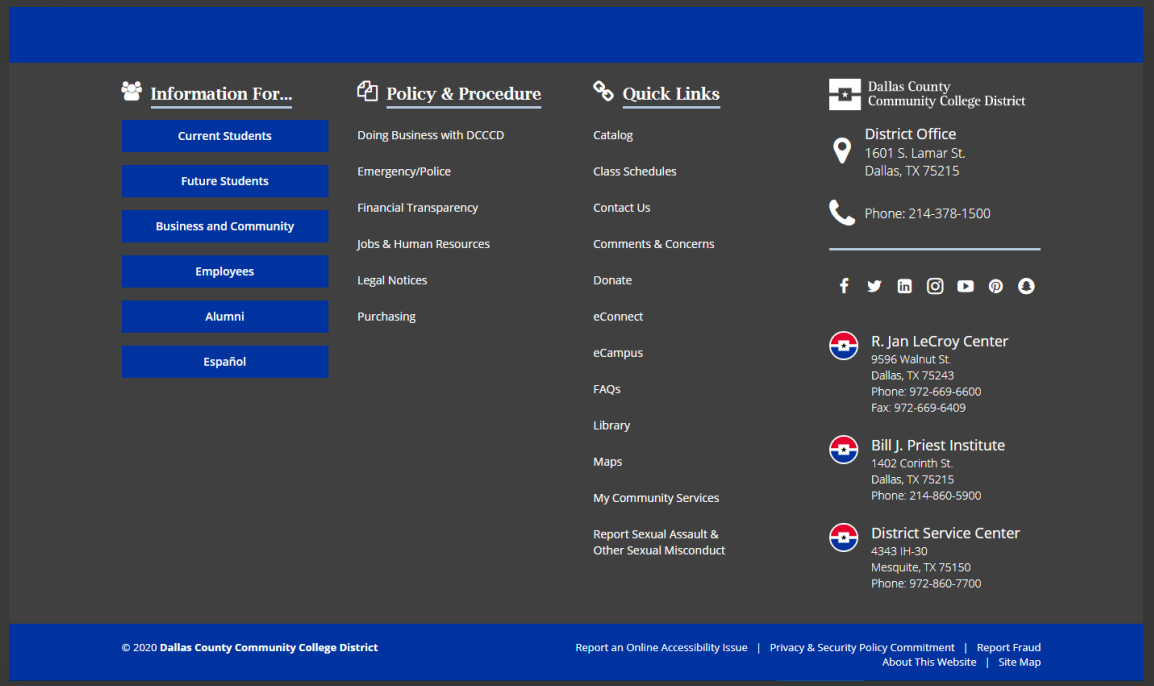


Fall 2019



Spring 2020




Information For...
Current Students
Future Students
Business and Community
Employees
Alumni
Español
Policy & Procedure
Doing Business with DCCCD
Emergency/Police
Financial Transparency
Jobs & Human Resources
Legal Notices
Purchasing
Quick Links
Catalog
Class Schedules
Contact Us
Comments & Concerns
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eConnect
eCampus
FAQs
Library
Maps
My Community Services
Report Sexual Assault & Other Sexual Misconduct
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District Office
1601 S. Lamar St.
Dallas, TX 75215
Phone: 214-378-1500
R. Jan LeCroy Center
9596 Walnut St.
Dallas, TX 75243
Phone: 972-669-6600
Fax: 972-669-6409
Bill J. Priest Institute
1402 Corinth St.
Dallas, TX 75215
Phone: 214-860-5900
District Service Center
4343 IH-30
Mesquite, TX 75150
Phone: 972-860-7700
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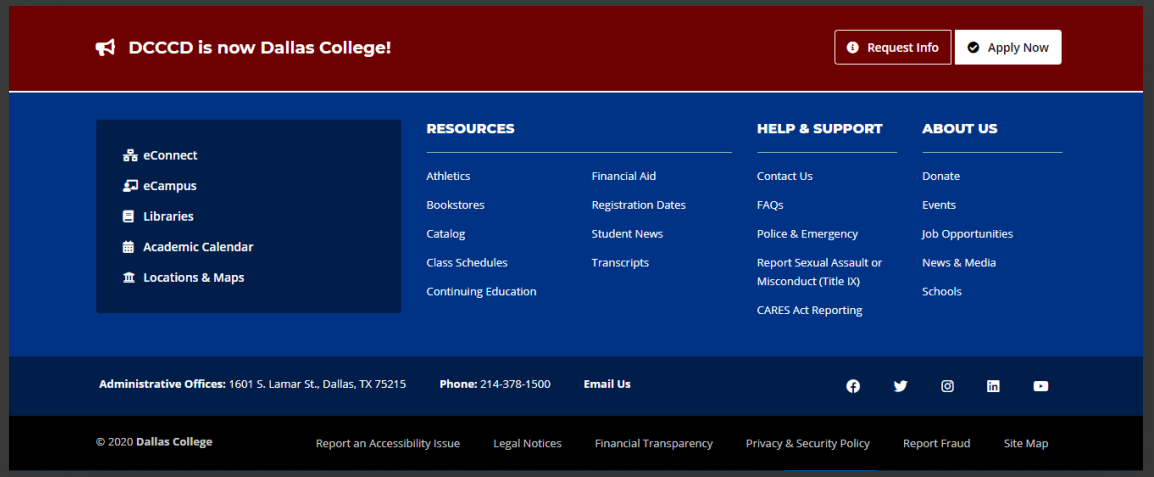
About This Website | Site Map

