

XX University Admissions

Usability Report



DESIGN & USABILITY CENTER

Abigail Swain
Fiona Tranquada
Susan Mercer
Bill Albert

July 29, 2010

Please note that the university's name has been removed from this report at their request. Images of the website have also been removed to preserve their anonymity. Rough mockups are occasionally displayed instead to provide some context, but these should not be taken as accurate representations of the site's structure.

Study Goals

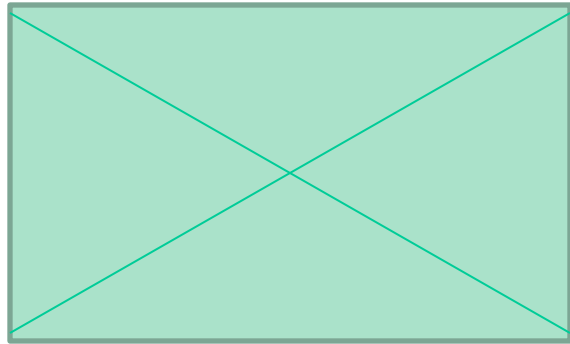
- Evaluate the usability of the new Undergraduate Admissions homepage
- Evaluate the usability of email templates and gauge user preference
- Measure prominence of action items using eye-tracking data

Test Structure

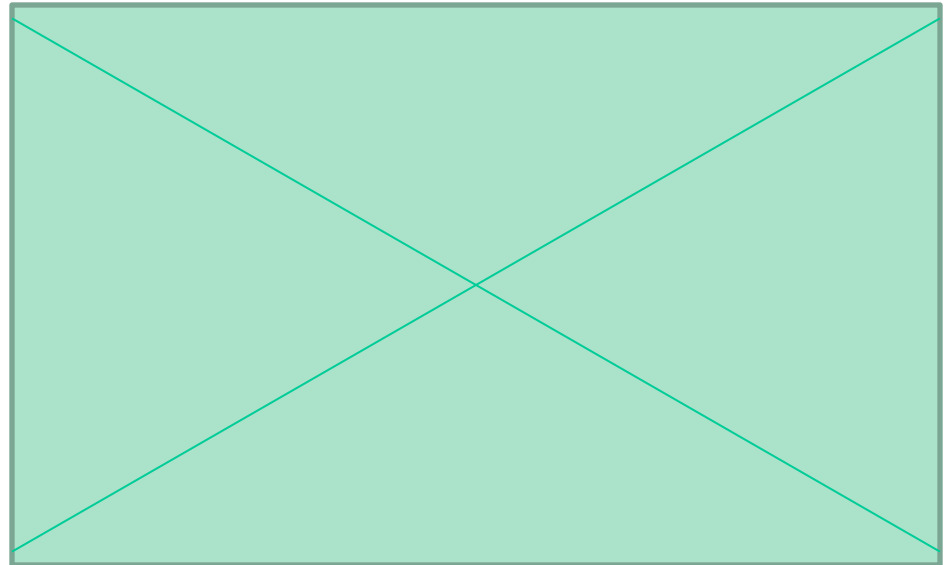
- 13 participants at Bentley University Design and Usability Center, July 21-23, 2010
 - 7 male, 6 female
 - 4 rising juniors, 9 rising seniors
 - 12 A/B students, 1 B/C student
 - *See Appendix for more participant details*
- Test sessions were 1-on-1, lasted 60 minutes each
- Sessions were video recorded
- Study structure (*see Appendix for a detailed list of tasks*)
 - Email templates 1c and 3a
 - Eye tracking for 15 seconds
 - 4 tasks with each template
 - Live Undergrad Admissions Site
 - Eye tracking for 15 seconds
 - Up to 12 tasks

Intent and Limitations of this Report

- Participants viewed the website in a widescreen monitor which may not reflect the display of typical users.



Top: 1024x768 common monitor dimensions



Right: 1680x1050 study monitor dimensions

- Participants viewed the emails in a web browser and out of the context of an email client, with all content visible above the fold. This study cannot provide recommendations about the particular usability issues that may be encountered with they way email clients display the emails.
- All email tasks presuppose that the user will open the email, rather than leave it unopened in the inbox.

What Worked Well

- Overall design of the emails and website was described as “exciting”, “cool” and “friendly”
 - These designs compared well to “boring” emails and websites of other colleges
- Participants found it easy to find the information they were looking for
- Participants spent a fair amount of time reading the content of the emails and website
- The student stories in the emails and website banner strongly resonated with participants
- Participants responded very positively to the interactive content, namely the videos, social networking links, and the virtual tour
- Participants preferred the design of the 1c email template to the 3a template, and found the “Schedule a Visit” button easier to find

Opportunities for Improvement

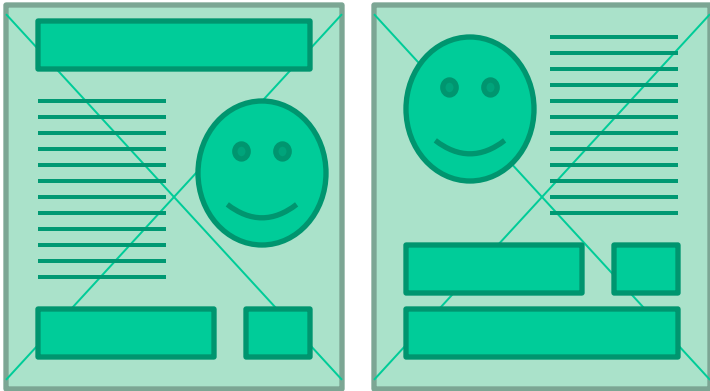
- Amount of text in the e-mails was seen as long, and some action items went unnoticed
- Banner at the top of the website was engaging, but scrolling behavior remained hidden
- Participants were able to get into specific areas of the site to complete tasks, but interior pages often failed to highlight the next step

General Recommendations

- Use content copy to fullest extent, keeping it short and drawing users attention to desired actions
- Combine successful elements from the two e-mail design templates, and fine-tune font size and layout
- Make the scrolling feature of the website banner more obvious
- Provide action buttons to emphasize desired behaviors on interior pages of the website

The rest of the report details specific findings and recommendations for the e-mails and website.

