



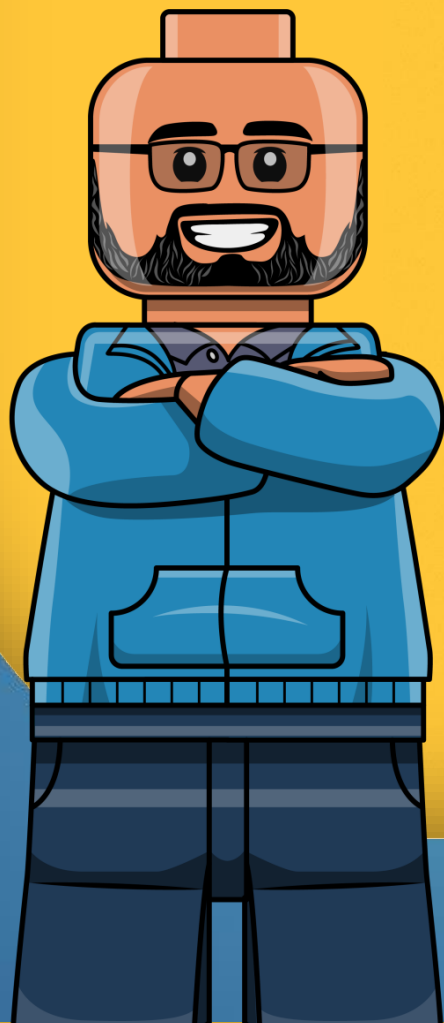
UX

9 UX

Building Blocks
for
College Web
Teams

Lessons From
9+ Years
In the Field

Luis Merino



9 pcs/pzs

About Me



Luis Merino

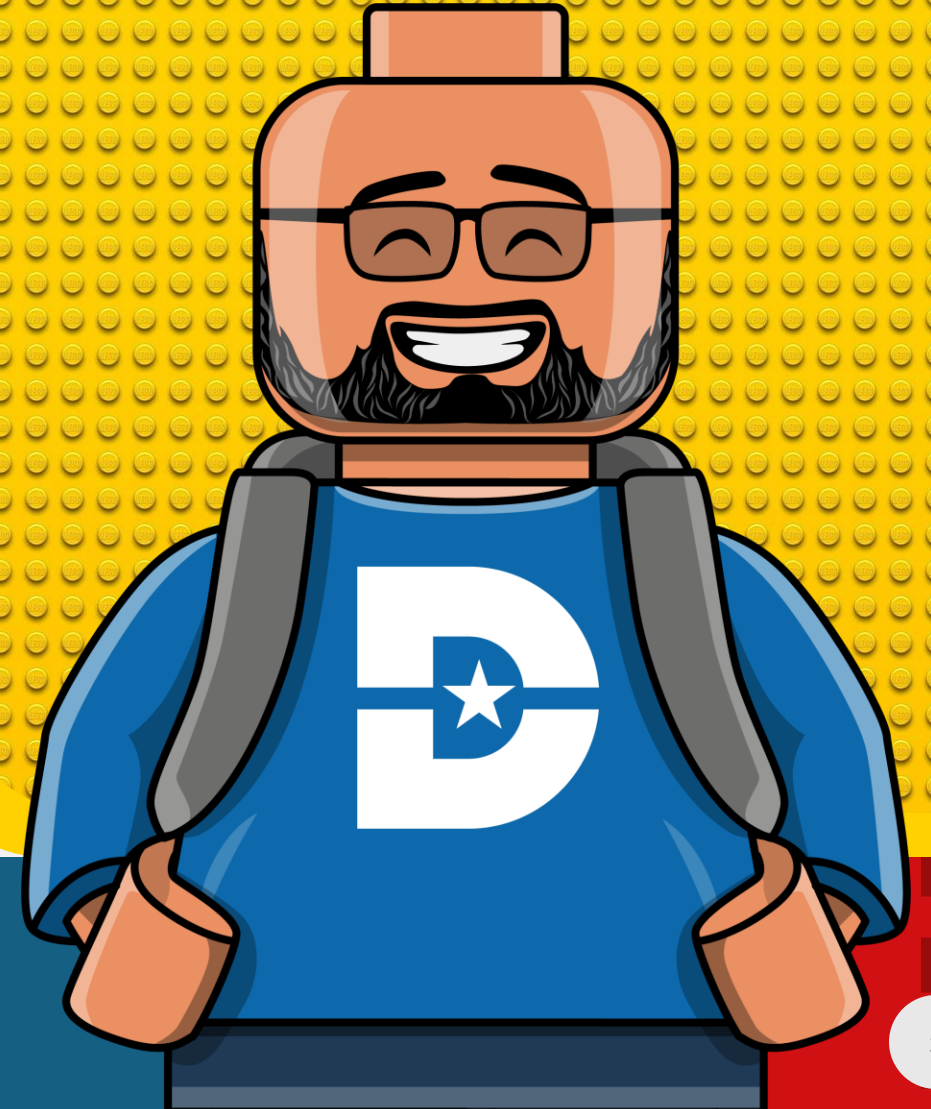
20+ years in graphic, web & digital media design

9+ years in higher ed web & UX design

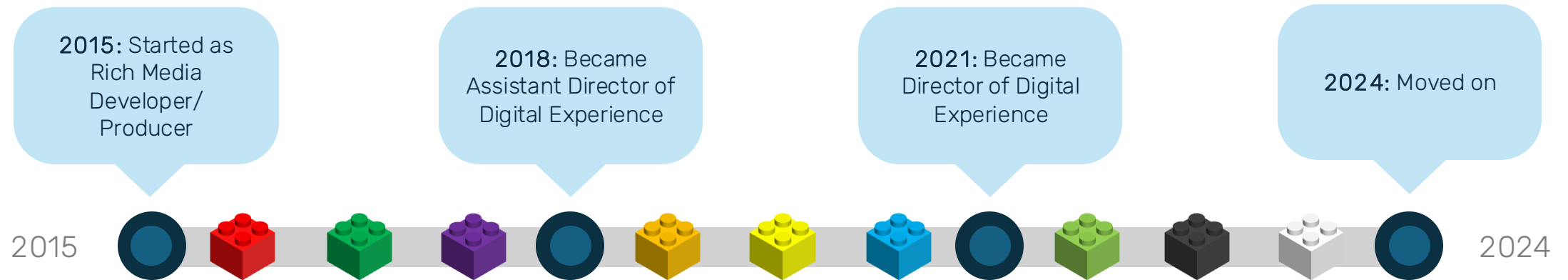
4th time presenting @ TACCM

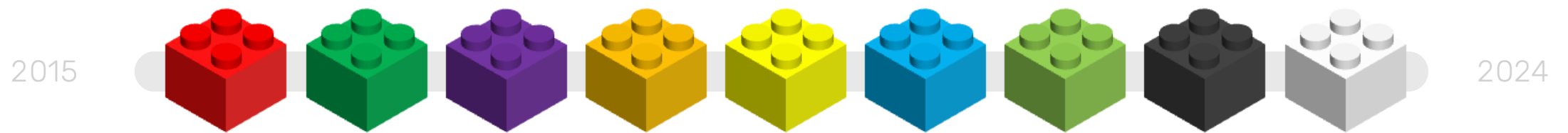
(Formerly) Director, Digital Experience @ Dallas College

(Currently) Product Design Manager @ Baylor Scott & White



My 9-Year UX Adventure @ Dallas College

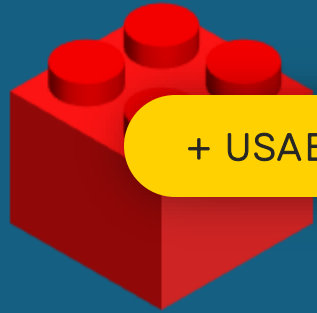




The 9 most important UX lessons I learned during my 9 years.

LuisMerino.com/9Blocks

Test to See What Clicks



+ USABILITY TESTING

What is it?

- Watching real users try your design
- Observing friction or confusion
- Iterate or improve design

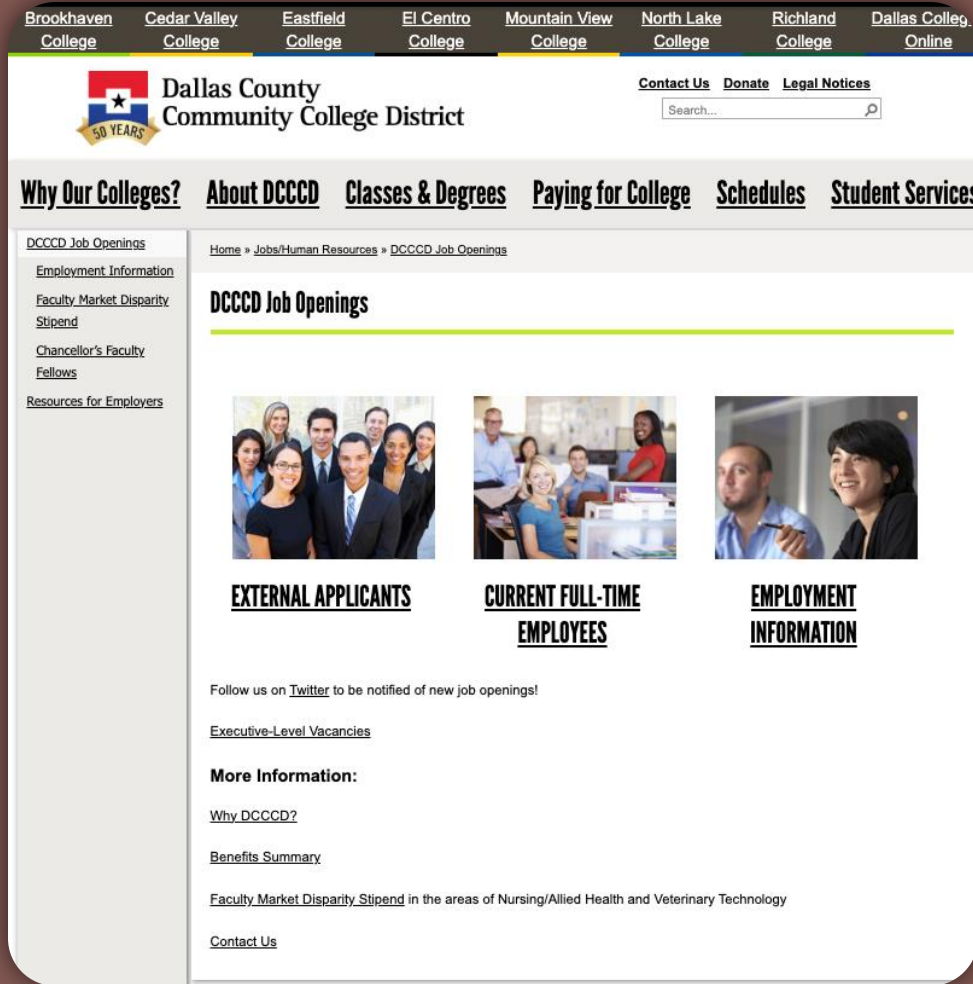
AI-generated illustration



#1



How did I learn this lesson?



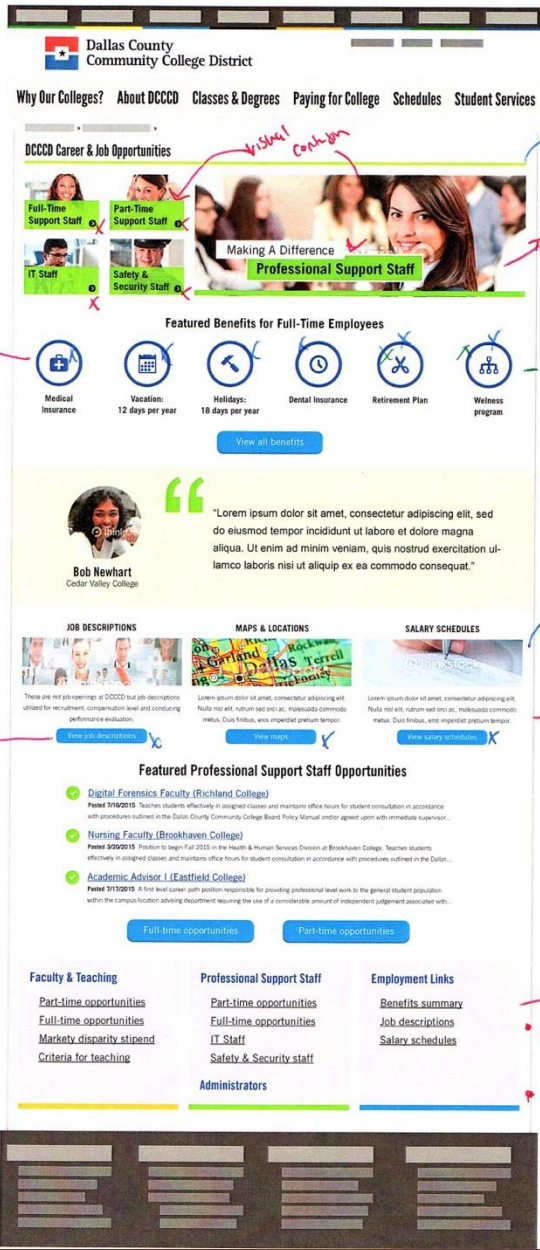
Jobs/Careers Subsite (2015)

Background

- Careers site was outdated

The Assignment

- Redesign the site



not clickable, b/c 1st page
if this is 1st page
seen... then possibly clickable

Administration & Staff page

searchable?

