UI/UX Design: Social Wellbeing Application

Conducting user tests and research to deign an application to help students with their social well-being on campus

Overview

This project was a UX/UI design initiative focused on enhancing college students' social well-being. I aimed to explore common social challenges that students face on campus, being responsible for the full design process of this project. There were various stages to this project, starting with user research, followed by ideation, prototyping, and user testing. I actively conducted user interviews, recording and collecting data, synthesizing insights through affinity diagramming, and then creating user personas. The second part was to use these personas to create user scenarios, and move onto prototyping. The final part was the design process, conducting heuristic evaluations and testing to iteratively develop the final prototype. This case study will explain the above steps that I took in more detail.

Goal

My goal was to design an application that promotes and facilitates casual, meaningful social interaction among college students, catering for my two identified personas, the first being new or transfer students, and the second being upperclassmen. I wanted to address feelings of isolation and help students integrate their social lives into their busy academic schedules. The goal was to design a tool with features that enable spontaneous hangouts, event discovery, and an easier way to find new peer connections.

My objectives include:

- Improve students' perceived ease of finding social events, to increase their likeliness of attending events around campus.
- Aiding connection discovery, allowing students to have their club and group events and communications in one place.

Role

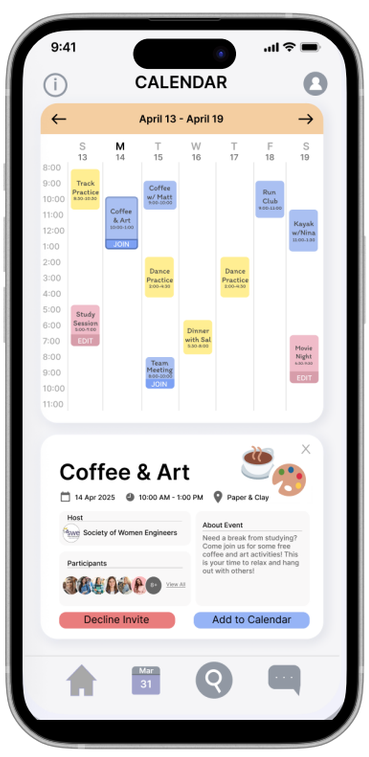
Lead UI/UX Designer & Researcher

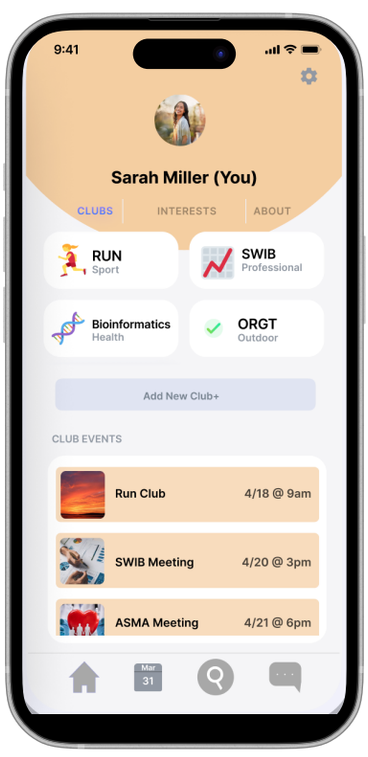
Tools

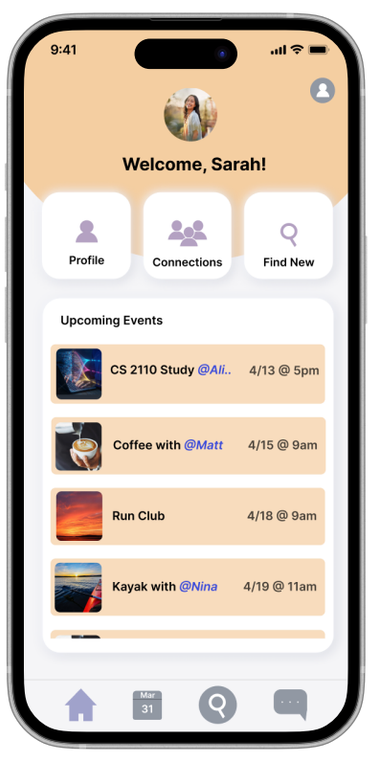
Figma, Canva

Timeline

Jan-May 2025







1 Interviews — 2 Personas — 3 Prototyping & Story Boards — 4 Heuristic Evaluations — 5 Final Prototype

Interviews

During the ideation phase, I conducted qualitative research to build user personas and guide my design decisions. I prepared an interview script with 13 open-ended questions, aiming to explore students' values, social habits, pain points, and motivations for social interaction.