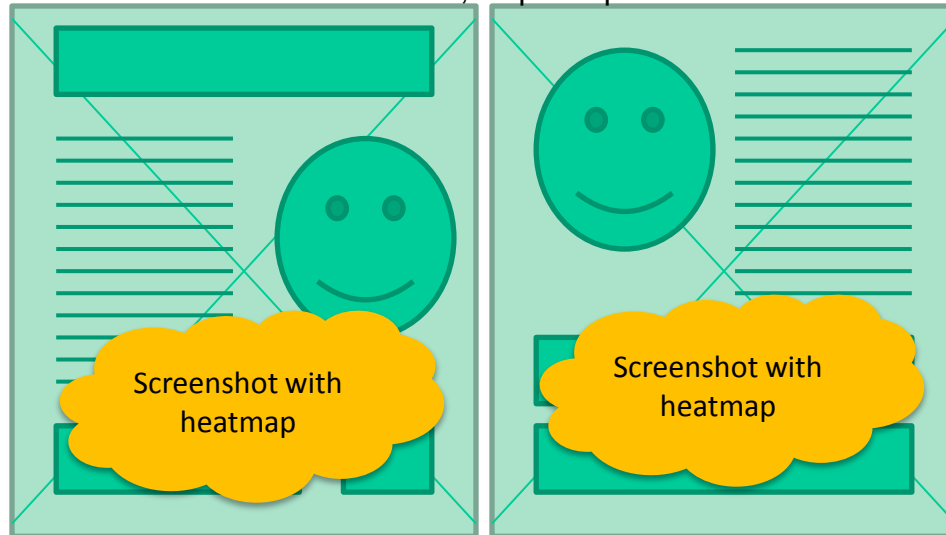
Detailed Findings: Emails



E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings

Summary of Findings

Whole15 s., all participants



3a Template

1c Template

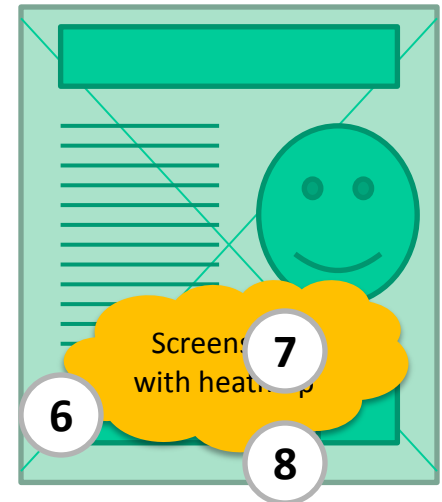
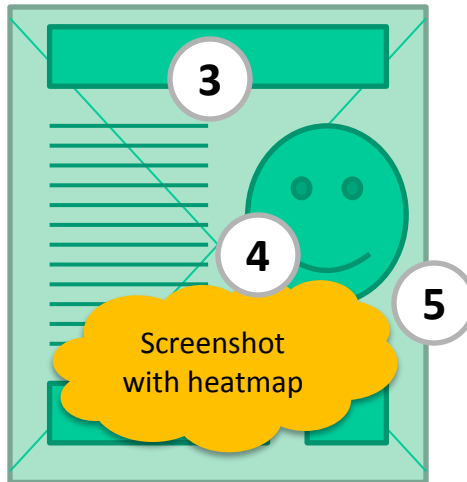
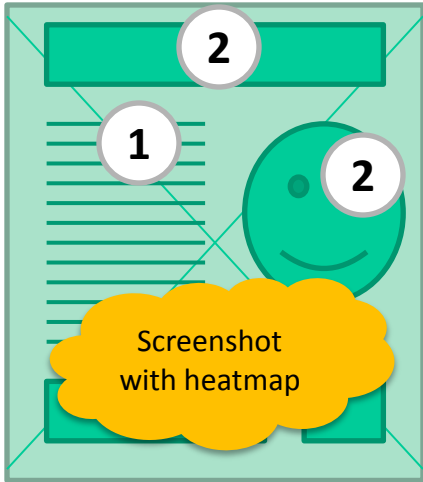
Findings:

- Compelling content and personal details drew participants' attention
 - Around 70% of time was spent looking at main content
 - Student name and details got relatively high amount of attention
- Elements at the top of the page received earliest and most attention

See appendix for more heat maps by gender and time window

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings

Template 3a



Order of focus:

1 Main Content

2 Student Photo
XX Univ. Logo

Participants spent 68-75%
of the time looking at the
main content area *

3 Schedule a Visit

4 Student Name

5 Video Link

* No other region of interest attracted
more than 5% of dwell time

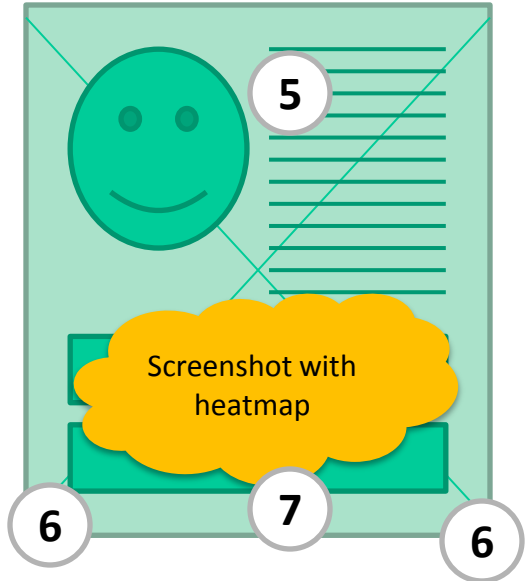
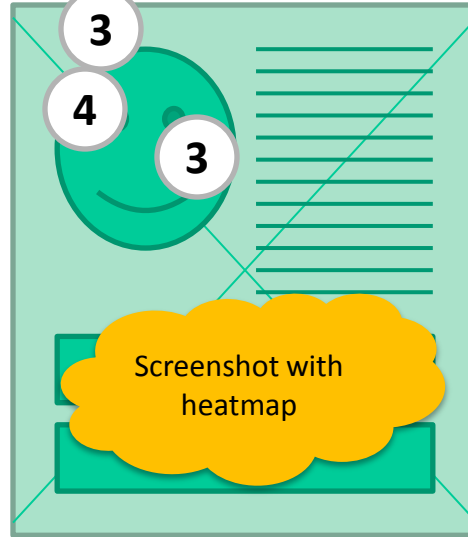
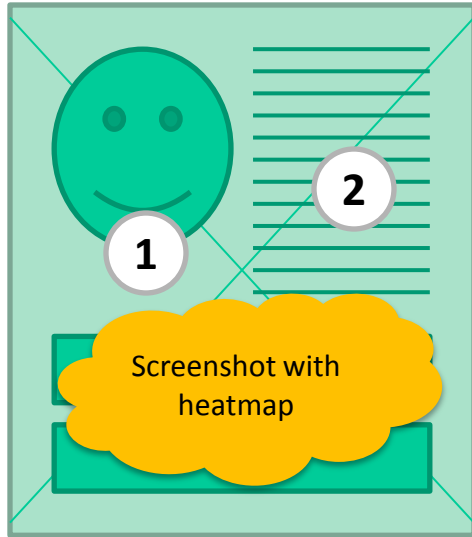
6 "Success" title