at first

frustrating

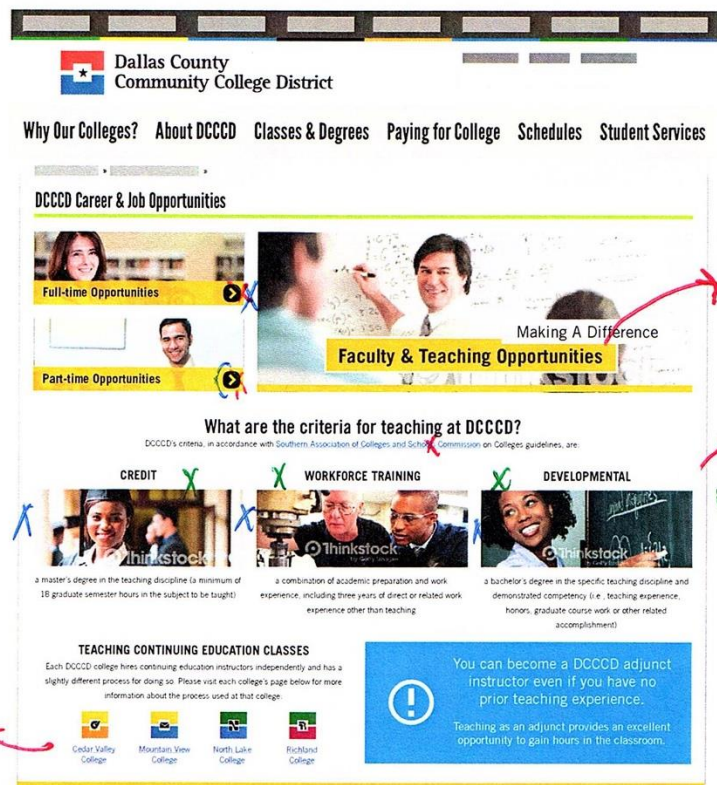
what is PSS?

it's 3rd button, but not - but looks flat, so

CURRENT:

Teaching:
By Location

1. I created new designs
2. Printed them out and took them to colleagues to get user feedback
3. Refined based on feedback



Faculty & Teaching page

maybe check

check word for link
→ line first
→ Aug, 2nd
→ if subhead, not underline, not even connect it
it's mx

photo shows sections

Underline to know they're

2015 Outcome

DCCCD Career and Job Openings

Featured Benefits for Full-Time Employees

- Medical Insurance
- Vacation: 12 days per year
- Holidays: 18 days per year
- Dental Insurance
- Retirement Plan
- Wellness program

Who We Are

Our Mission

To equip students for successful living and responsible citizenship in a rapidly changing local, national and world community.

Our Purpose

To ensure Dallas County is vibrant, growing and economically stable for future generations.

Together the seven independently accredited colleges of DCCCD compose one of the largest college systems in the state of Texas, serving more than 3 million students since 1965.

19
campuses and locations

2.8K
full-time administrators, faculty and staff

4.9K
part-time faculty and staff

90K+
credit and continuing education students

[More info about DCCCD](#)

Today

Where Making a Living Means Making a Difference

Search job title or location [Search](#)

Faculty and Teaching

Full-time faculty, Adjunct faculty, Credit and non-credit faculty

Staff

Student services, Instructional support, Administrative support, IT, Facilities

Administrators

Deans, Department chairs, Directors, etc.

Executives

Vice chancellors, Associate vice chancellors, C-level executives, etc.

- Medical Insurance**
Our plan includes vision care and prescription drug coverage. Dental plans are optional.
- Retirement Plan**
Standard plans include an employer contribution. Boost your savings with optional plans.
- Paid Holidays**
Enjoy a week off for Spring Break and six end-of-year holidays totaling 18 days per year.
- Education Credit**
Take classes free for professional growth or to earn a degree.
- Education Stipend**
Complete a degree and earn a one-time bonus.
- Wellness Program**
Use work time for exercise or other healthy activities.

Who We Are

Since 1965, Dallas College has served and educated more than 3 million students. As one of the largest colleges in Texas, we work to transform lives and communities through higher education in a rapidly changing local, national and world community.

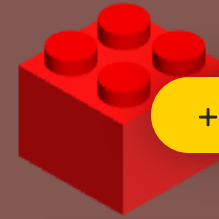
24
CAMPUSES AND LOCATIONS

3.7K
FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

3K
PART-TIME FACULTY AND STAFF

100K+
CREDIT AND CONTINUING ED. STUDENTS

[More About Dallas College](#)



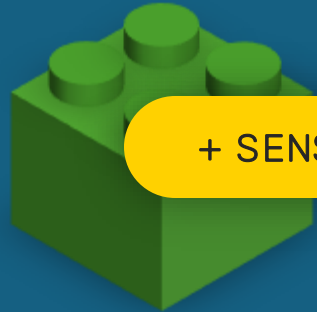
+ USABILITY TESTING

LESSON #1

- Run your designs through real users, even in low-fi or paper, and see how they use it.
- It's always an eye-opening experience.



Make Sense of the Pieces



+ SENSEMAKING

What is it?

- Investigating complexity
- Organizing unclear content
- Finding patterns
- Translating into clarity

AI-generated illustration

2015

2016

2024

#2



How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2016

2024

The screenshot shows a website page for Associate Degree Nursing programs. The navigation menu at the top includes: Why Our Colleges?, About DCCCD, Classes & Degrees, Paying for College, Schedules, and Student Services. The main content area is titled "Nursing" and features a header with the text "Shortcut to this page: dccc.edu/nursing". Below the header are three small images of nursing students. The main text is titled "Associate Degree Nursing" and lists participating colleges: Brookhaven College, El Centro College, Mountain View College, and North Lake College. The text describes the program as a full-time program with lecture, skills lab, and clinical experience, involving both day and evening hours. It also mentions that graduates are eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to become licensed as a registered nurse (RN) in Texas. The page lists several colleges offering the program and provides links to get more information about each. The page also includes a section titled "Why is This a Good Career" and "Career Opportunities".

Associate Degree Nursing
Brookhaven College • El Centro College • Mountain View College • North Lake College

Associate Degree Nursing is a full-time program that includes lecture, skills lab and clinical experience, with rotations involving both day and evening hours. Students begin hospital rotations the first semester after admission to the program and rotate through area hospitals, participating in a wide variety of procedures.

Associate Degree Nursing graduates are eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to become licensed as a registered nurse (RN) in Texas.

Several colleges of the Dallas County Community College District offer Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) programs. Each has its own admissions process, application timeline and requirements; please check with an [academic advisor](#) at the college of your choice to find the right fit for you.

Click on each college program below to get more information about detailed admission requirements, faculty bios and links to specific degree and certificate requirements.

- **Brookhaven College** offers an [Associate Degree Nursing A.A.S.](#) Get more information about [Brookhaven's Associate Degree Nursing program](#).
- **El Centro College** offers an [Associate Degree Nursing A.A.S.](#) as well as a [Perioperative Nursing Enhanced Skills Certificate](#) for RNs and graduate nurses. Get more information about [El Centro's Associate Degree Nursing program](#).
- **North Lake College** is an authorized site for El Centro's ADN program. Students attend classes at North Lake but receive their [Associate Degree Nursing A.A.S.](#) from El Centro. Find out more about ADN classes at North Lake through [El Centro's Associate Degree Nursing program](#).
- **Mountain View College** offers an [Associate Degree Nursing program](#). Get more information about [Mountain View's Associate Degree Nursing program](#).

Vocational Nursing and LVN-RN Bridge Program
El Centro College

- El Centro College offers a [Vocational Nursing certificate](#). The program includes classroom and laboratory work on campus as well as clinical experience at various area health care facilities. Graduates may take the Licensing Examination for Vocational Nurses (NCLEX-PN) in order to become a licensed vocational nurse (LVN) in Texas. An LVN-RN Advanced Placement "Bridge" program is also available. Get more information about [El Centro's Vocational Nursing program](#).

Program Page Pathways (2016)

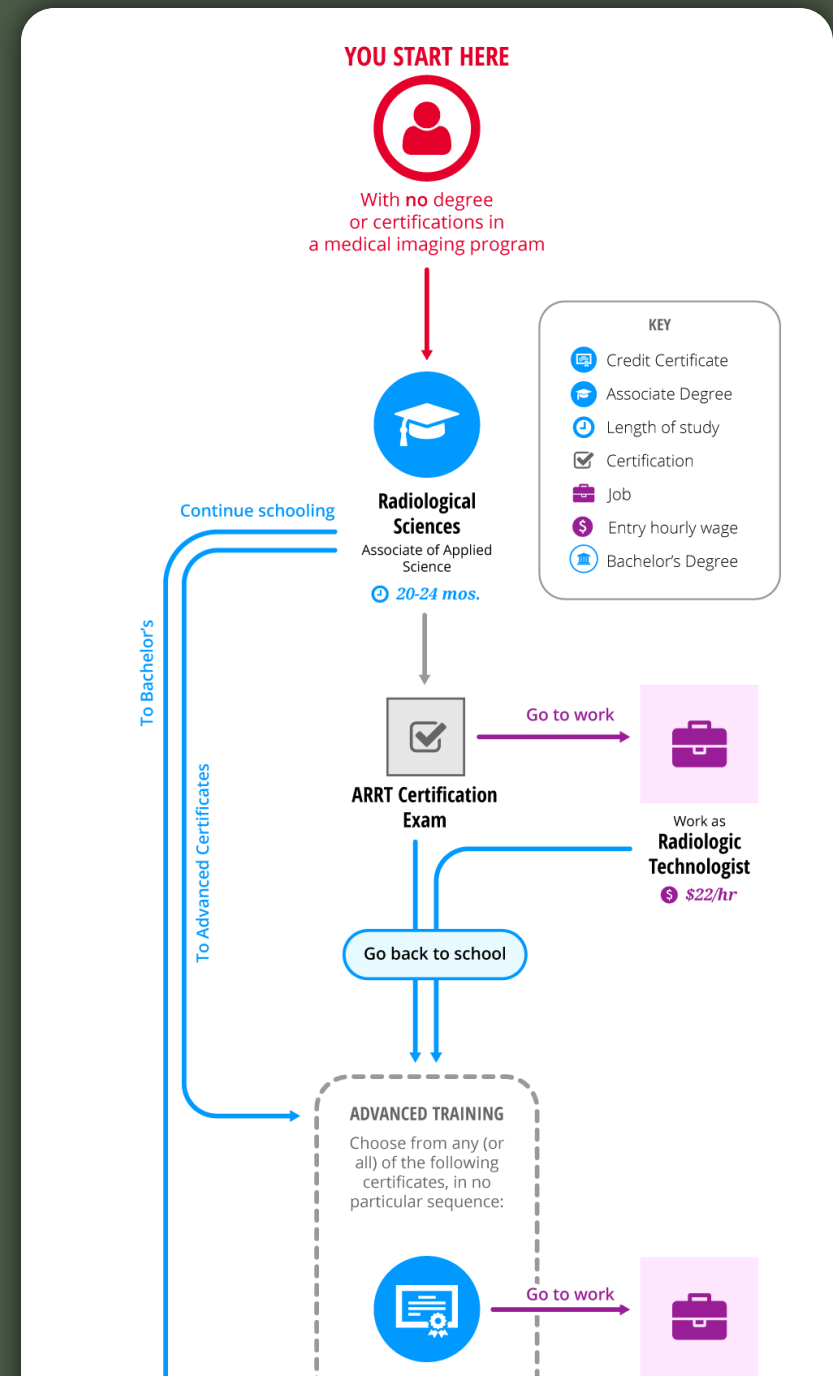
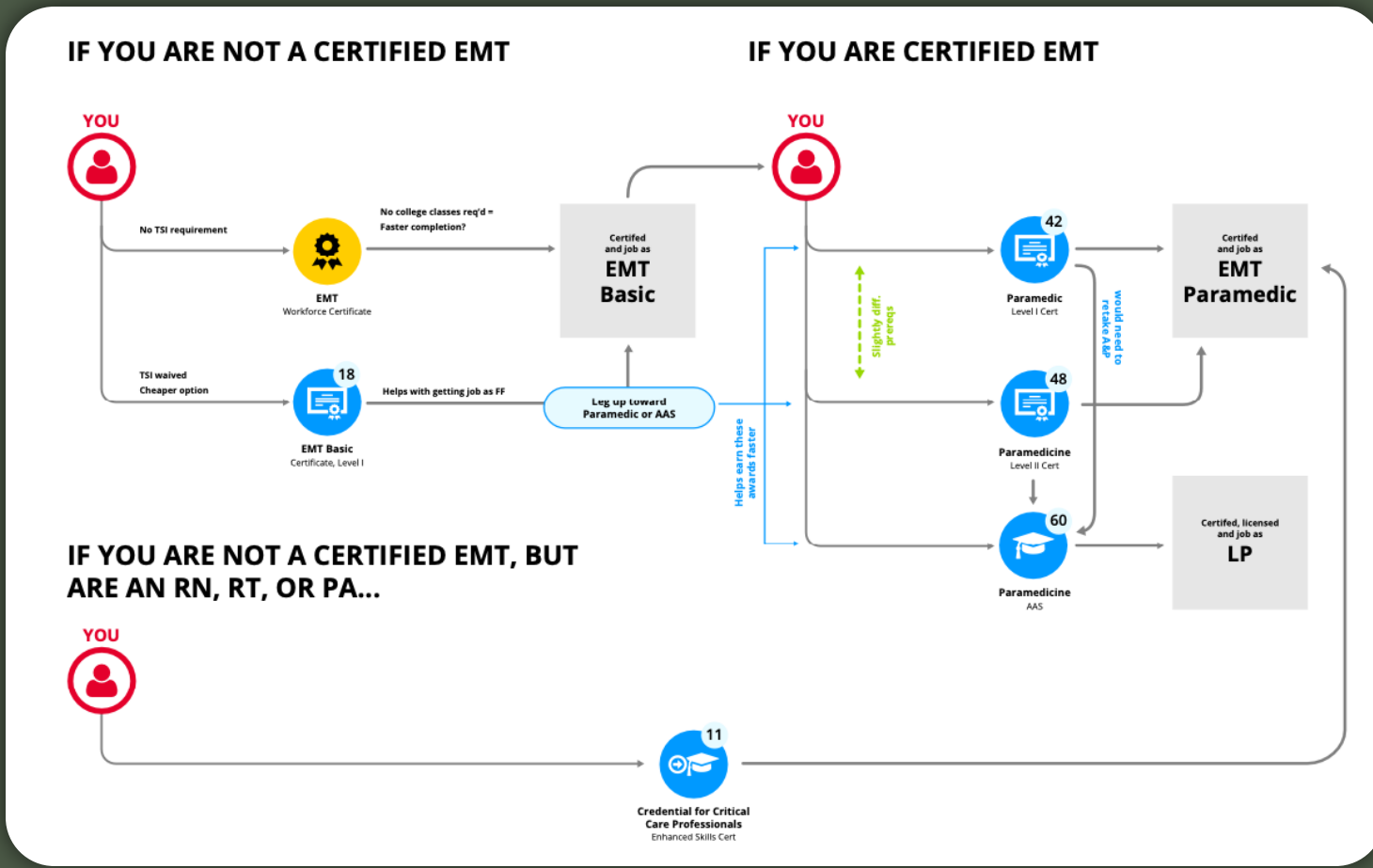
Background

- Program descriptions were flat and text-heavy

The Assignment

- Redesign program pages
- Visualize relationships between degrees and certificates

1. We turned into detectives
2. Interviewed stakeholders to understand connections
3. Made sense of complexity



Outcome

- 3 new pages launched

Nursing

Care for patients in need and help fill the shortage of nurses nationwide.