Spring 2020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eCampus
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Academic Calendar
Locations & Maps
RESOURCES
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Class Schedules
Continuing Education
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Registration Dates
Student News
Transcripts
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Schools
Administrative Offices: 1601 S. Lamar St., Dallas, TX 75215
Phone: 214-378-1500
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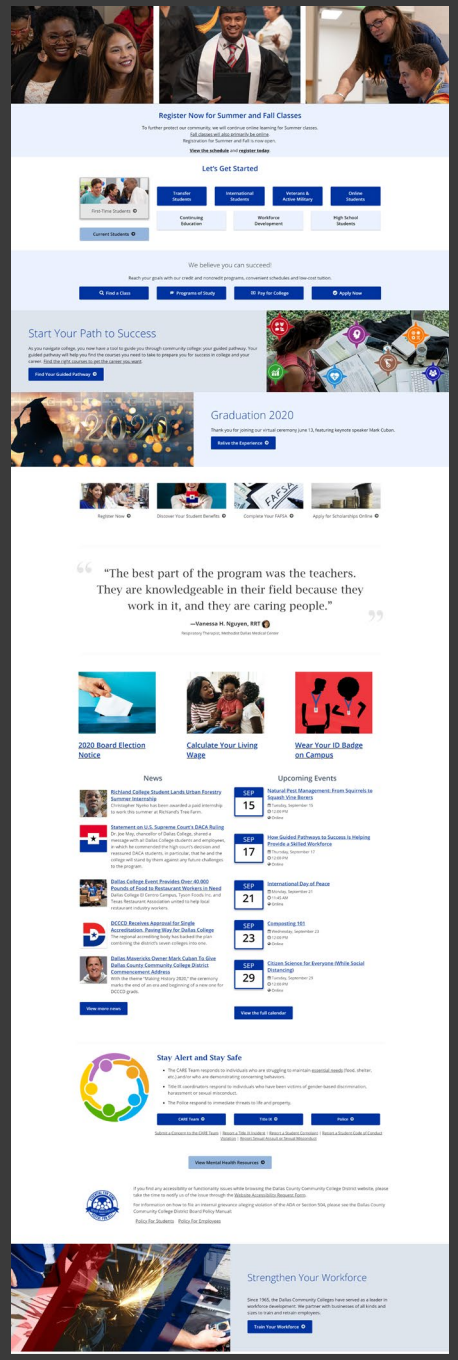
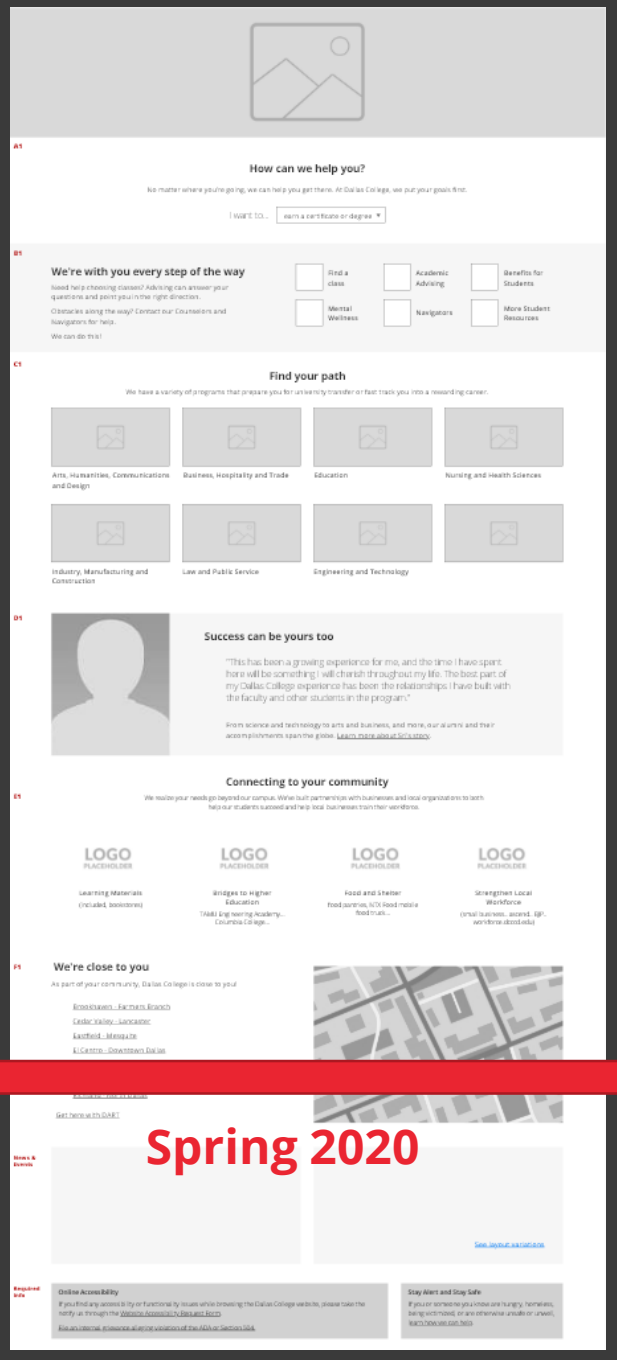
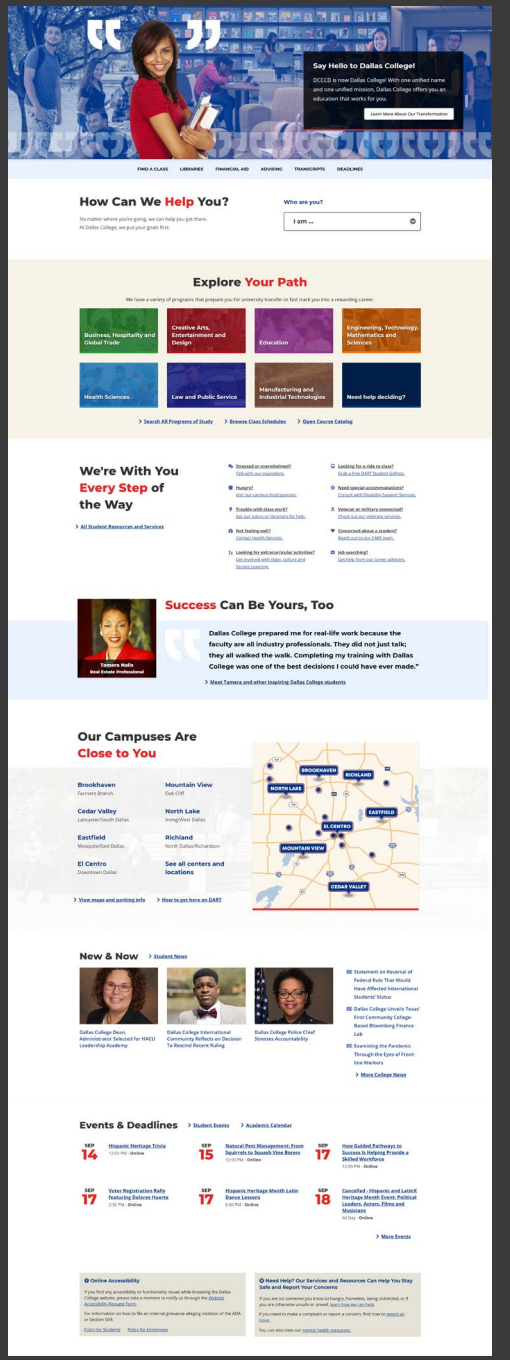
Site Map