7 Student Details (Major, Minor)

8 Facebook Link

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings

Template 1c



Order of focus:

1 Student Photo

2 Main Content

3 Student Details
"My Story" Title

4 Student Name

5 Video Link

6 XX Univ. Logo
Facebook Link

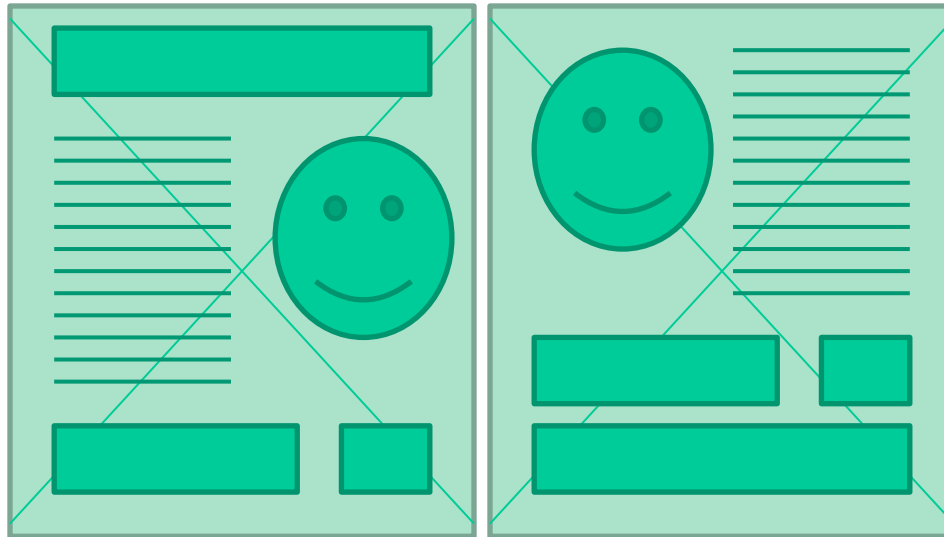
7 Schedule a Visit

Participants spent 68-70% of the time looking at the main content area *

* No other region of interest attracted more than 5% of dwell time

See appendix for more details about the regions of interest

Overall Impressions



3a Template

1c Template

Positive Findings:

- Participants noticed the action items quickly and easily
 - Schedule a Visit, Video, Facebook
- Participants found the layout and colors visually pleasing
- Participants liked that emails provide more than just text, especially the videos and the link to Facebook
- All participants who receive emails from colleges (9) preferred the XX Univ. emails because they were better designed and had more interesting content

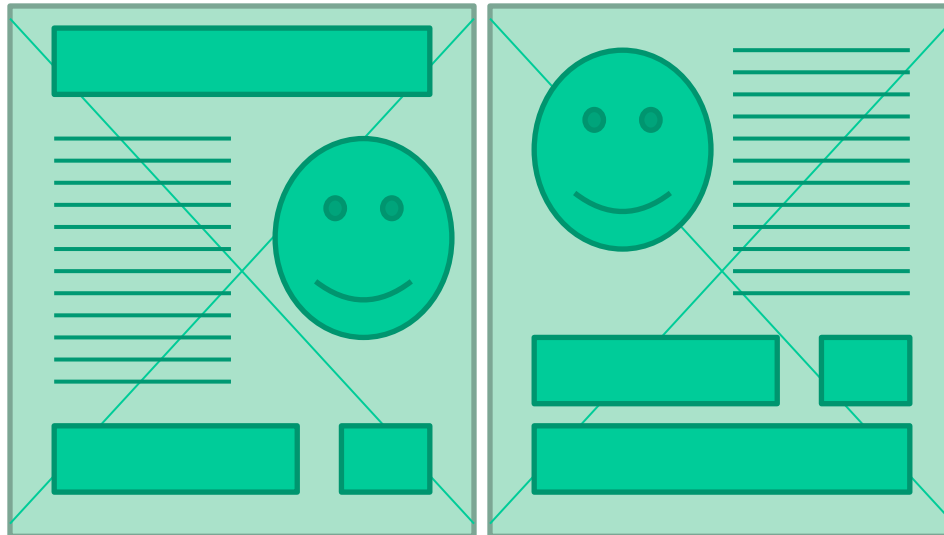
“Other schools are just, like, boring emails.” (P9)

- Participants connected with the content (12 participants mentioned liking the real students’ experiences)

“I like these better because they are real people’s stories, rather than just information about the school. So I can connect better.” (P11)

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

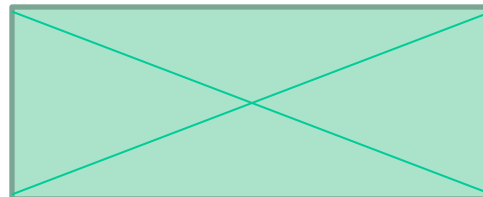
Overall Impressions



3a Template

1c Template

Possible action button linking to Admissions site.



Areas for improvement:

- 4 participants reported that there was too much text to read
- 3 participants noted that the body text was slightly too small
- 8 participants thought the emails lacked a way to get more information about XX Univ., e.g. link to site, contact info for sender, info about campus, info about majors/minors

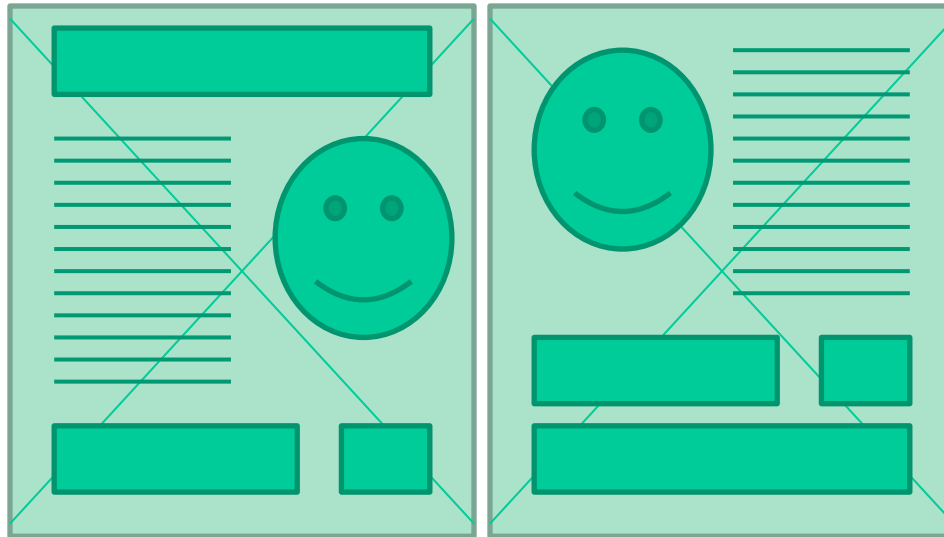
Overall Recommendations:

- Slightly increase the font size for body text
- Keep an eye on the amount of text in each email. Consider breaking up paragraphs with headings, bullets and other formatting changes
- Consider making link to Undergraduate Admissions site more like an action button, see left
- Add a reference to one key action in the content copy

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

E-mails: Qualitative Findings

Overall Impressions - Preference



3a Template
3 participants
preferred this one

1c Template
9 participants
preferred this one

(1 participant had no preference)

Why Prefer Template 1c?

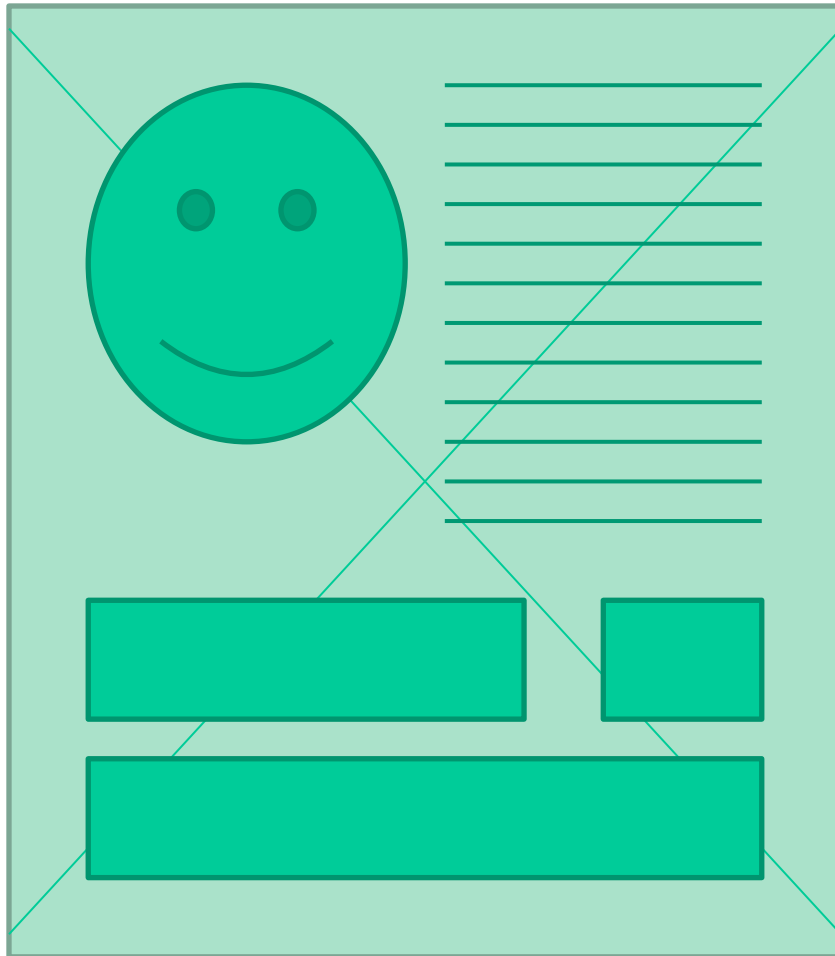
- More colorful, design is more attractive
 - In particular, the grey background which made it look more “exciting” (3 participants)
- The message about being “unsure” and “overwhelmed” resonated strongly
- Title (“Discover My Story”) reflected email content; 3a Template lacked true title
- Schedule a Visit button stood out more

However...

- Video link was more noticeable on the 3a Template because of position on page and color contrast (4 participants)
- 2 participants preferred black text on white background
- 2 participants preferred having the main content text on the left

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Template 1c

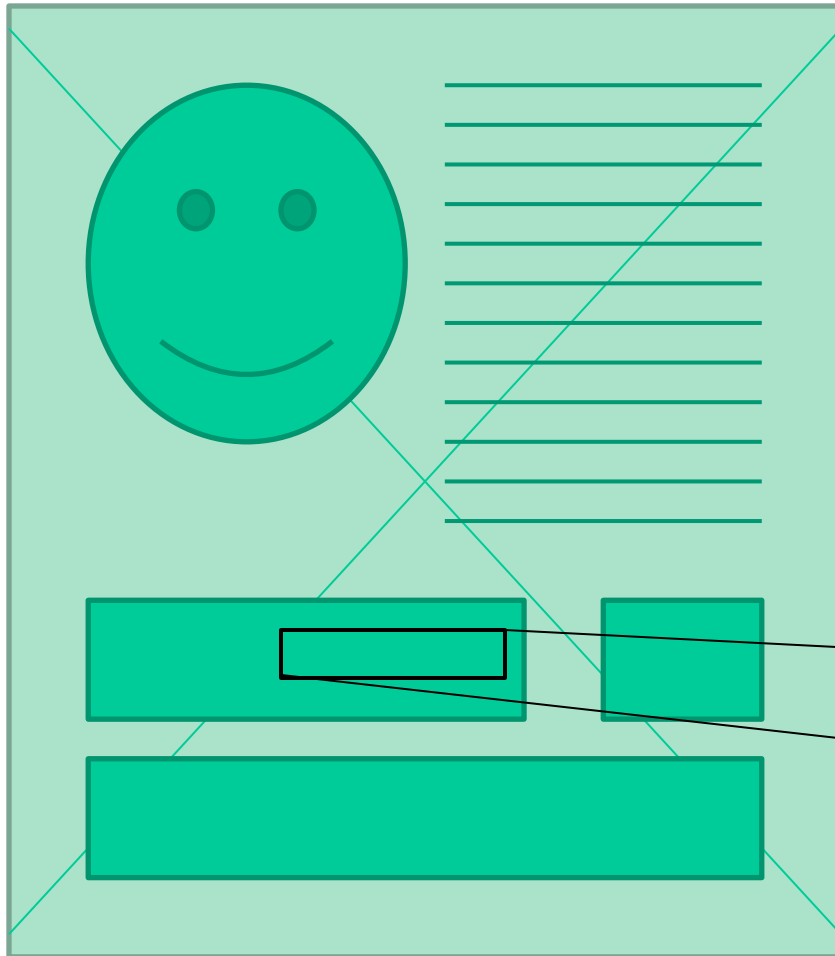


Findings:

- Participants liked the design: good colors, simple, organized layout
- Participants reported that they noticed the picture first
- What would participants do with the email?
 - Read it (8 participants)
 - Schedule a visit (4 participants)
 - Watch video (4 participants)
- **Scheduling a visit task:** 10 found the button
 - 4 participants reported that their first instinct would be to go to the website to schedule a visit
 - 2 reported that they did not see the button
- **Watch video task:** 12 found the video button, 1 did not see it
- **Connect on Facebook task:** all participants found the Facebook link

E-mails: Qualitative Findings

Template 1c

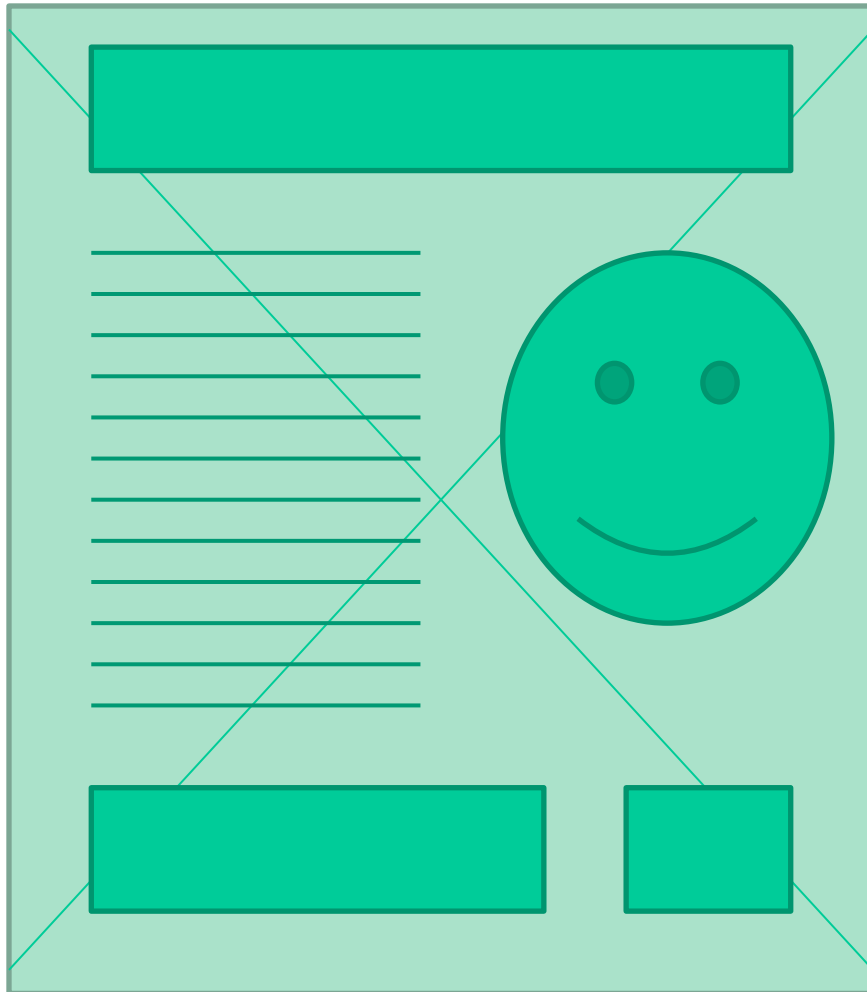


Recommendations:

- Consider increasing font size
- Consider using the video button design from the 3a template in this template as well, reposition video link next to image

E-mails: Qualitative Findings

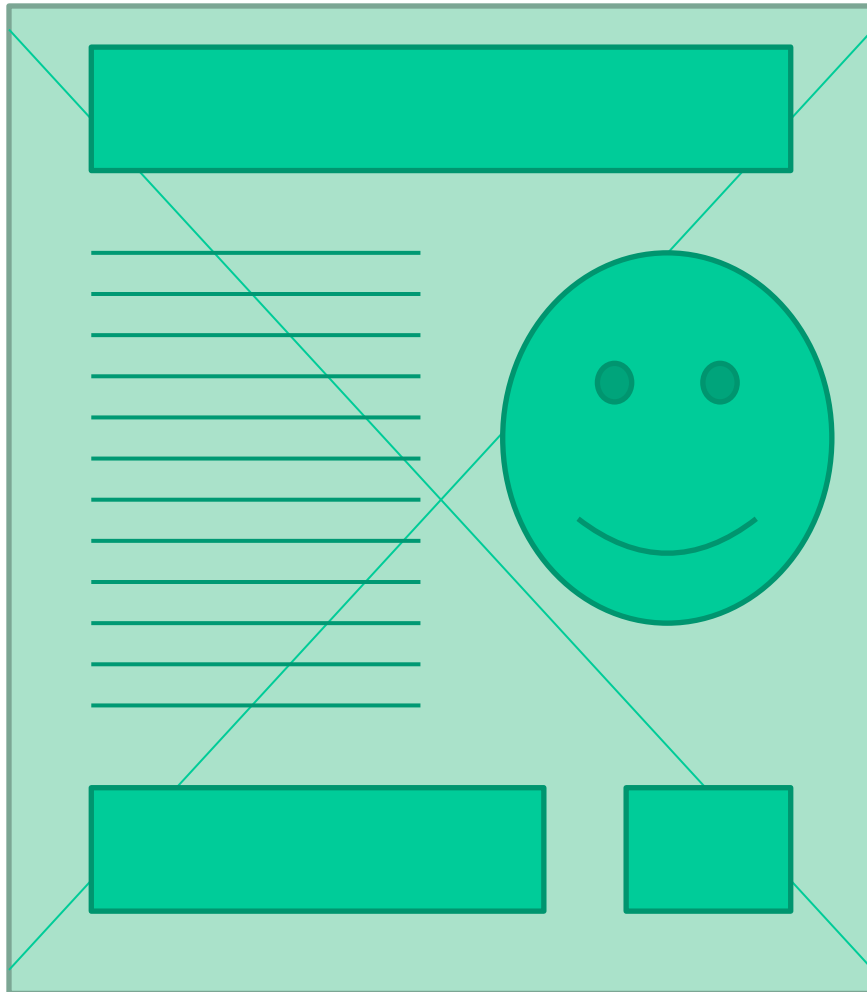
Template 3a



Findings:

- Participants liked the colors and the black-on-white text (in contrast to 1c Template)
- Participants reported that they notice the picture and the word “Success” first
- What would participants do with the email?
 - Read it (11 participants)
 - Watch video (6 participants)
 - Schedule a visit (1 participant)

Template 3a



Findings, *continued*:

- **Scheduling a visit task:** 8 found the button
 - 3 of the remaining 5 did not think that Schedule a Visit was a link until prompted
 - 1 participant would schedule a visit through the XX Univ. website, 1 would schedule through Facebook
 - 1 participant did not understand task
- **Watch video task:** 12 found the video button, 1 did not see it
- **Connect on Facebook task:** 12 found the Facebook link, 1 did not see it

Template 3a

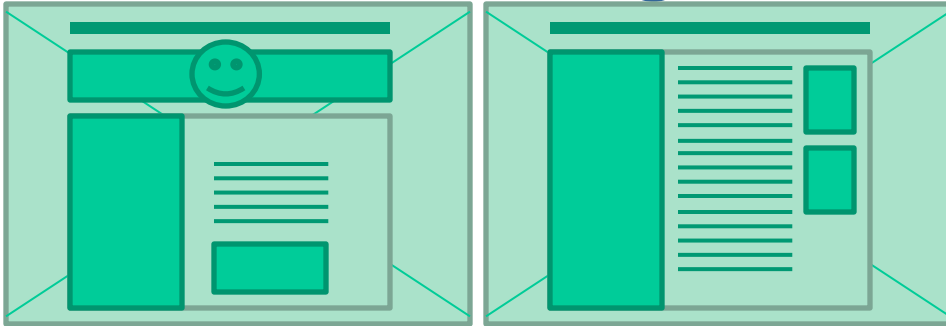


Possible design modifications to the 3a Template

Recommendations:

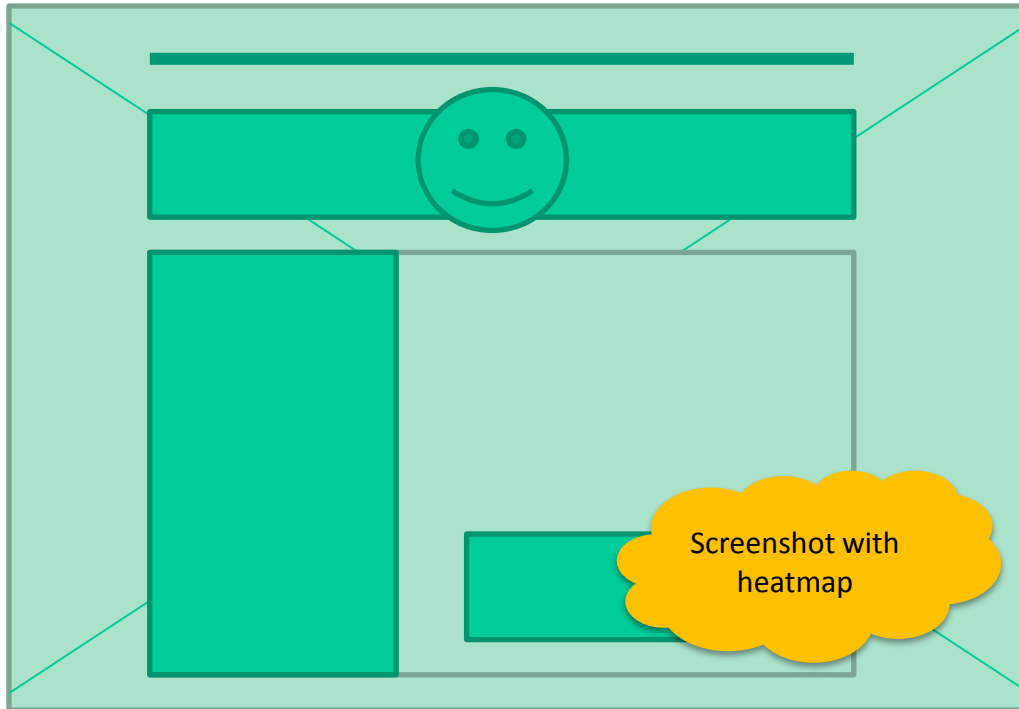
- Consider adding a title, such as “Discover My Story”, to the main content
- Make the Schedule Your Visit Today look more like a button and less like a banner
 - Make the button a shorter width than content area, with rounded corners
 - Consider moving this button to below the text as this may better reflect the natural order of participants’ actions (read first, then schedule a visit)

Detailed Findings: Website



Website: Eye-tracking Findings

Summary of Findings



Whole 15 s., all participants

Findings:

- Banner grabbed participants' attention
 - Not only photo, but quote and student's details
- "Welcome to XX Univ...." text area received extended attention (~20% of dwell time)
- Key navigation areas stood out
 - Left nav area received significant attention (8% of dwell time)
- Participants did not ignore the top nav, XX Univ. logo and search box