Do you want a health care career that's always in high demand? Would you like a challenging job where no day is the same? One where you can really make a difference?






If so, think about becoming a nurse. A critical shortage of nurses exists nationwide. You can be one of the graduates who have the skills and professional training to meet the demand.

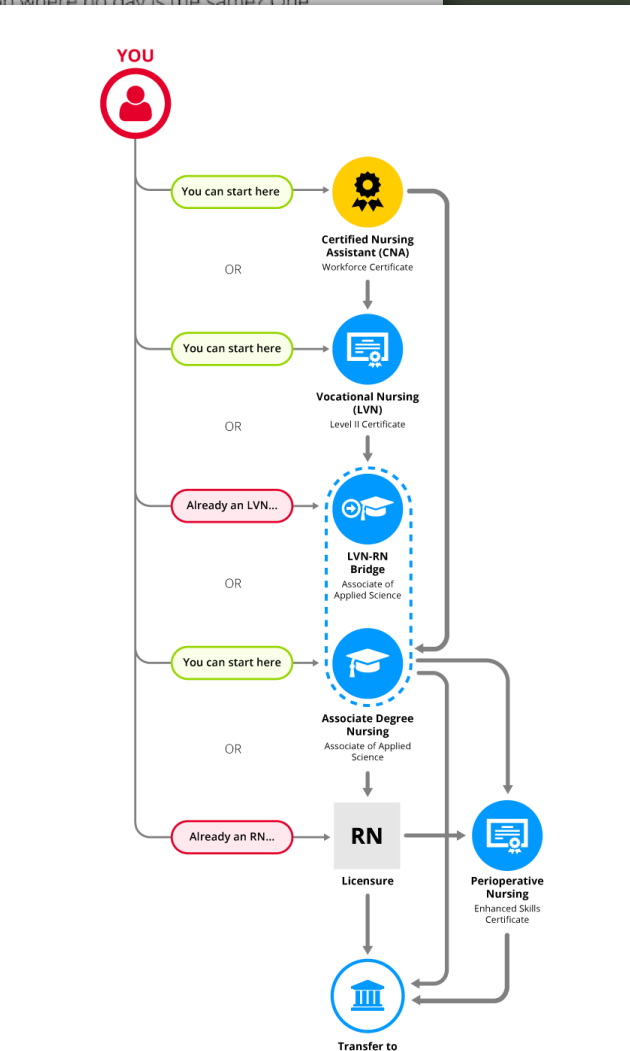
Nursing Pathway

Our Programs

Our certificates are designed to be built upon one another in a pathway that leads you to higher earning jobs. The more you learn, the more you earn.

[View Pathway Overview](#)

 Associate Degree Nursing Associate in Applied Science	PROGRAM AND CAREER DETAILS
 Perioperative Nursing Certificate, Enhanced Skills	PROGRAM AND CAREER DETAILS
 LVN-RN Bridge Program Associate in Applied Science	PROGRAM AND CAREER DETAILS
 Vocational Nursing Certificate, Level II	PROGRAM AND CAREER DETAILS
 Nursing Assistant Workforce Certificate	PROGRAM AND CAREER DETAILS



+ SENSEMAKING

LESSON #2

- Sensemaking is a core UX skill.
- It's often required to turn complexity and disorganization into something clear and intuitive.



Build Together to Go Farther

2015

2017

2024



+ RADICAL COLLABORATION

#3

What does it look like?

- Intentional and strategic
- Shared ownership and mutual trust
- Bold co-creation



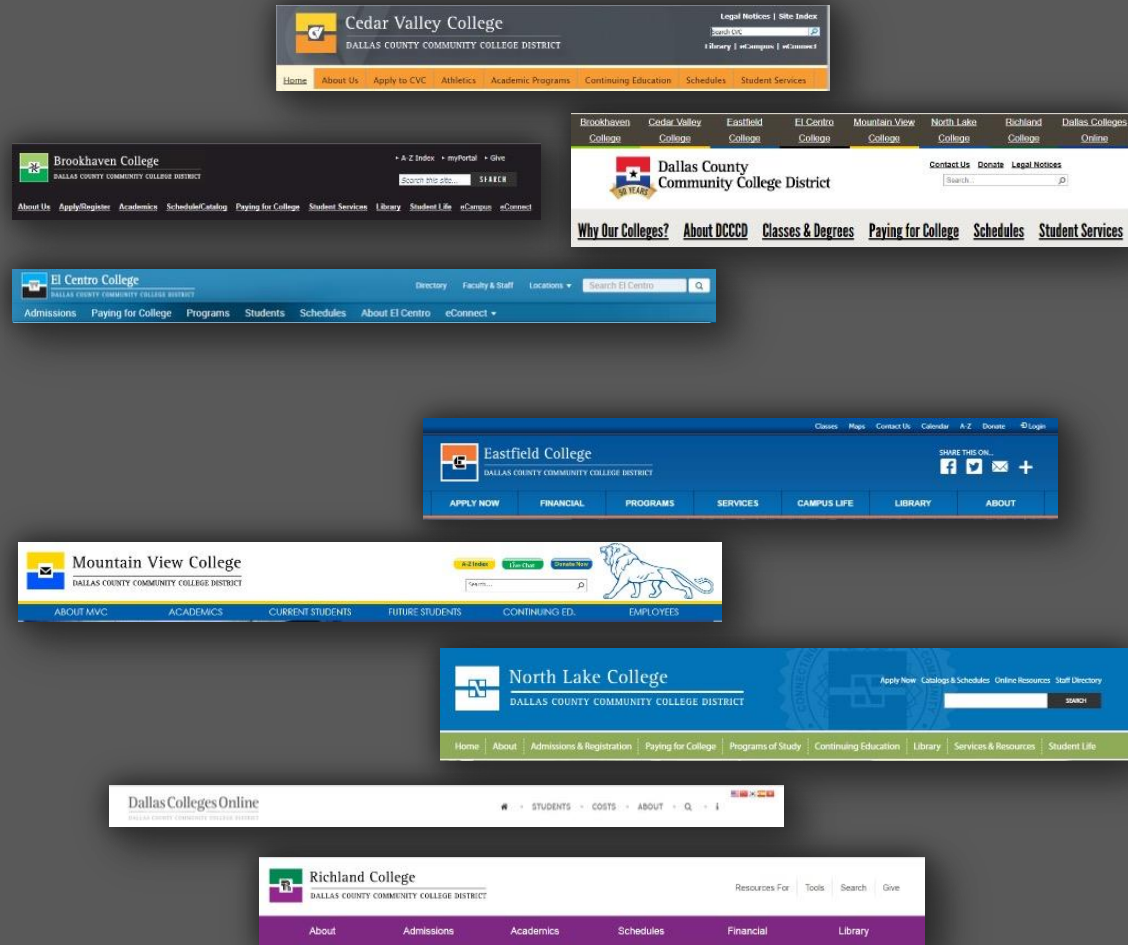
AI-generated illustration

How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2017

2024



Unified Student Experience Website (2017)

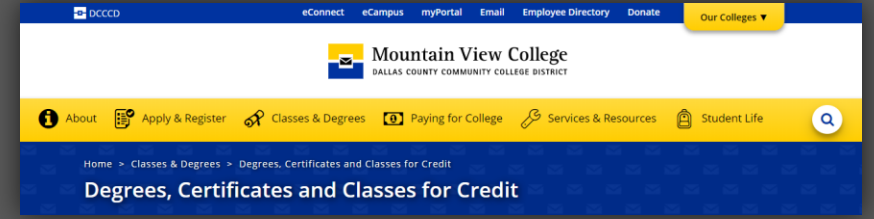
Background

- Leadership decided to consolidate all 9 college websites into unified platform
- In less than 6 months 🗓️

The Assignment

- Lead design for the unified experience
- While navigating individual colleges' loss of autonomy

1. Long story short: we built the new platform
2. To meet deadline, decisions were siloed. But weak buy-in from college teams



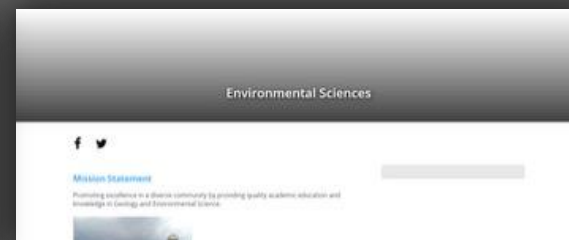
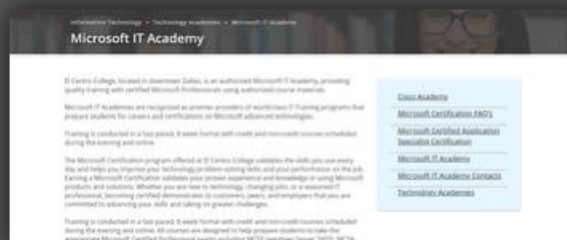
AI-generated illustration

“But, that wasn’t collaboration.”

2015

2018

2024



Program Overview Pages (2018)

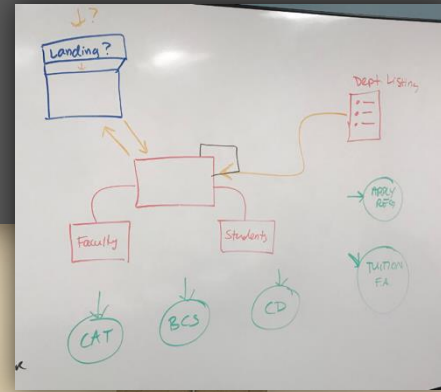
Background

- Because of rushed migration, program pages were inconsistent

The Assignment

- Lead design of new, consistent program page template
- Improve clarity, usability, and findability and regain buy-in from college teams

1. Started with making sense of complexity with teams
2. Facilitated brainstorm session for design
3. Ran usability testing and included college teams



CURRENT STUDENT (THE "TRADITIONAL" STUDENT PERSONA)	
Name:	Kira Hernandez
Job title / major responsibilities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eastfield student Helping her mom at home Part-time job at Starbucks
Demographics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19 years old Hispanic Lives at home; oldest of four siblings First-generation college student



+ SENSEMAKING

+ USABILITY TESTING

Outcome

- Consistent program pages
- Buy-in from college teams



Cedar Valley College
DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

About Apply & Register Classes & Degrees Paying for College Services & Resources Student Life

Veterinary Technology

Shortcut to this page: dccc.edu/vettech

Degrees and Certificates Career Information

If you have a desire to care for and treat animals, the Veterinary Technology program at Cedar Valley College offers courses both on site and via distance education so you can study in the way that's most convenient for you.

★ **Guided Pathways** are maps that show you what classes you will take, and when. [View Guided Pathways](#)

📄 [How much money does this career pay?](#)

🔗 [Which classes do I need?](#)

Contact Us

Are you interested in a career in veterinary technology? [Start Today](#)

El Centro College
DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

About Apply & Register Classes & Degrees Paying for College Services & Resources Student Life

Food and Hospitality Institute

Shortcut to this page: dccc.edu/food

Degrees and Certificates Career Information

At El Centro College's renowned Food and Hospitality Institute, you'll train alongside experienced professionals, develop dynamic skills and build strong industry connections — all at a fraction of the cost of for-profit culinary schools.

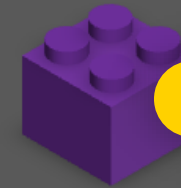
★ **Guided Pathways** are maps that show you what classes you will take, and when. [View Guided Pathways](#)

📄 [How much money does this career pay?](#)

🔗 [Which classes do I need?](#)

Contact Us

Are you interested in a career in food and hospitality? [Start Today](#)



+ RADICAL COLLABORATION

LESSON #3

- Going fast alone leads to more work later.
- When others are part of the build, they help carry it forward.