Objectives of the Interviews

- Understand barriers students face in making and maintaining friendships.
- Identify common social activities students value and participate in.
- Learn how students currently discover social events or coordinate hangouts.
- Explore their use of current apps/tools for social planning and the gaps they face.

Interview Methodology

- I conducted a total of 12 user interviews with my target user group
- Interviews were conducted in-person with typed notes.
- Additional supplementary data was collected by distributing a survey to groups (50 responses)
- Participants were college students from different years and social groups, recruited through clubs, class chats, and my sport team.

Insights

- **Newer students** often rely on structured environments (e.g., clubs, classes) to meet others but struggle to build deeper friendships outside those spaces.
- **Upperclassmen** find it hard to maintain friendships due to time constraints and want low-effort, easy-to-coordinate hangouts. They also prefer to hang out with existing friends rather than reaching out to make new connections.
- Many students use clubs and student organizations as a core method of connecting socially, but struggle with event awareness and scheduling.
- Students showed interest in casual, lightweight ways to connect such as meals, coffee outings, or shared interest events.

How the Data was Used

I analyzed these responses using affinity diagramming in Figma, organizing insights from user comments into themes, core issues, and groups. These themes directly informed the creation of two primary personas to shape the ideation process:

- **New/Transfer students** looking to form new connections.
- **Upperclassmen** seeking to maintain existing friendships with limited time.

Personas

The goal of developing personas was to ensure my design decisions were grounded in actual user needs rather than assumptions. Throughout the project, I used personas as reference points to challenge my biases, guide ideation, and validate my solutions. I updated these personas periodically as I received updated insights and feedback. I needed these personas as a way to humanize the qualitative data gathered during user interviews and surveys. Personas helped to form user needs into focused narratives and stakeholder needs.

Information Specified for Personas

- Name, age, and academic standing
- Personality traits and goals
- Key frustrations and challenges
- Typical behaviors related to socialization
- Motivations for engaging in campus life
- Quotes directly drawn or paraphrased from interviewees

Below are my 2 primary personas:

Brooklyn Shannon

Persona 1
Transfer Student

Demographic

Age: 19
Gender: Female
College: Georgia Tech
Year: 2nd Year
Major: Computer Science

Representative Quote

"College is the right time to make new and close friends. "

Archetype

Explorer

Frustrations

Trouble finding clubs on campus

Doesn't know how to continue her friendships with the people she talks in class with

Goals

Goal #1: Find a group of close friends (hopefully a long lasting friendship)

Goal #2: Join social clubs and academic clubs for networking experience

Goal #3: Try to meet with friends from class often (want to continue the friendship after the course ends)

My Story

Brooklyn transferred to Georgia Tech this semester. She is excited to attend the university, but is worried she won't be able to make friends because she is new student. She currently lives in a dorm with 3 other students and tries to hangout with them every weekend. Brooklyn is also trying to find clubs so she can meet people that have similar interest with her like crocheting.

Persona Charactersitics

Extrovert	★★★☆☆	Friendliness	★★★★★
Adventurous	★★★★☆	Organized	★★★☆☆

New students (Underclassmen/Transfer students) trying to find friends in a new school. (Primary)

Max Boyle

Persona 2
Busy Upperclassman

Demographic

Age: 22
Gender: Male
College: Georgia Tech
Year: 4th Year
Major: Business

Representative Quote

"It's hard to plan things with everyone's busy schedules"

Archetype

EveryMan

Frustrations

Takes big effort to plan hang outs

Time constraints lead to neglecting friends

Goals

Goal #1: Maintaining Pre-Existing Friendships

Goal #2: Doing activities related to me and my group's interests

Goal #3: Finding a common time to meet up with my friends that are also busy.