See appendix for more heat maps by gender and time window

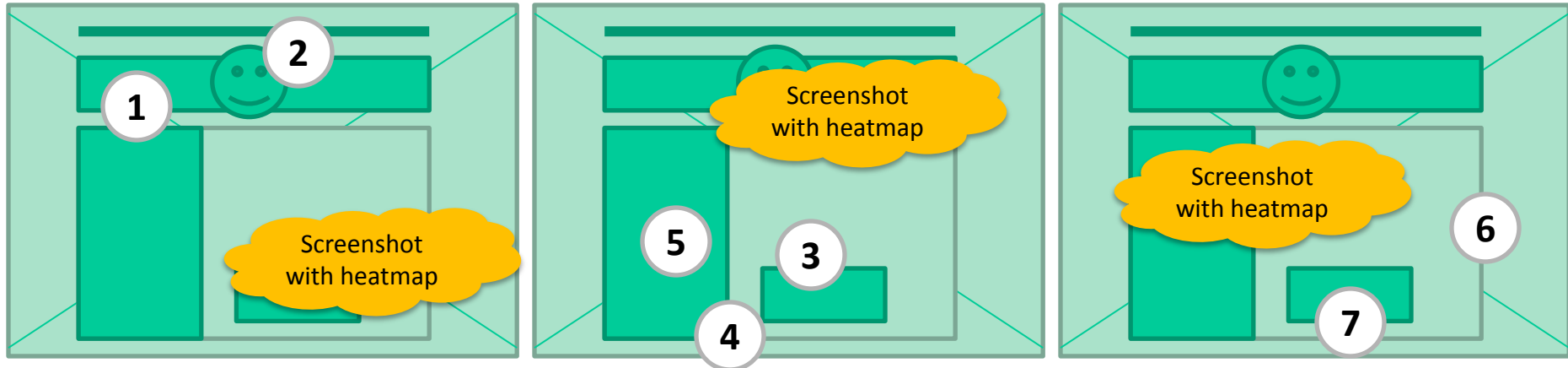


Details

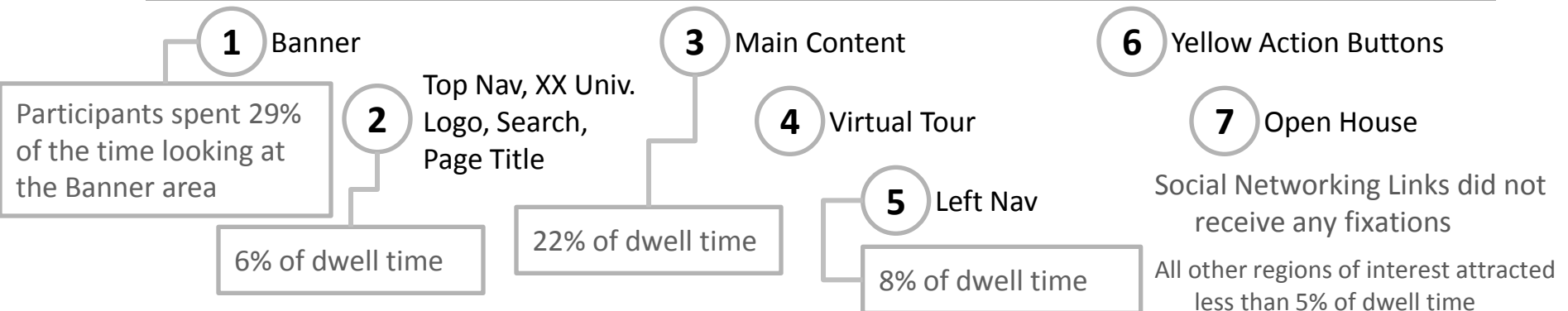
0-5 s.

5-10 s.

10-15 s.

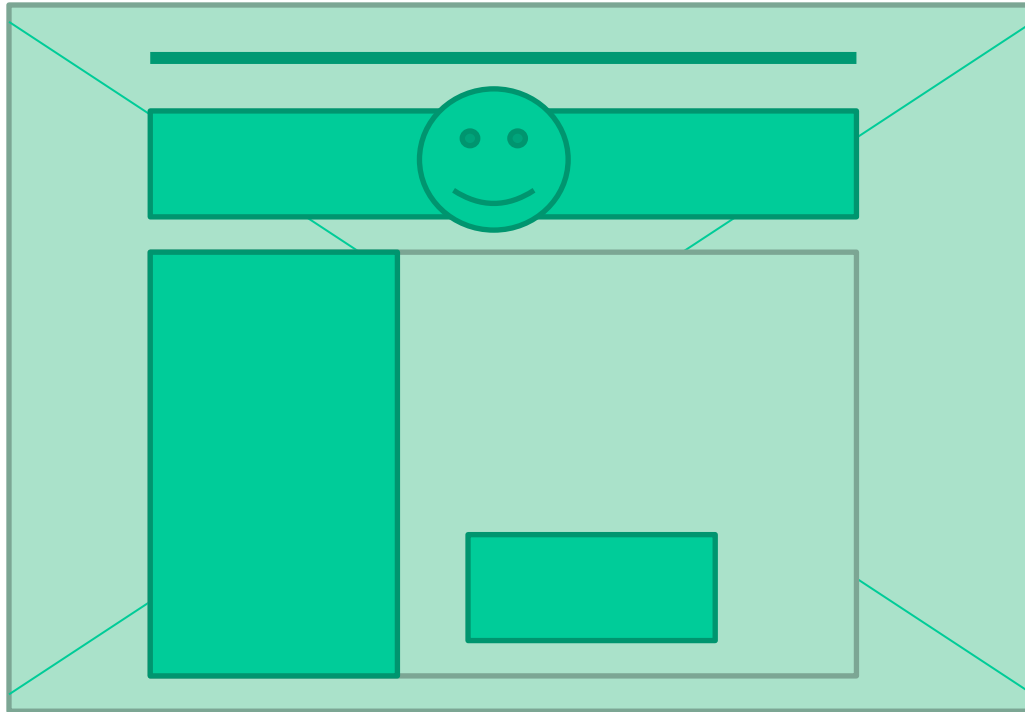


Order of focus:



See appendix for more details about the regions of interest

Website: Overall Impressions



Positive Findings:

- Participants reacted positively to the website, both before and after exploring it in more depth
 - Nice design, particularly the “cool” pixelated background
 - Easy to find information
 - Described the site as “friendly”, “interesting” and “interactive”

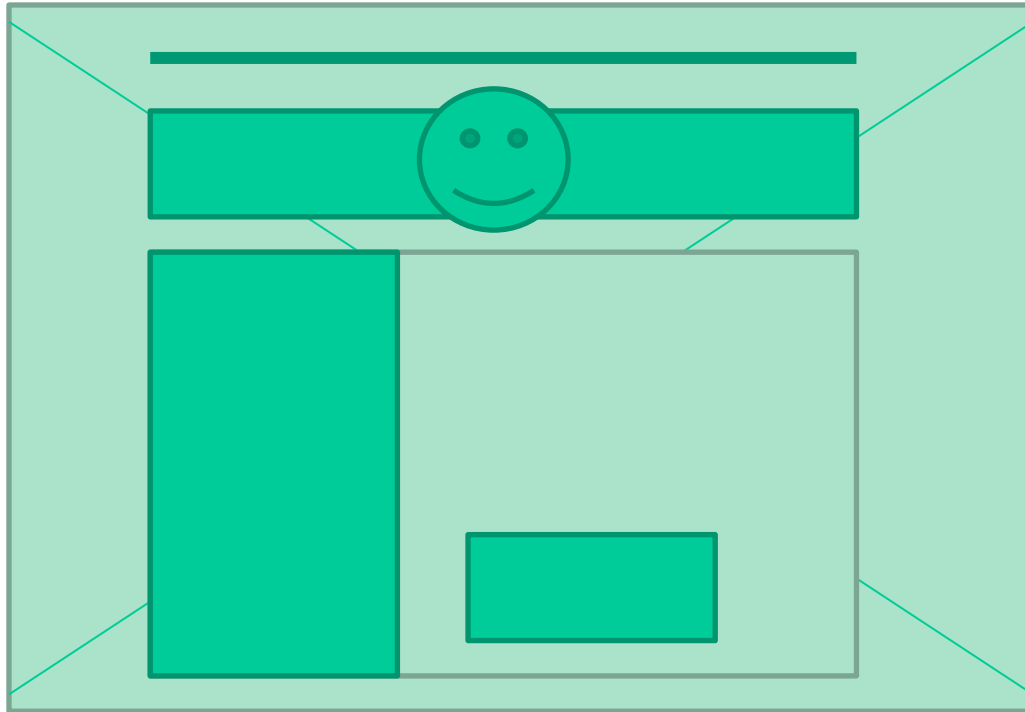
“Fun to know how simple it can be.” (P1)