Move Without Instructions



+ NAVIGATING AMBIGUITY

What is it?

- Starting a project without all the answers
- Asking questions, sensemaking
- Creating a path forward and being adaptable

AI-generated illustration

2015

2019-2020

2024

#4



How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2024

2019-2020



One College Website (2019-2020)

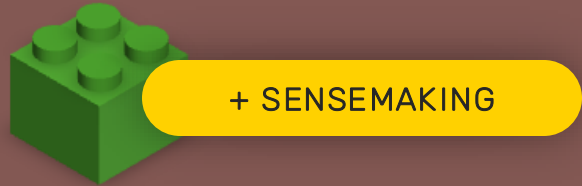
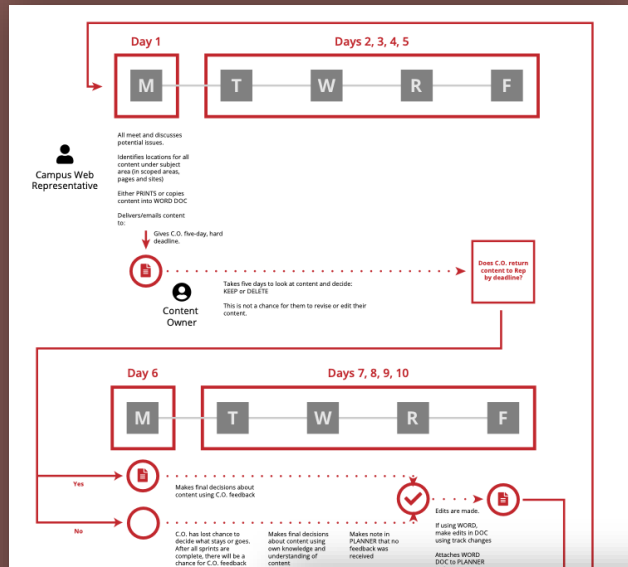
Background

- District was merging into one college with no name, structure, or roadmap
- < 9 months

The Assignment

- Lead design and project management of new website (for college that didn't exist yet)

1. Required definition of goals, audience, and strategy
2. Created content review process to start



Overarching Marketing Goals

These are the overarching goals we are designing the website to meet.



1. Attract



2. Engage



3. Convert



4. Support & Retain

Target Audiences

The following, while they are overall audiences for the whole website, the focus/breakdown for the home page is the same.

PRIMARY

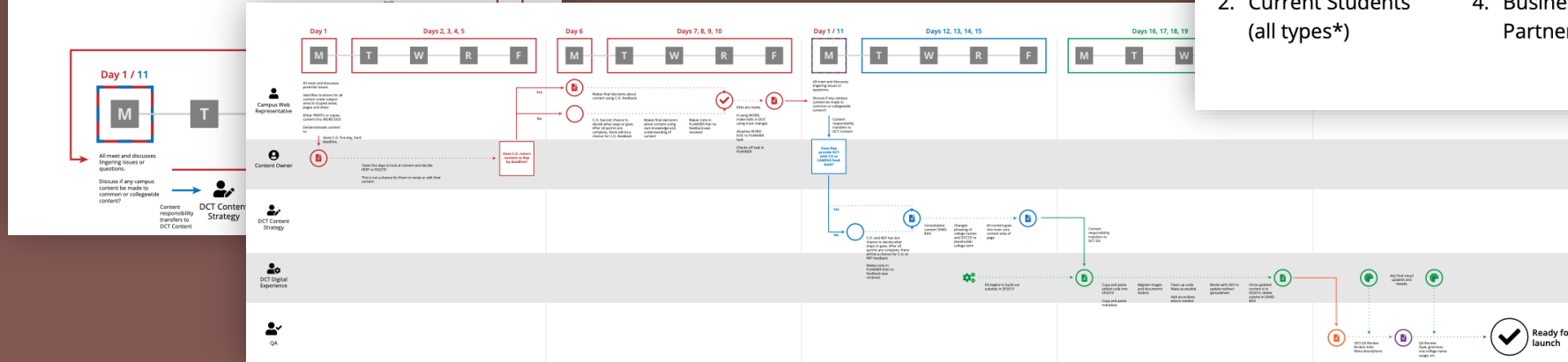
1. Prospective Students (all types*)
2. Current Students (all types*)

SECONDARY

3. Community Members
4. Business/Industry Partners

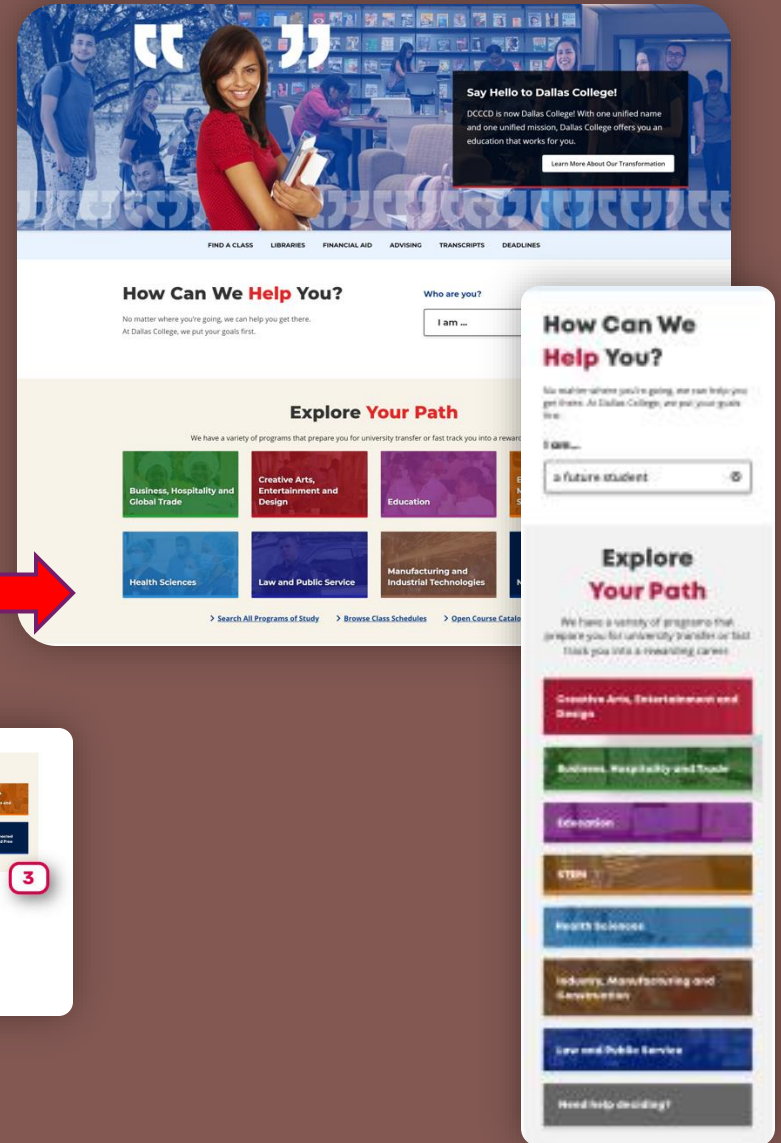
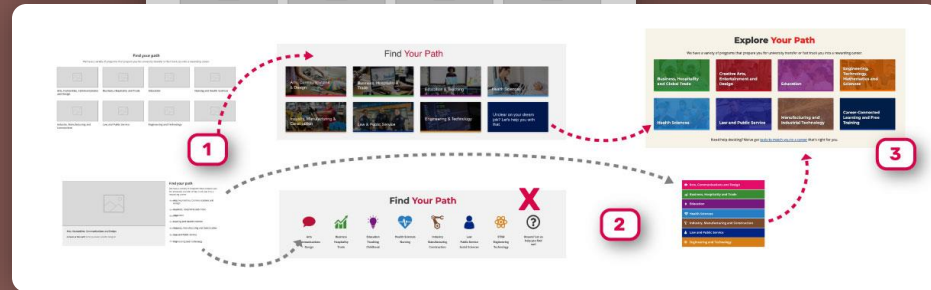
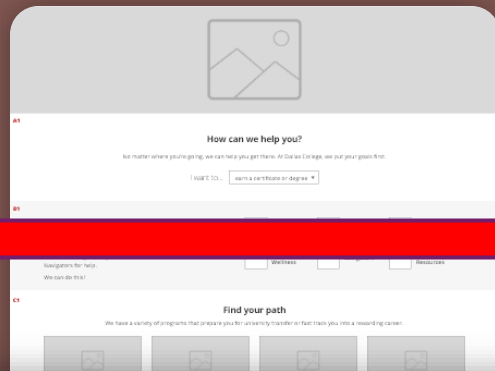
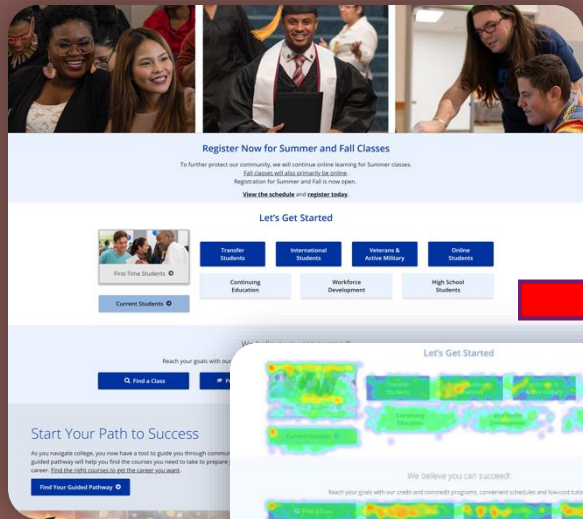
TERTIARY

5. Former Students/Alumni
6. Employees (prospective and current)

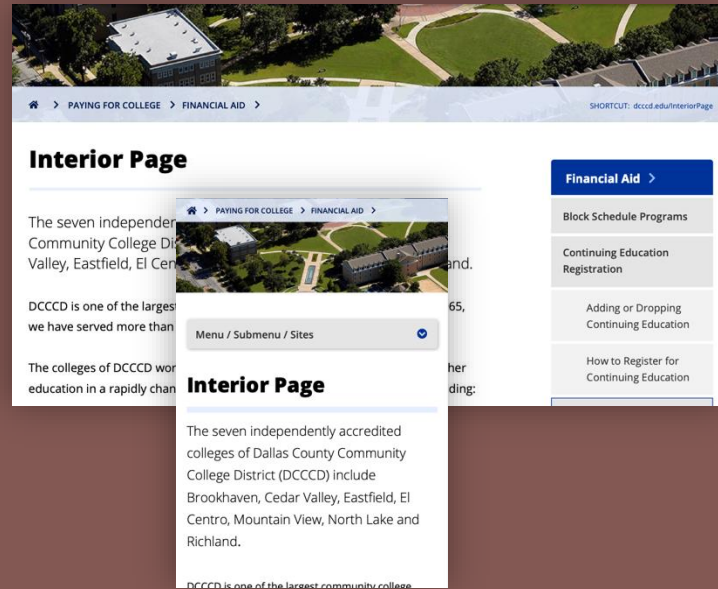
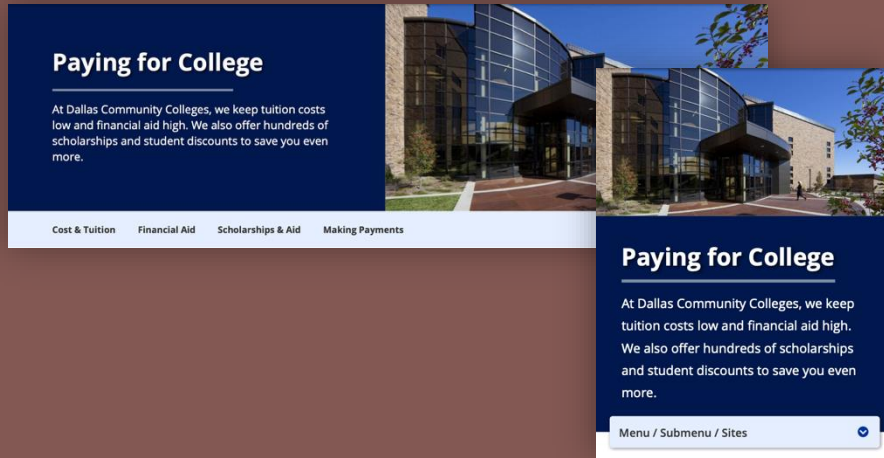


Home Page Redesign/Recode

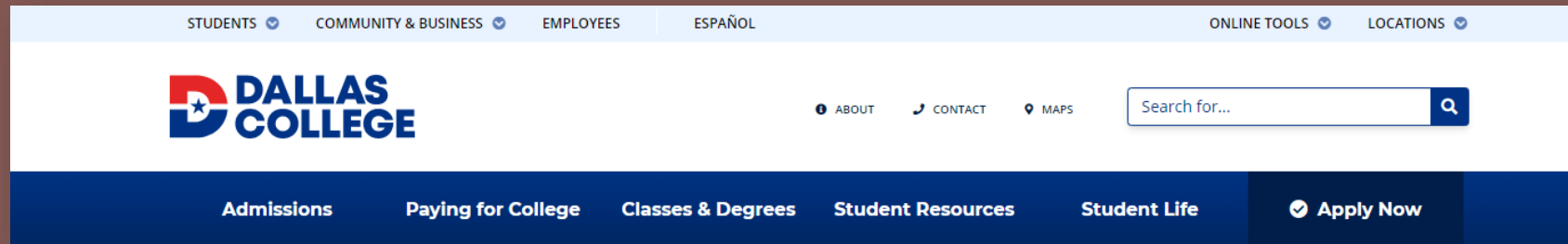
- Cross-functionally collaborated with graphic designers and writers to co-create the messaging and design of the new home page