My Story

Max is an upperclassman trying to balance his social and academic life. He has a well-established group of friends he made throughout the years. However, due to his busy schedule with classes and extracurriculars, he found that some relationships are diminishing due to lack of regular socializing. He wants to make more time for his friends and isn't looking out to make more out of his circle.

Persona Charactersitics

Extrovert	★★★★☆	Down-to-Earth	★★★☆☆
Organized	★★☆☆☆	Independent	★★★☆☆

Busy Upperclassmen trying to maintain existing relationships/social life (Primary)

Prototyping & Story Boards

Using Figma, I started with hand-drawn sketches and then turning those into low-fidelity wireframes for initial user testing for 3 different app ideas. For these ideas I defined functional and non-functional design requirements which I included in my prototypes:

Functional Requirements

1. Profile Creation: The ability to create a profile is important for fostering meaningful connections within the app. A well-structured profile will help students to share details about themselves, making it easier for others to get to know them or for them to get to know others. This plays a crucial role in enabling users to find like-minded individuals for socializing, attending events, and forming new friendships. Profiles also act as digital and non-direct introductions that reduce the intimidation and anxiety of reaching out to new people, giving users a glimpse of their backgrounds and interests before starting a conversation.

2. Direct Networking and Messaging: By adding a messaging and notification system, users can easily communicate with others through the app, making networking and connections easier and more efficient. Users can directly reach out to others, starting new conversations that can lead to more friendships, and which will send a direct notification to the other person.

Notifications will also speed up responses, connection requests, and event planning communications. It can be difficult to plan all the details surrounding an event, such as pickup location, meeting time, finding out who can attend, etc. this requires constant messaging back and forth to get everything planned, so having notifications and direct messaging in the app will eliminate having to check other messaging apps for responses, and notifications will help to prevent having to open the app every time you want to see if your friend has responded or not. This keeps interactions active and engagement high, avoiding the need to rely on external platforms for communications related to campus social events.

3. Event Sharing : This feature is essential for helping users discover and organize social gatherings, meetups, or group activities. By allowing students to share events they are hosting or attending, this feature encourages more participation as it allows other users in your groups - and from this would have similar interests and groups - to view and join these events. Additionally, by allowing these events to be pinned and displayed to a main home page, it makes event-finding more efficient and accessible. This is a core functionality as it is helping our defined users view all the events related to their joined groups, eliminating the need to go search across multiple social apps to refer back to and find events for these groups.

Nonfunctional Requirements

1. Simple & Intuitive Interface: The interface should be intuitive and require no more than three clicks to reach the most key features, like finding events, checking availability, or connecting with new people. By creating a frictionless, minimal interface, the app will remove barriers to engagement, allowing students using the app to discover social opportunities without feeling overwhelmed or discouraged.

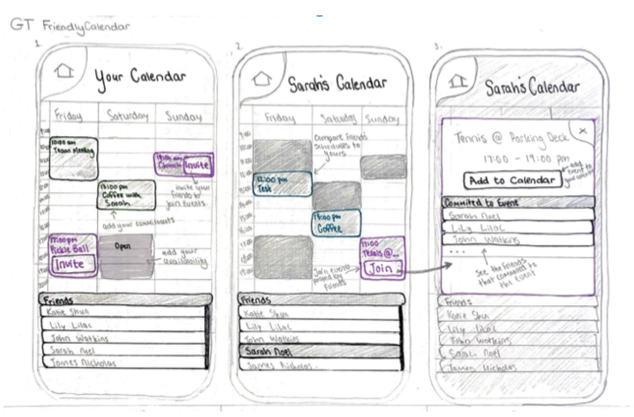
2. Availability: User is able to access it at any time. Students are constantly trying to find events and sometimes look to find plans last minute. Making a mobile app would be giving students accessibility to the app through their most convenient and most used device. By also having no log-in requirement once the user is logged in on their phone, and adding direct messaging, this would also decrease time taken to access the app and people in the app. This meets our requirement as it is making the process of connecting as fast and as easy as possible which is what students need given their busy schedules and limited time to organize and attend events.