Register Now for Summer and Fall Classes
Let's Get Started
Start Your Path to Success
Graduation 2020
"The best part of the program was the teachers. They are knowledgeable in their field because they work in it, and they are caring people."
—Vanessa H. Nguyen, RRT
2020 Board Election Notice
Calculate Your Living Wage
Wear Your ID Badge on Campus
News
Upcoming Events
Stay Alert and Stay Safe
Strengthen Your Workforce


How can we help you?
We're with you every step of the way
Find your path
Success can be yours too
Connecting to your community
We're close to you
Spring 2020


Say Hello to Dallas College!
How Can We Help You?
Explore Your Path
We're With You Every Step of the Way
Success Can Be Yours, Too
Our Campuses Are Close to You
New & Now
Events & Deadlines

Let's Get Started

First-Time Students

Current Students

Transfer Students

International Students

Veterans & Active Military

Online Students

Continuing Education

Workforce Development

High School Students

We believe you can succeed!

Reach your goals with our credit and noncredit programs, convenient schedules and low-cost tuition.

Find a Class | Programs of Study | Pay for College | Apply Now

FIND A CLASS LIBRARIES FINANCIAL AID ADVISING TRANSCRIPTS DEADLINES

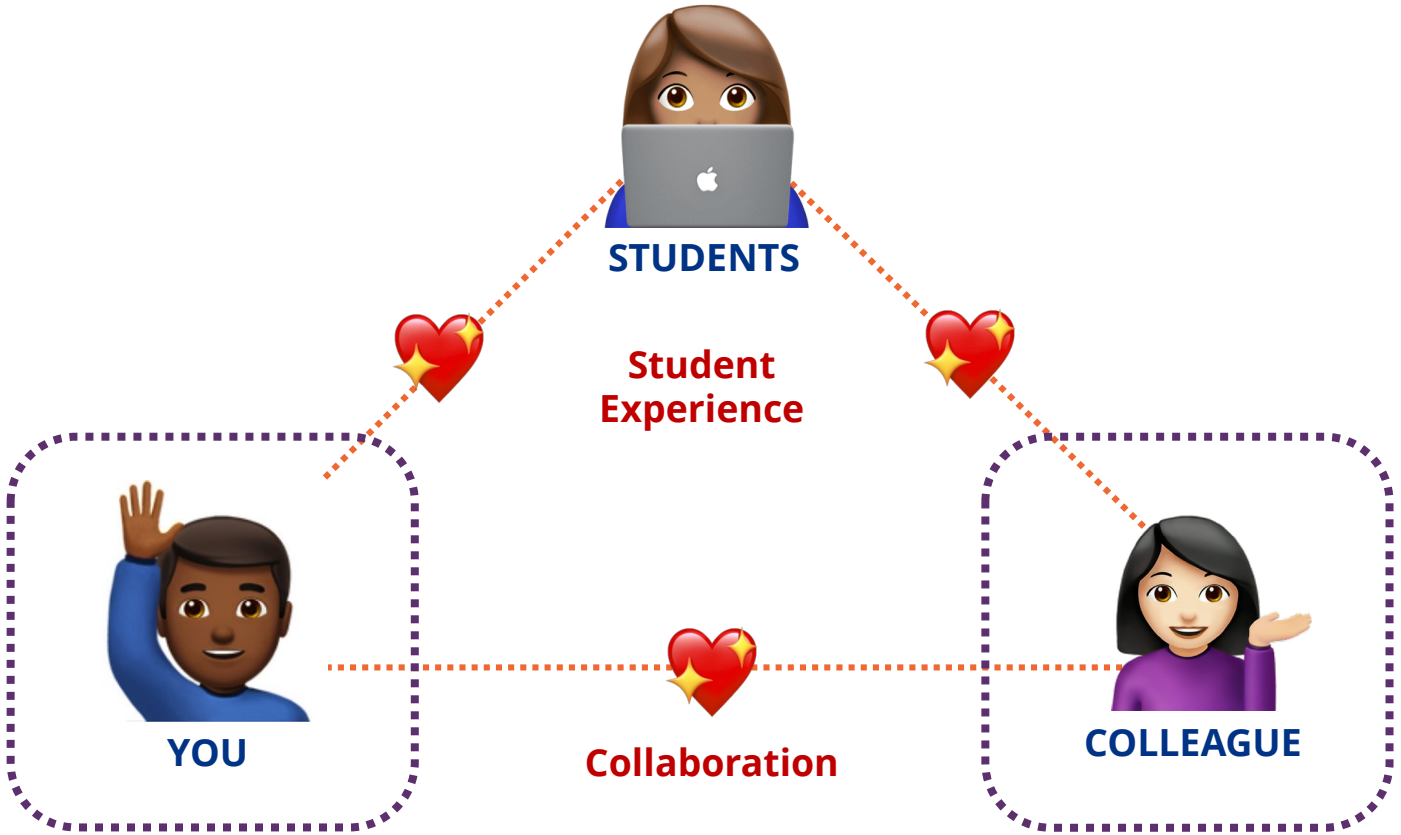
How Can We Help You?

No matter where you're going, we can help you get there.
At Dallas College, we put your goals first.

Who are you?

I am ...

Empathy is everything.



Thank you

lmerino@dcccd.edu

@LuisRMerino