Page Templates Redesign/Recode



Full header and footer redesign

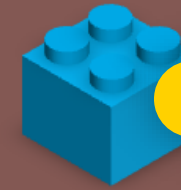


Outcomes

- Met deadline
- New website was faster, more accessible
- 9X increase in clicks to Apply/Admissions pages from home page

By the numbers

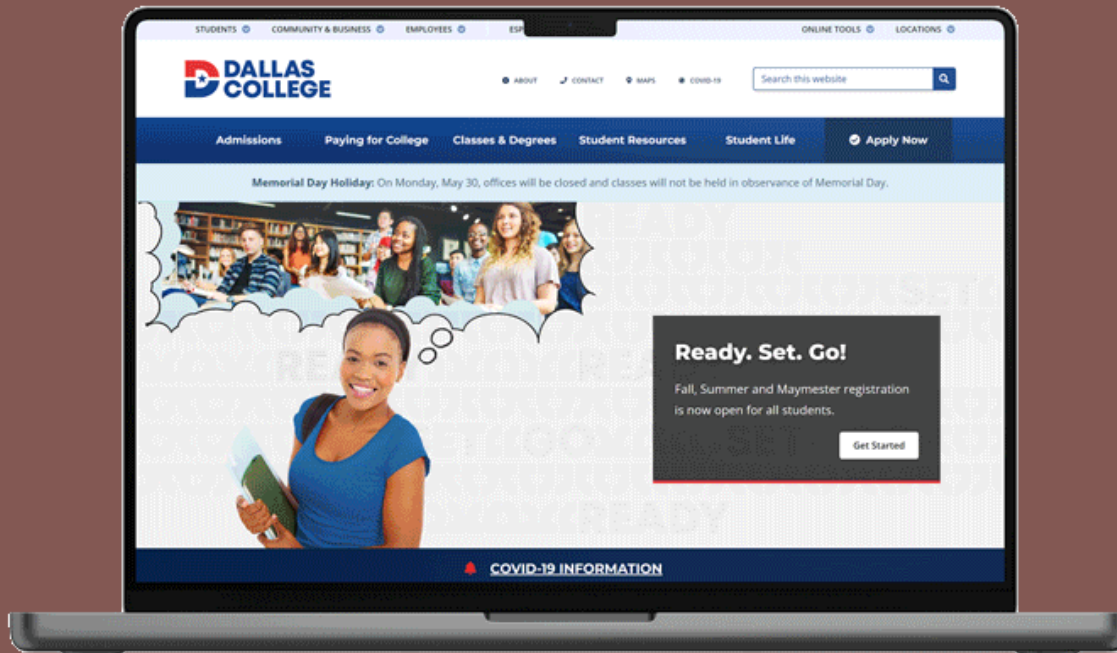
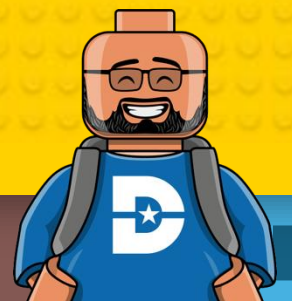
- Approx. 5K people hours
- 36.8K source pages
- 2.6K PDFs reviewed
- 5.3K pages manually reviewed for QA



+ NAVIGATING AMBIGUITY

LESSON #4

- **You don't need a full plan to start. Chart your first steps and be willing to adapt.**
- **Ambiguity is an invitation to lead.**



Shape Systems that Stack



+ DESIGN SYSTEMS

What is it?

- Shared library of reusable components
- Guidelines for consistency
- Builds toward cohesive digital experience

AI-generated illustration

2015

2021

2024

#5



How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2021

2024

USE Framework Style Guide

Typography

The USE Framework uses two fonts to keep the site clear and legible.

For sans-serif, we use Google's Open Sans (specifically the weights 300,400,600,700) and for serif we use Lucida Bright which should already be loaded on 76% of Windows based machines and 99% of Mac based machines.

Open Sans is the primary font for the site and should always be used for body copy.

```
font-family: 'Open Sans', arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
```

Lucida Bright (serif) should be limited to headers or content areas that need special attention.

```
font-family: 'Lucida Bright', Georgia, serif;
```

Heading Styles

This is an H1. This is an H1 link

This is H2. This is an H2 link

This is H3. This is an H3 link

This is H4. This is an H4 link

This is H5. This is an H5 link

THIS IS H6. THIS IS AN H6 LINK

This is lead paragraph text.

This is regular paragraph text. This is a link in a regular paragraph.

This is paragraph with `<small>` text.

This an H2 in Lucida Bright.

Lists

PEGASUS Design System (2021)

Background

- Based on basic, existing pattern library
- Build for One College website created opportunity

The Assignment

- Formalize components into well-documented system
- Guide UX, UI, content, and accessibility

1. Documented using atomic design principles
2. Wrote all guidelines
3. Created dedicated site
4. Built components in Adobe XD



This screenshot shows design guidelines with three numbered callouts:

- 1**: Accessibility Note: **aria-label** elements should only appear on an element and should be descriptive. Do not use generic phrases like "button" or "link" for accessibility purposes.
- 2**: Best Practice: **Buttons**. Always use title caps for text inside of icons.
- 3**: Style Note: **Notice how the padding** is applied around the entire element.

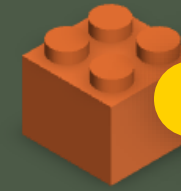
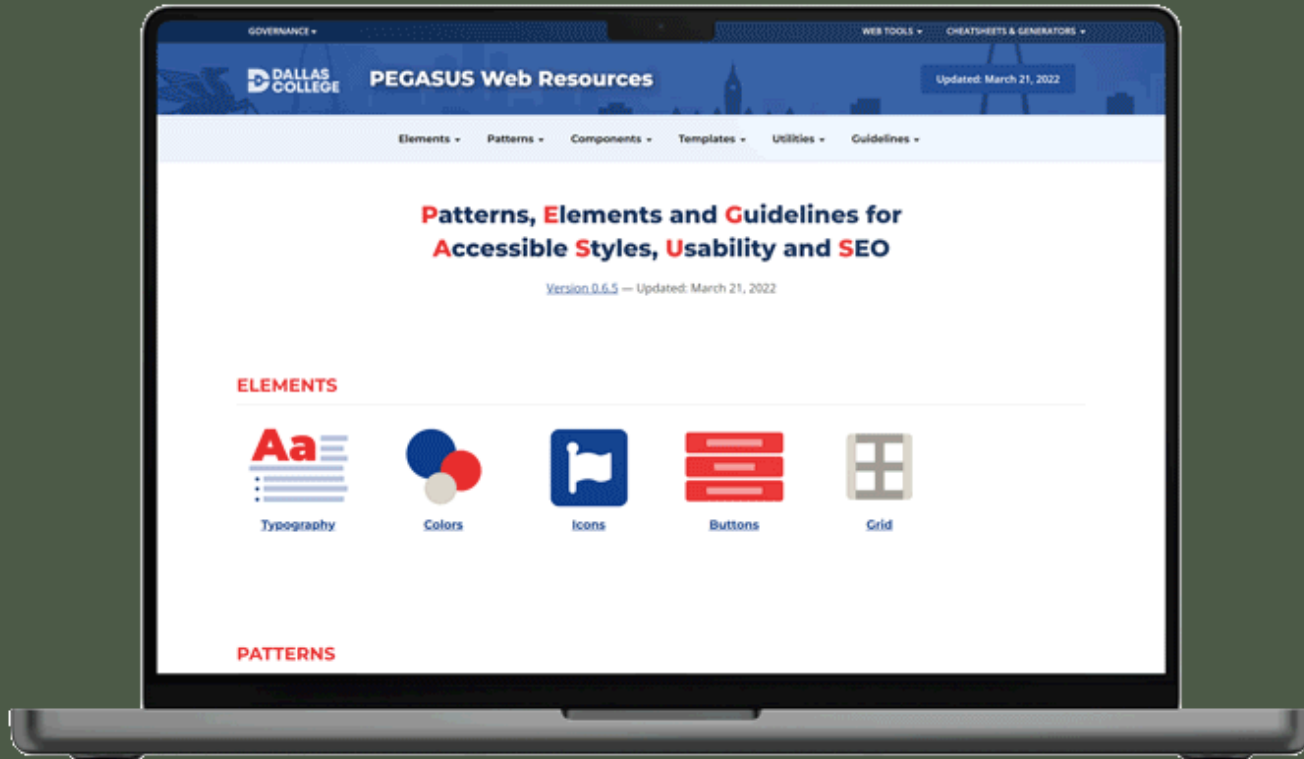
The **ELEMENTS** section includes icons for **Typography**, **Colors**, **Icons**, **Buttons**, and **Grid**. The **PATTERNS** section includes examples for **Action Links**, **Boxes, Content and Image**, **Boxes, Data**, **Buttons, Grand**, **Calls-To-Action**, and **Cards, Feature**.

This screenshot shows a user interface with four numbered callouts:

- 1**: Callout pointing to a job skills section.
- 2**: Callout pointing to an accordion title.
- 3**: Callout pointing to a profile card.
- 4**: Callout pointing to an award certificate card.

Outcomes

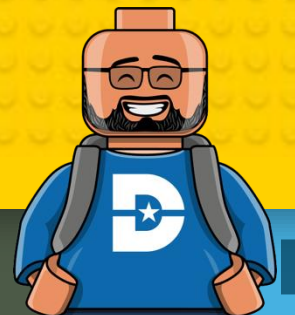
- PEGASUS: Patterns, Elements & Guidelines for Accessible Styles, Usability and SEO
- Adopted across team and used daily
- Improved consistency, accessibility, and efficiency



+ DESIGN SYSTEMS

LESSON #5

- Time and effort in a design system is a worthy investment.
- It brings needed clarity, consistency, alignment.



Workshop for Fast Alignment



+ FACILITATION

What does it look like?

- Organizing structured sessions to solve specific problems
- Planning and organizing activities to align, prioritize, or co-create

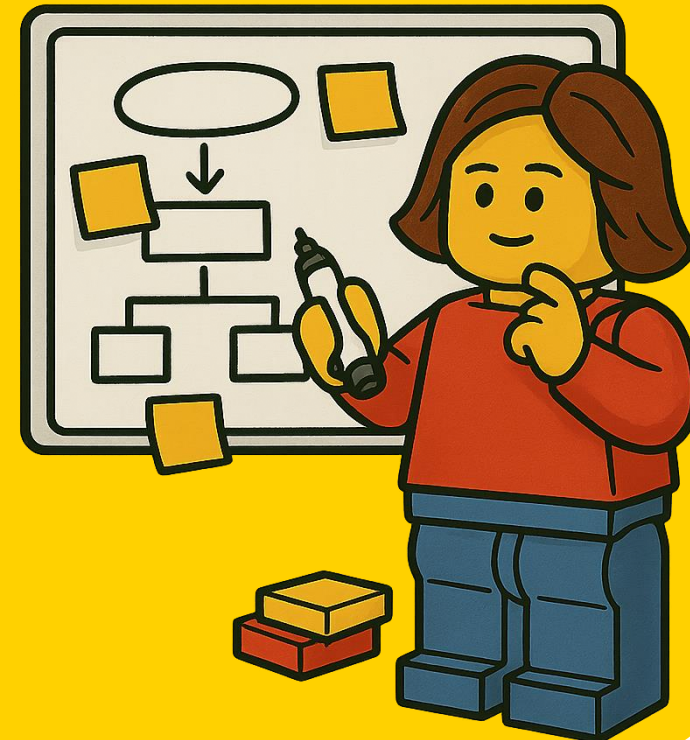
2015



2024

2022

#6

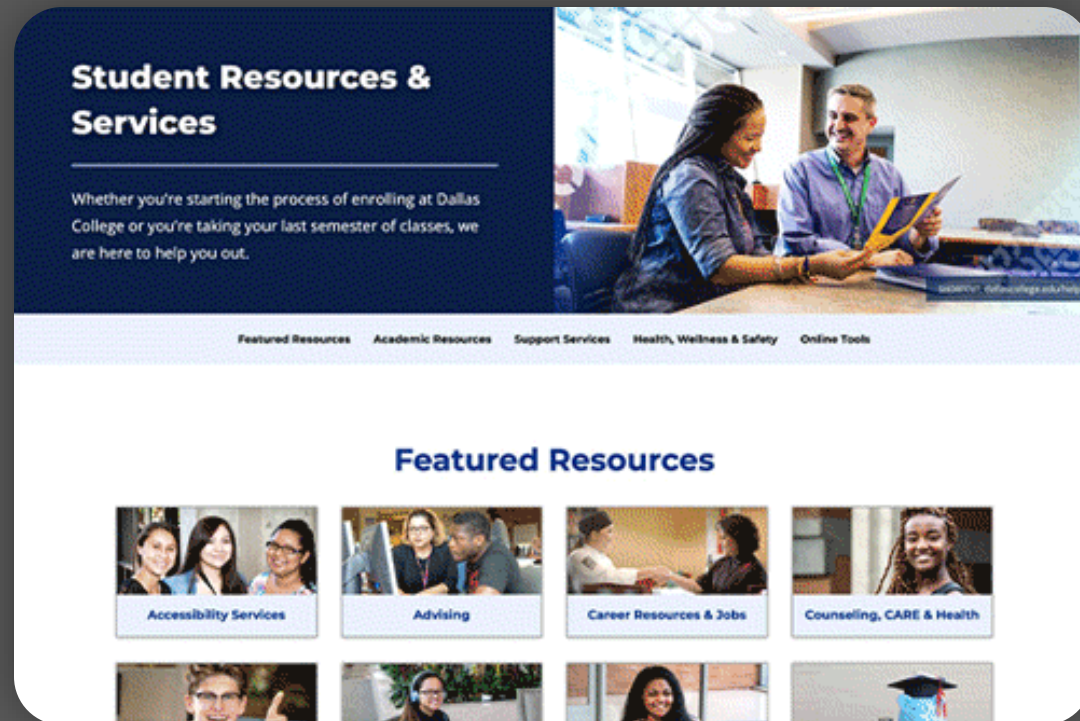


How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2022

2024



Student Resources Directory (2022)