I then used the first user tests to develop a first draft of a high fidelity prototype focusing on one app design meeting my design requirements and user needs.

Initial low-fidelity prototype #1: Buddy Finder

Supported Design Requirements: Direct Networking & Messaging & Profile Creation

This prototype allows users to add their current clubs or groups of involvement on campus, and explore these groups having access to the profiles of group members, showing their photo, bio, classes and clubs. The app allows you to easily reach out using direct messaging to message members within your groups. You can start chats, as well as seeing the latest events posted by your organizations.

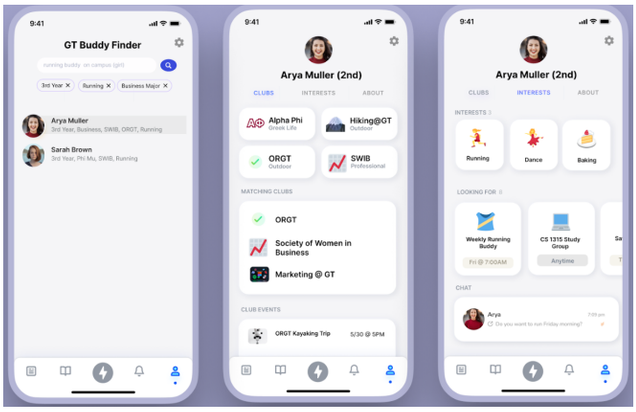


Initial low-fidelity prototype #2: Friendly Calendar

Supported Design Requirement: Event Sharing

This lets you have a shared calendar with your close friends, syncing your schedule with theirs and adding your availability and commitments, as well as event invites within the calendar. This shows you availability so that friends can reach out, and grey areas for the times that you have commitments. Committing to shared events as seen in the third frame automatically adds you to the event and notifies your friend organizing the event.

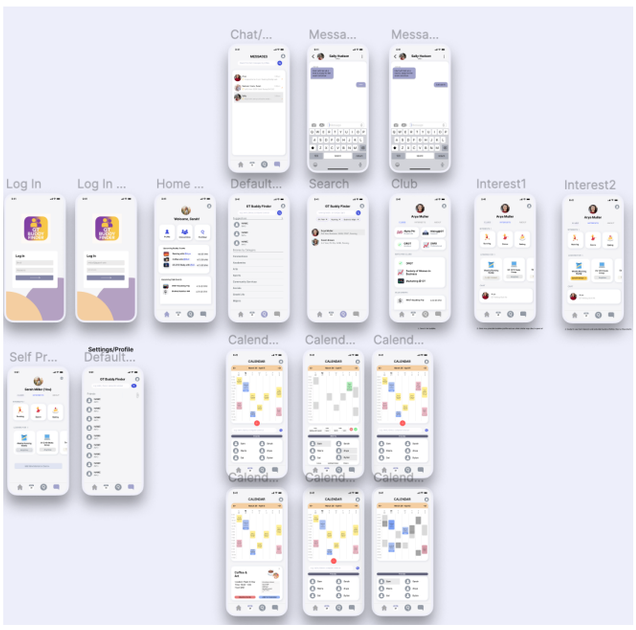
Supported Design Requirement:



Initial low-fidelity prototype #3: Buddy finder (Version 2)

Profile Creation & Networking

This prototype allows students at a college to create profiles with their club and school involvements, activity interests, and general information (name, year, major, where they live, etc.). Users can connect with their close friends and network with new friends within their college organization. This addresses the needs of the majority of users surveyed who indicated they wanted to find activity and study buddies on campus while also addressing the concerns of users who had varying interest in reaching out to new people. On the first page, users can search for activity or club buddies and filter based on how far of a connection they want to establish. The user then clicks on the individual's profile and sees which club activities/events they have upcoming together. The user can also look up individual profiles based on what they're looking for, i.e a weekly running buddy, a study group, etc. The user can reach out to an individual via their profile and directly respond to posts and coordinate activities. To address the need for academic support and study/activity groups on campus indicated in research, the prototype will also support group chat features, either in-app or linked externally (iMessage, GroupMe).