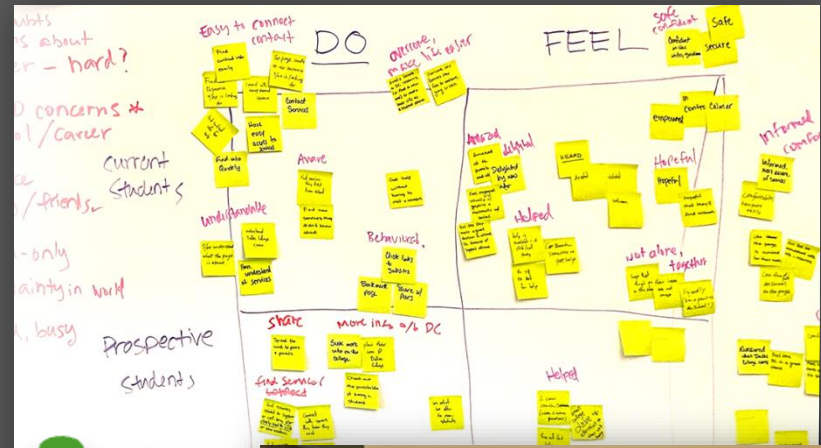
Background

- After One College launch, student resources page was overloaded and difficult to navigate

The Assignment

- Lead new team through full UX redesign
- Restructure the page(s), improve clarity, and center student needs

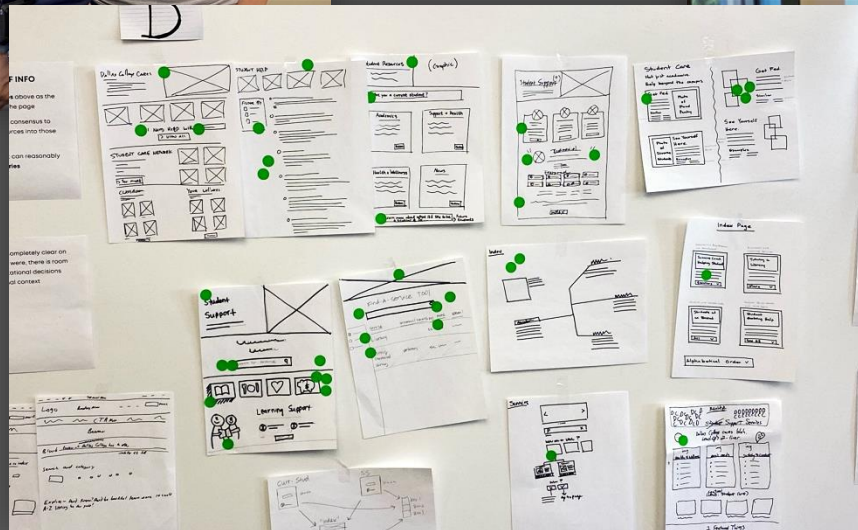
We ran full-day workshop including problem-framing, empathy mapping, and sketching



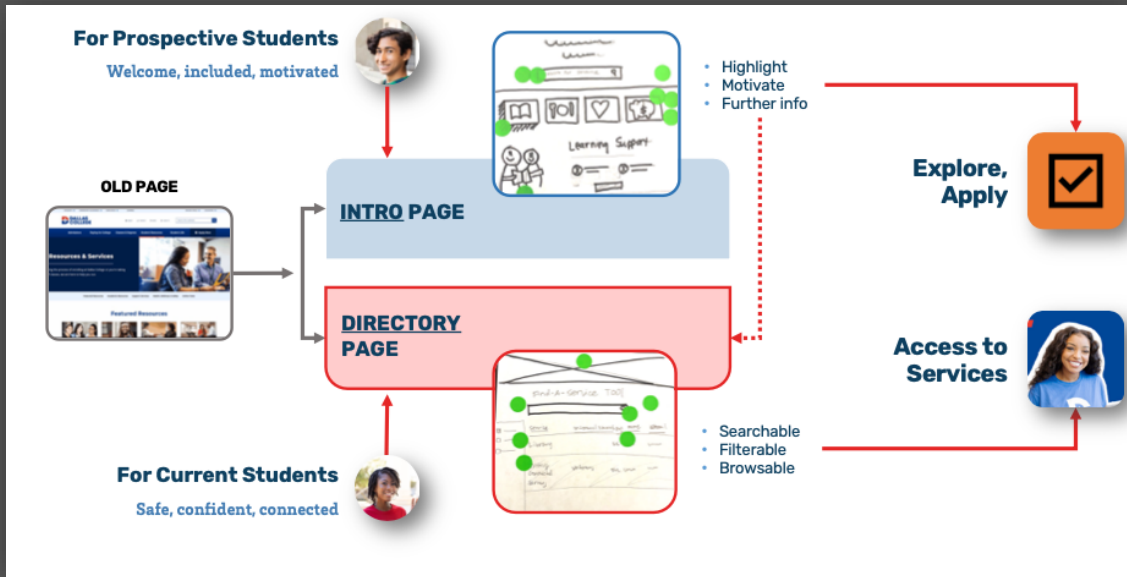
+ SENSEMAKING



+ COLLABORATION



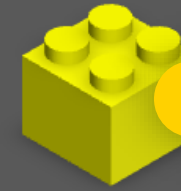
It laid solid foundation for the rest of the project



The screenshot shows a website interface with sections for 'Library', 'Transfer Services', 'Testing Centers', and 'Essential Needs'. A red callout box with the text 'USERS DIDN'T SEE' points to a missing element in the 'Library' section. A green callout box with the text 'MOVED. VISIBLE TO USERS' points to a new element in the 'Essential Needs' section. A yellow callout box with a red brick icon contains the text '+ USABILITY TESTING'.

Outcomes

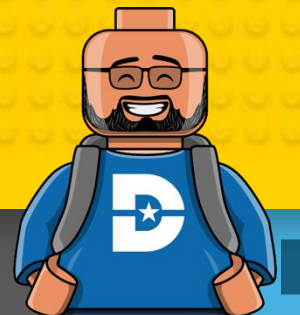
- Better served both current and prospective students
- Team operated at new level of UX maturity
- Increased visits to resource pages by 26%



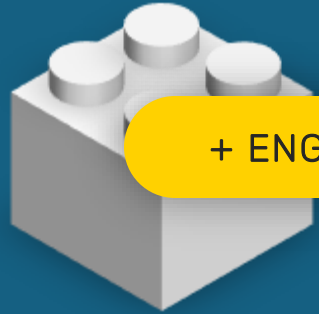
+ FACILITATION

LESSON #6

- When workshops are intentional, well-organized, well-facilitated, they turn endless waffling into clear, quick decisions.



Invite Allies into the Build



+ ENGAGED ALLIES

Who are they?

- Partners who brings insights/context from their area
- Are present, ask questions & shape solutions
- Will advocate for your work and process in their circles

AI-generated illustration

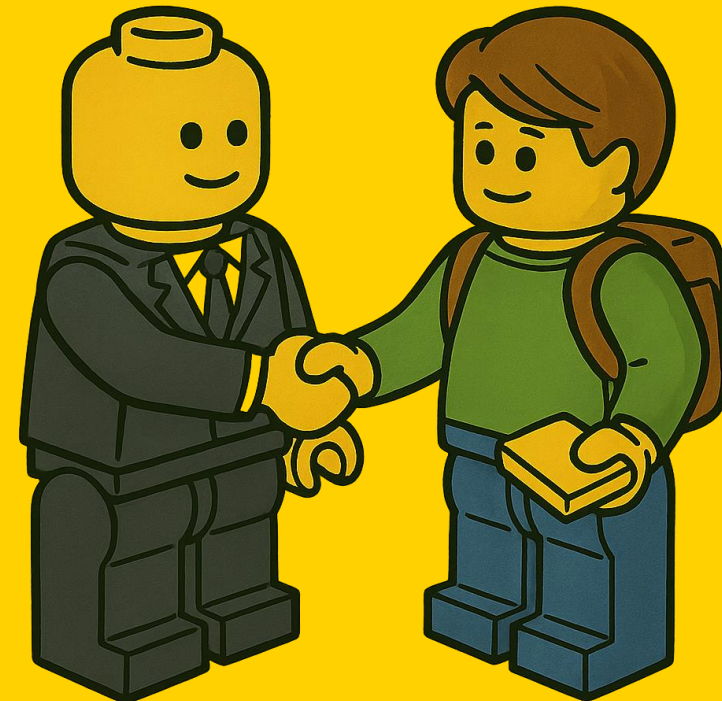
2015



2024

2023

#7

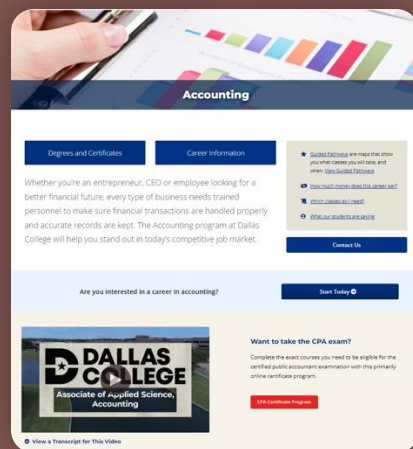
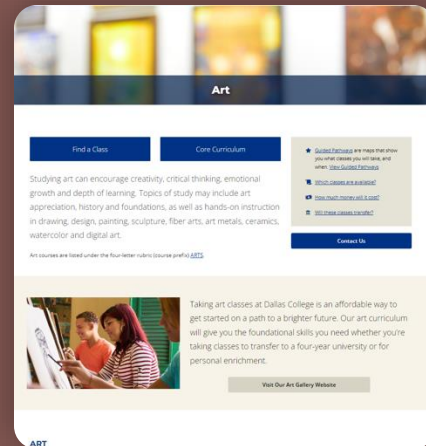
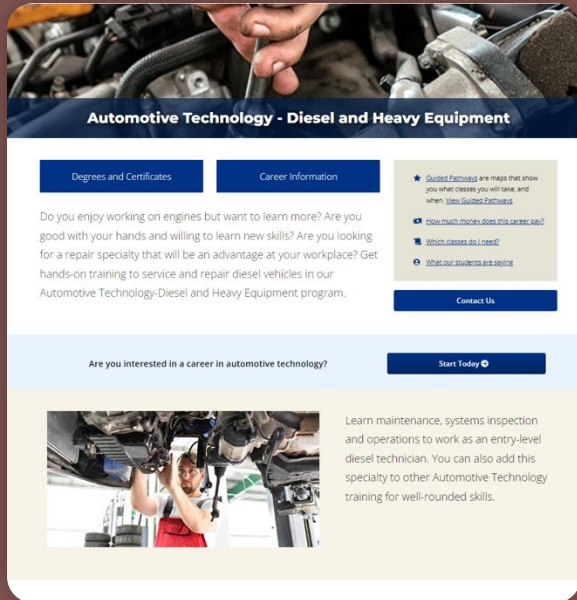


How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2024

2023



Program Pages Redesign (2023-)

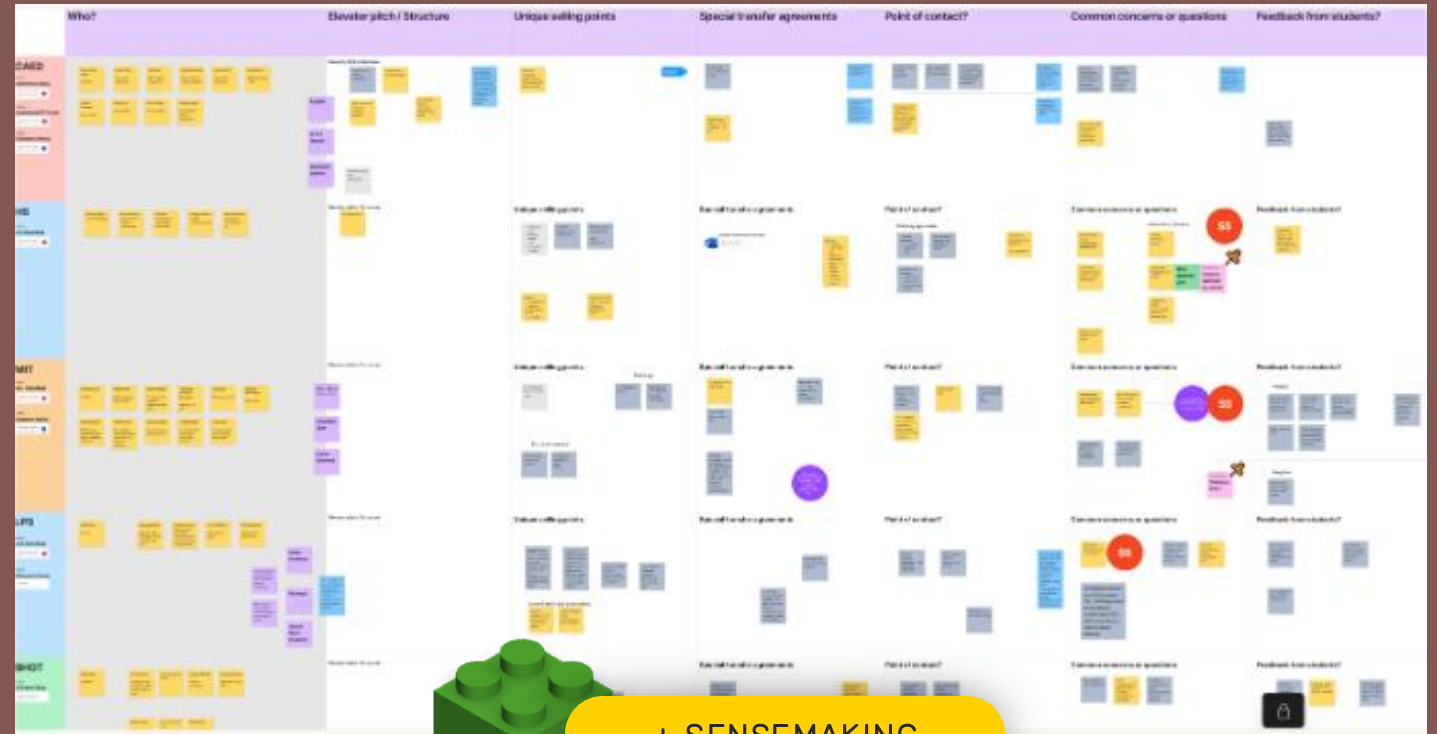
Background

- Well after One College launch, Academics divisions had complete reorg
- New CMS created opportunity to redesign program pages
- Growing need to align programs with career outcomes and transfer clarity

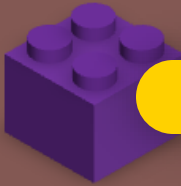
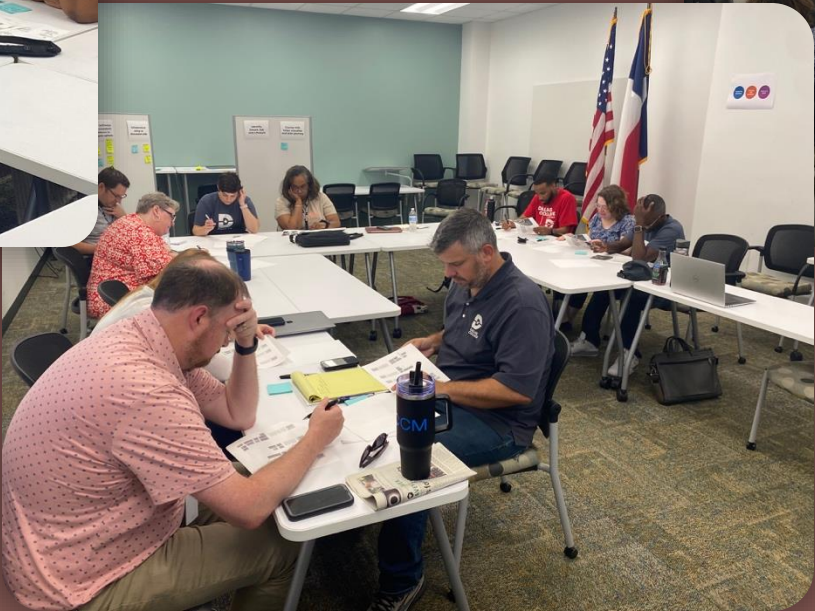
The Assignment

- Lead a strategic redesign process that addressed both content and structure

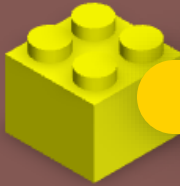
1. Delegated SME interviews across team to deepen understanding
2. Aligned with leadership from all seven schools of instruction
3. Synthesized feedback and input from stakeholders



- 3. Brought in student success dean key ally
- 4. Brought her into a full-day workshop align on direction



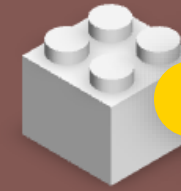
+ COLLABORATION



+ WORKSHOPS

Outcome

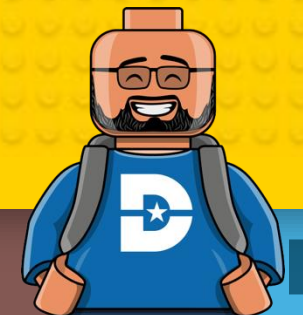
- Foundational decisions were made with broader buy-in
- Even after transitioning out, impact continues to shape direction



+ ENGAGED ALLIES

LESSON #7

- Bringing allies in expands your influence beyond the project.
- You have to be intentional to make this happen.



Digital Art and Design

5 Certificates

2 Associate Degrees

1 Bachelor's Degree

Request More Info

What Can I Study?

I Want To Go to Work

I Want To Transfer

Workforce Certificates

Digital Art and Graphic Design, Advanced
\$2,970 1 year

Digital Art and Graphic Design, Basic

Level 1 Certificates

Animation Certificate
\$2,970 1 year

Digital Interface Design Certificate

Level 2 Certificates

Animation Certificate
\$2,970 1 year

Digital Interface Design Certificate

Digital Art and Design A.A.S.
\$2,970 1 year

Experience Design/User Interface (UX/UI) A.A.S.
\$2,970 1 year

Digital Interface Design
\$2,970 1 year

Digital Photography/Video

Video Game Designers

\$41/hr

Median Salary

369

Job Openings

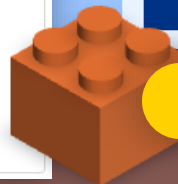
27%⁺

Projected Outlook

Top Skills:

Programming Active Listening Reading Comprehension
Critical Thinking Complex Problem Solving
Judgment and Decision Making Active Learning
Time Management Systems Analysis Writing

+ DESIGN SYSTEMS



Sharing Impact to Unlock Support

2015

2024

2024



+ COMMUNICATING VALUE

#8

What is it?

- Understanding and measuring impact
- Strategically sharing with leaders
- Connecting your work to relevant metrics



AI-generated illustration

How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2024

2024

“This makes me proud to be a Dallas College student.”



+ ENGAGED ALLIES

↓ 8%

DROP IN VISITS* THAT RESULTED IN NO ACTION

Current students are less overwhelmed by page and engage resources more.

↑ 48%

INCREASE IN CLICKS TO KEY ENROLLMENT PAGES**

Prospective students feel more confident about Dallas College after viewing the updated intro page and are engaging further in .

↑ 26%

INCREASE IN OVERALL VISITS TO RESOURCES***

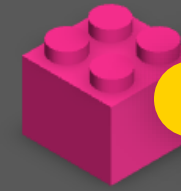
With an increase in visits to all resources pages, students are able to find and access resources better than before.

Part 3:
A Future Vision for UX Design

Digital Experience Team

Outcome

- Leadership gained clearer visibility into team's value
- Helped unlock new funding for research tools and Figma licenses



+ COMMUNICATING VALUE

LESSON #8

- **To influence change you need clarity, data, and the courage to speak up.**
- **Tell the right story.**
- **The more leaders see the value of UX, the more they'll invest in it.**



Appreciate the Full Build



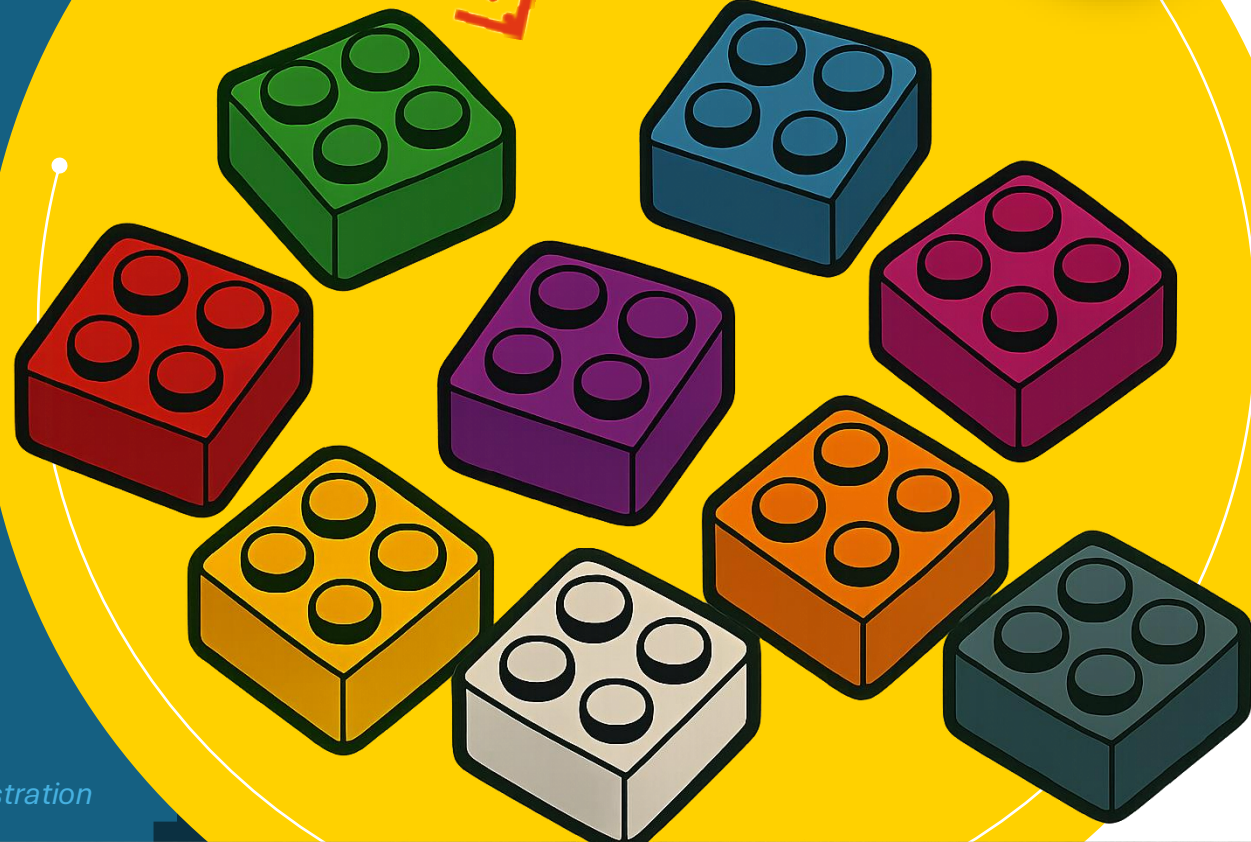
+ REFLECTION

2015

2024

2024-2025

#9



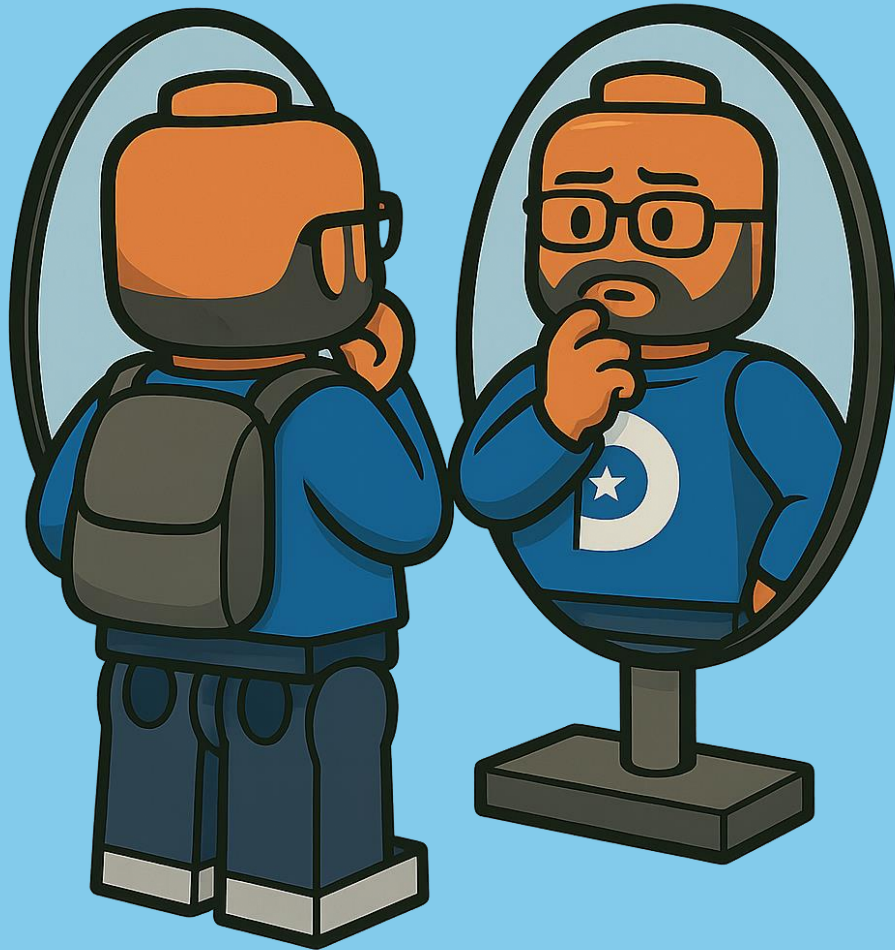
AI-generated illustration

How did I learn this lesson?