High Fidelity Prototype #1

My prototype based on a combination of my initial wireframes.

Heuristic Evaluation

This evaluation was conducted based on Nielsen's 10 usability heuristics, asking users to rate each heuristic on a scale from 0-5 from 'Not Severe or No Issue'(0) to 'Significant UI Issue'(5). With these ratings, 3 of the 10 had a severity rating of 2 or above, which are addressed below.

Issues

During the heuristic evaluation, evaluators noted the lack of safeguards for user actions, such as confirming events or friend requests without confirmation messages or warnings (e.g., double booking). Additionally, they emphasized the need for "exits" to allow users to cancel events or remove friends easily.

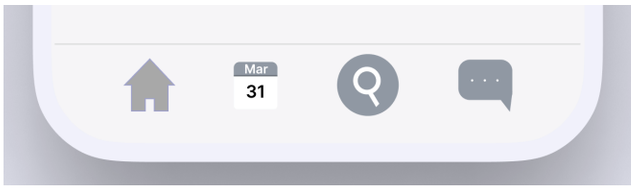
Issues around user control included limited navigation and edit capabilities, requiring users to restart from the beginning to reach certain pages. Suggestions included allowing calendar visibility controls and reinforcing freedom through more intuitive navigation and edit options.

Solution Response

1. Enhanced Error Prevention by adding confirmation pop-ups for critical actions.
2. Improving Help & Documentation with tutorials and a help desk.
3. Increase User Freedom by ensuring smoother navigation and edit capabilities throughout the app.

Final Prototype

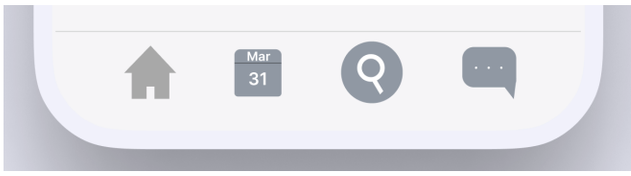
Our final prototype was based on getting more user feedback. Below are some changes made to the prototype based on physical user feedback.



1st Prototype: Navigation Bar

Feedback: Calendar Icon Does Not Match

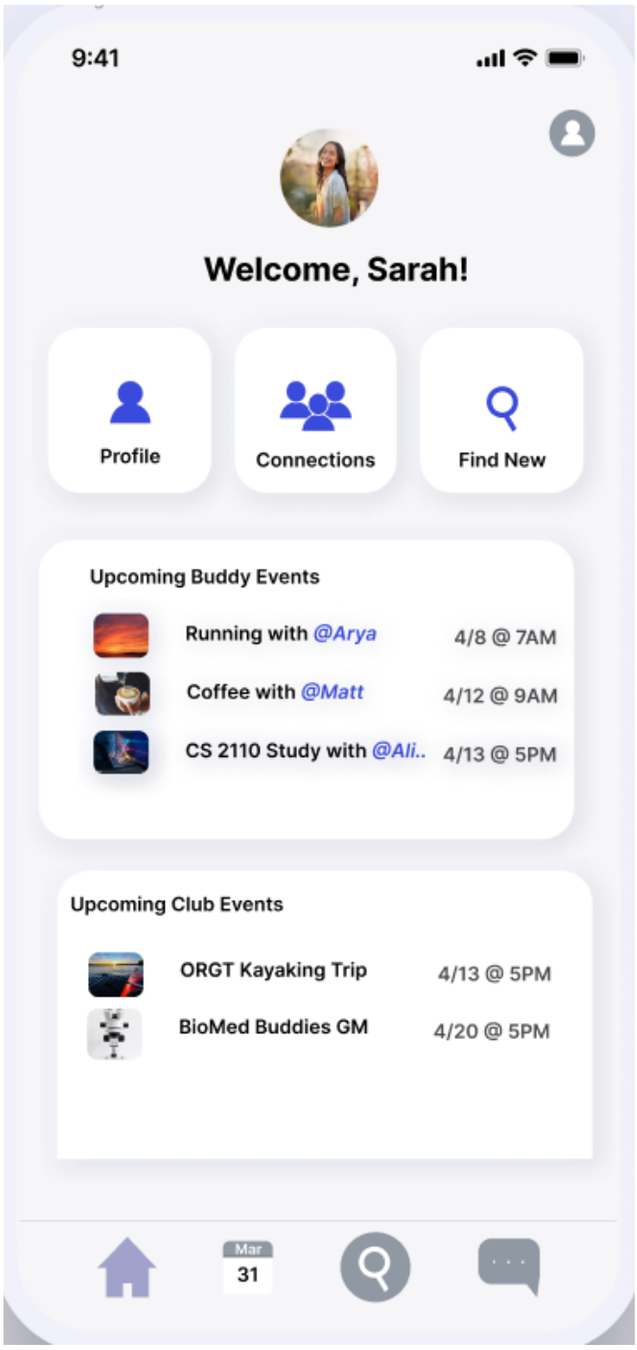
The user said that the calendar icon doesn't match the relating icons in the navigation bar.