2015

2024

2024-2025

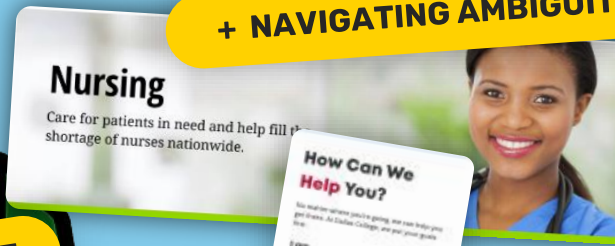
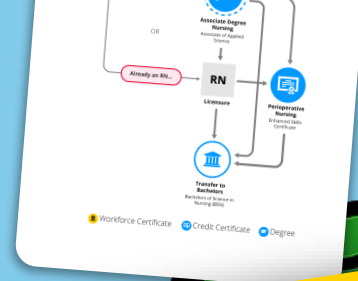
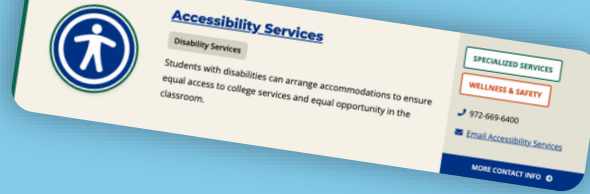


AI-generated illustration

Transitioning Roles/Orgs/Industries (2024-2025)

- After 9 years, I stepped away from Dallas College and moved to new UX role
- At org with greater UX maturity
- I felt intimidated thinking that I'd done for all those years somehow wasn't "real UX?"

- But... I noticed familiar patterns emerging
- I began to see those projects, constraints, and wins for what they really were: true UX building blocks that I had with me all along
- I understood what we were doing was real-world, constraint-bound UX design



+ RADICAL COLLABORATION

+ COMMUNICATING VALUE



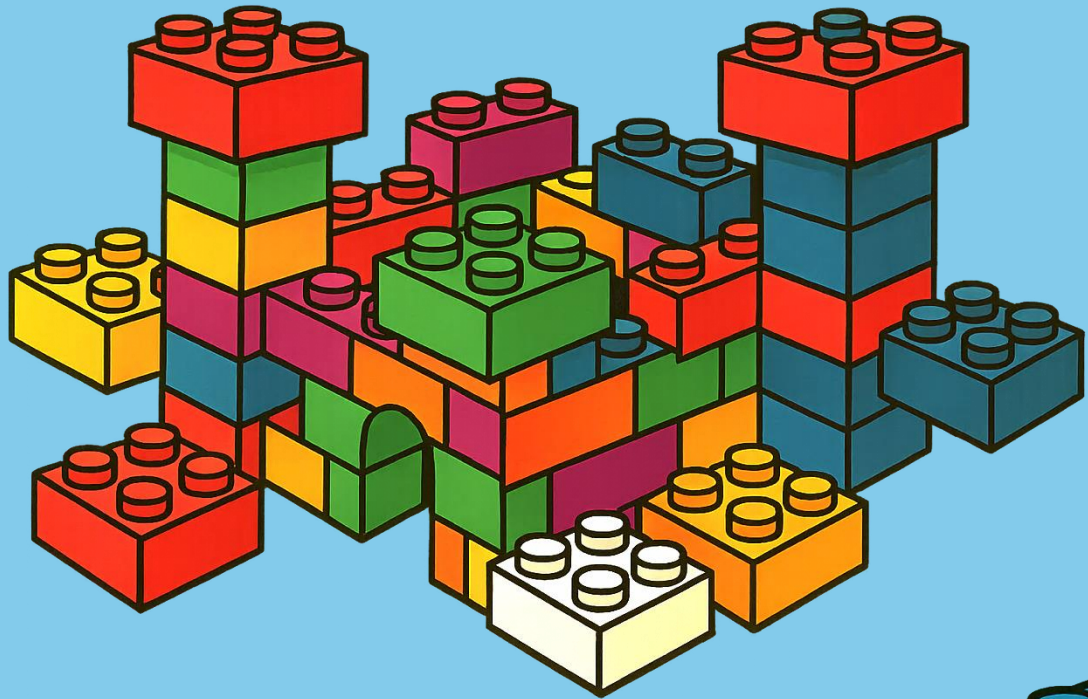
+ SENSEMAKING



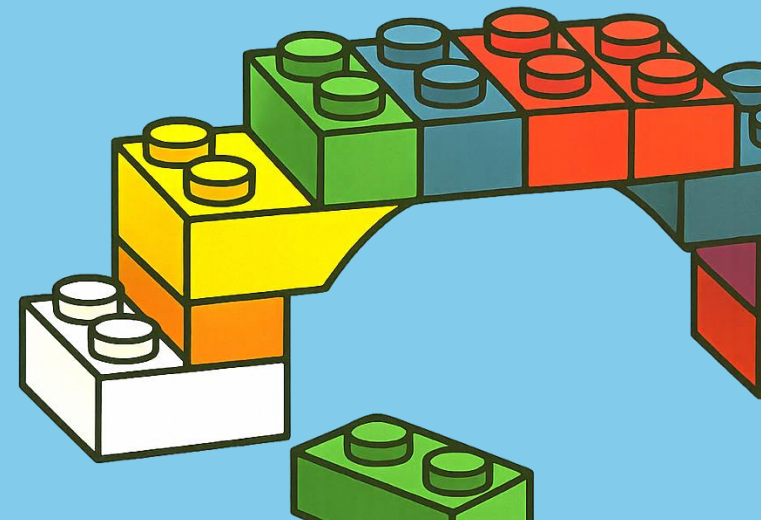
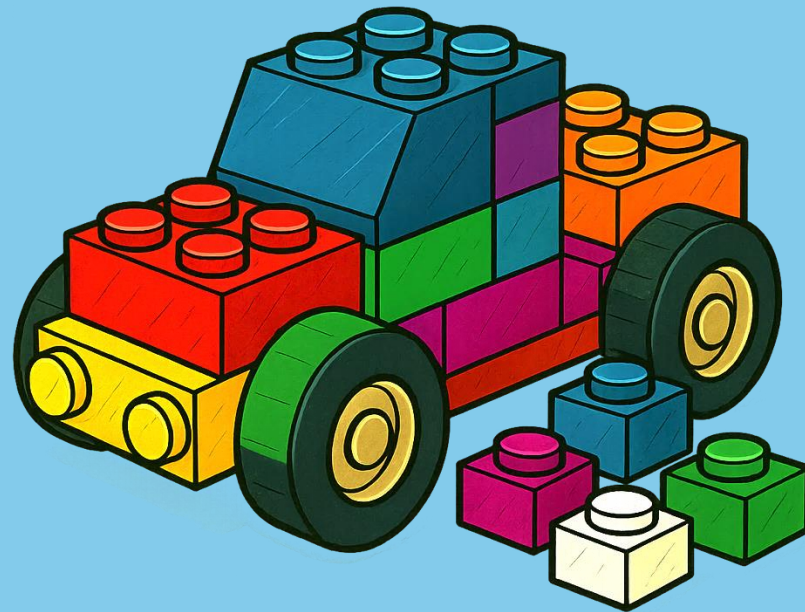
+ USABILITY TEST

AI-generated illustration



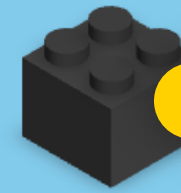


That these blocks can be used to build things much greater than the sum of their parts





AI-generated illustration



+ REFLECTION

LESSON #9

- **You don't need a title to build UX. You need care, curiosity, and the courage to keep stacking.**
- **Look back at what you've already built, and you'll realize: you've been doing UX all along.**

And now, it's your turn to build!

A usability test. A student interview. A workshop.

Start small

Work with constraints

While they may seem to limit you, they can shape the build

Build with what you have!

Don't wait for a title

We're not behind

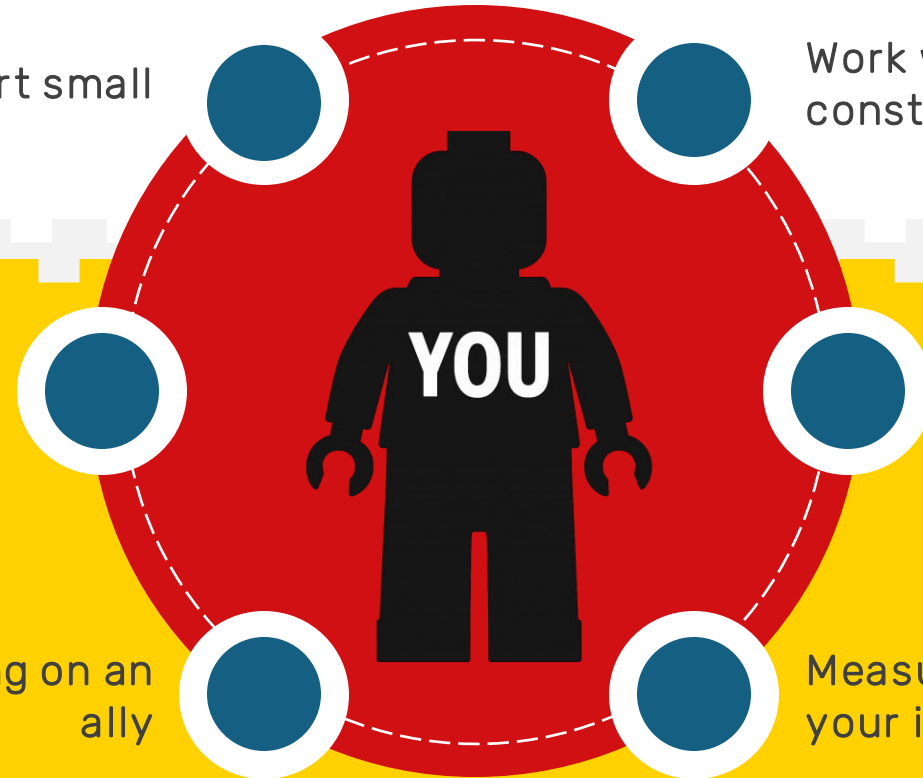
we're already building

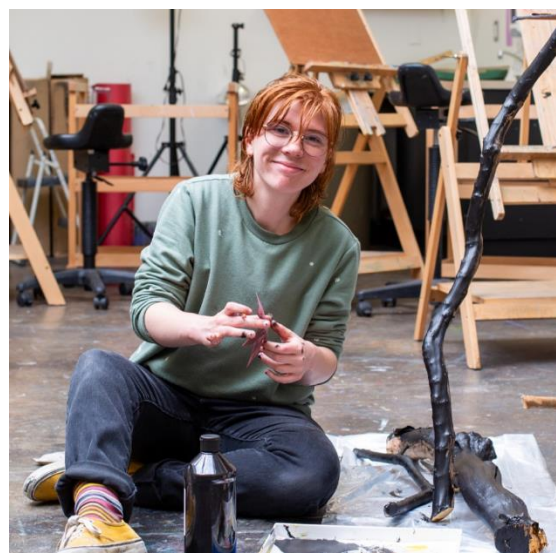
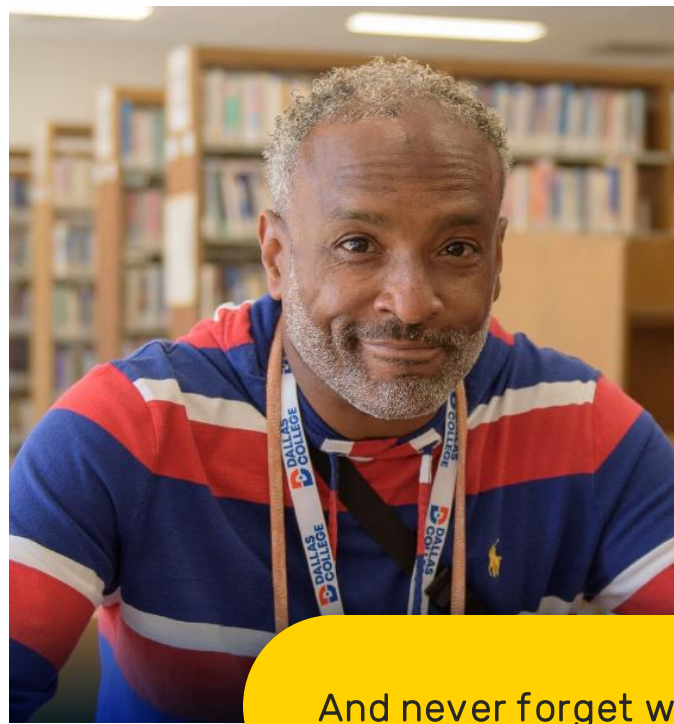
Invite someone new to the process – staff, faculty, student?

Bring on an ally

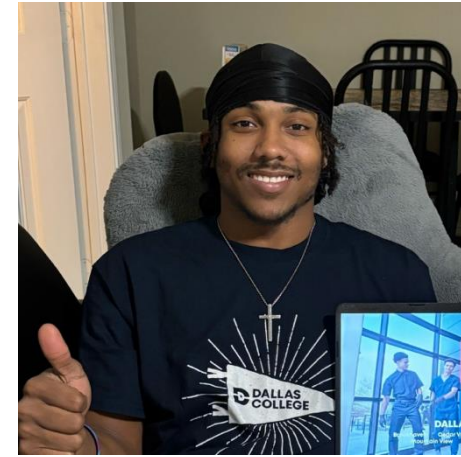
Measure your impact

Connect your work to the KPI's that matter and socialize your impact





And never forget who we're building for.





+ USABILITY TESTING



+ ENGAGED ALLIES



+ FACILITATION



+ DESIGN SYSTEMS



+ NAV. AMBIGUITY



+ SENSEMAKING



+ RADICAL COLLAB.



+ COMMUNICATING VALUE



+ REFLECTION



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LuisMerino.com/9Blocks