Final Prototype: Navigation Bar

Iterated Design

I changes the color tones to match the other icons, making it a more solid color created more harmony between these icons.



1st Prototype: Home Page

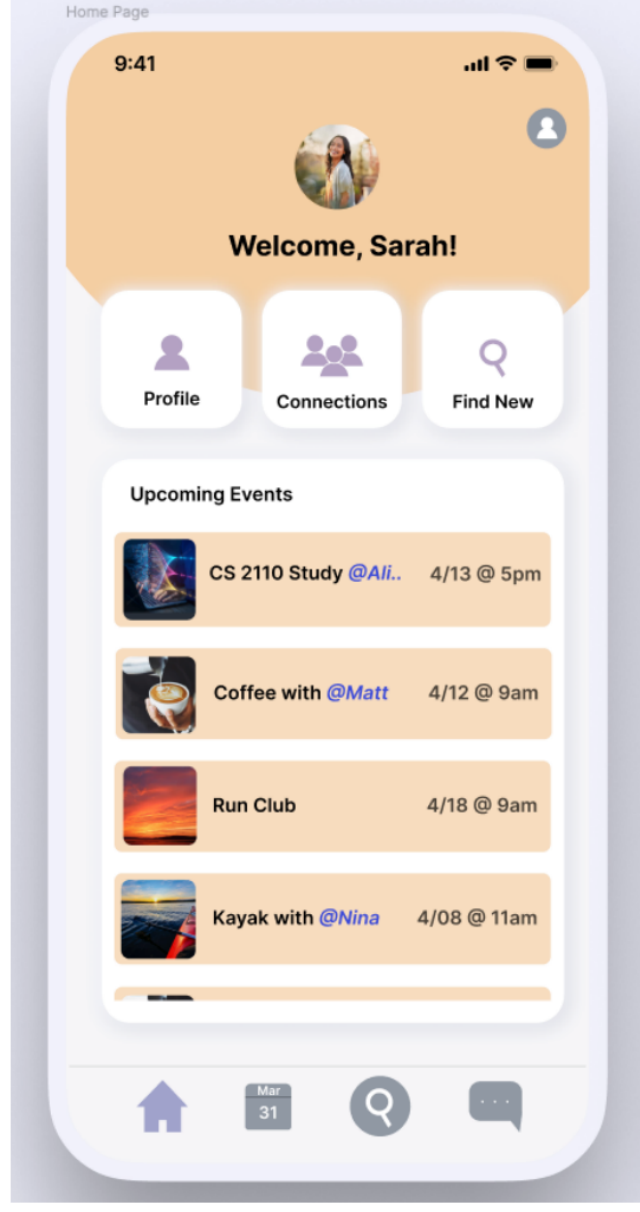
Original Design: Home Page

The colors are off and the font size is too small, so I worked on making this page feel more interactive and eye catching since it is the opening page and representation of the application.

The iterated version can be seen below.

Iterated Design: Home Page

The original home page was bland and the colors did not match the rest of the interface. Thus, I used shades from our color palette and incorporated them into the home page. This application is designed for students, so I found that subtle, bright colors would be suitable.



Final Prototype: Home Page