“This site was better than the other [college] sites I looked at. This isn’t boring.” (P12)

- The categories in the left navigation and the yellow action buttons made sense to the participants and invited exploration
- Virtual Tour stood out and interested participants – 7 participants would go here first after landing on site

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Overall Impressions

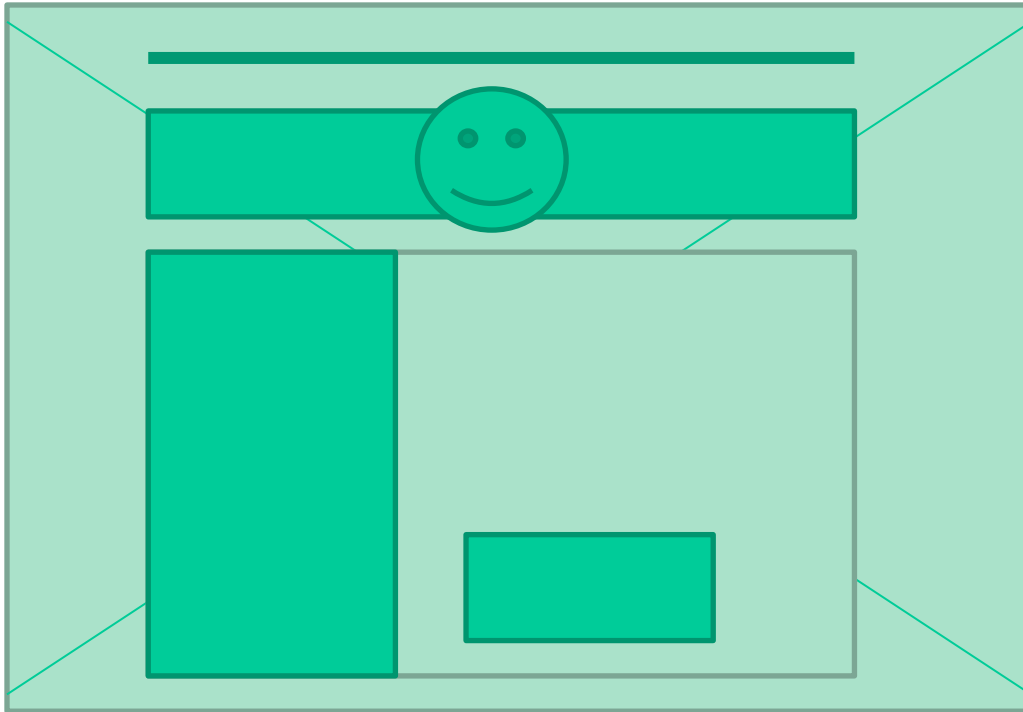


Areas for Improvement:

- Home page is visually attractive and provides clear actions, but interior pages still seem sparse
- Main content area invites users to “Start exploring today!” but provides no links or suggested actions
- 2 participants felt that images of the campus were missing from the site
- Several participants were confused about the top navigation and its relation to the left navigation
 - General confusion regarding the difference between the Undergraduate Admissions site and the XX Univ. website

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Overall Impressions



Recommendations:

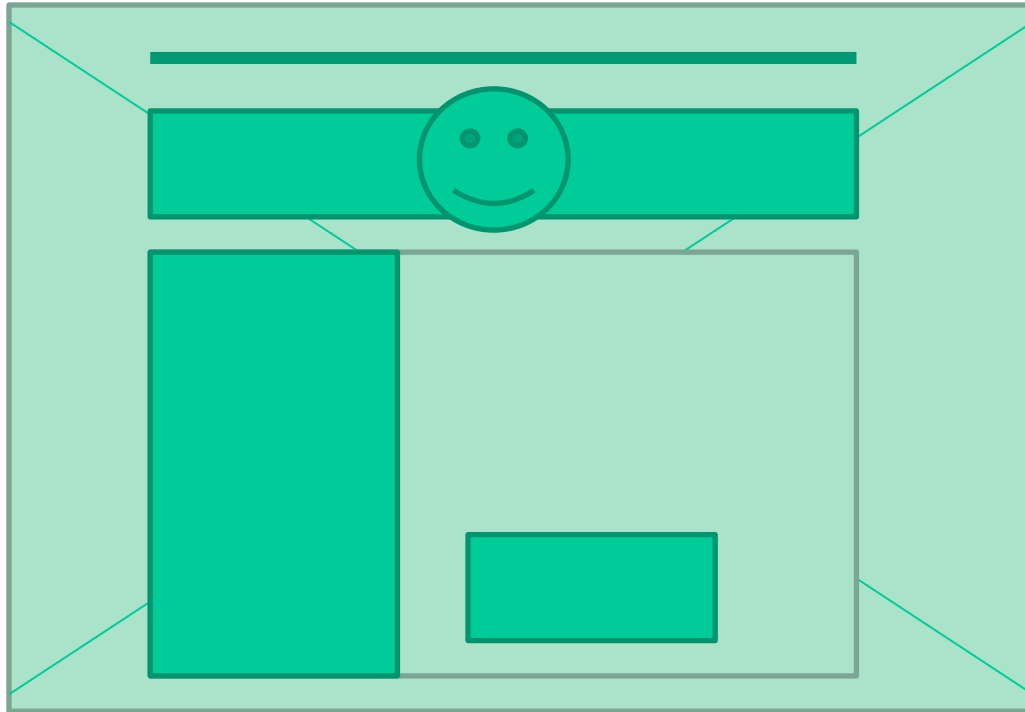
- Continue developing interior pages, adding more images, content and action buttons to highlight desired behaviors
 - Particularly images of the campus
- Mention suggested “next steps” or link to important pages from main content area (“Welcome to XX Univ....”)
- Add “Home” icon next to the Undergraduate Admissions title on all but home page to make title look more like a link
 - Similarly, add a hover state for the title to make it look more clickable

Using a home icon to encourage users to remain within the undergraduate admission space:



All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Home Page Banner

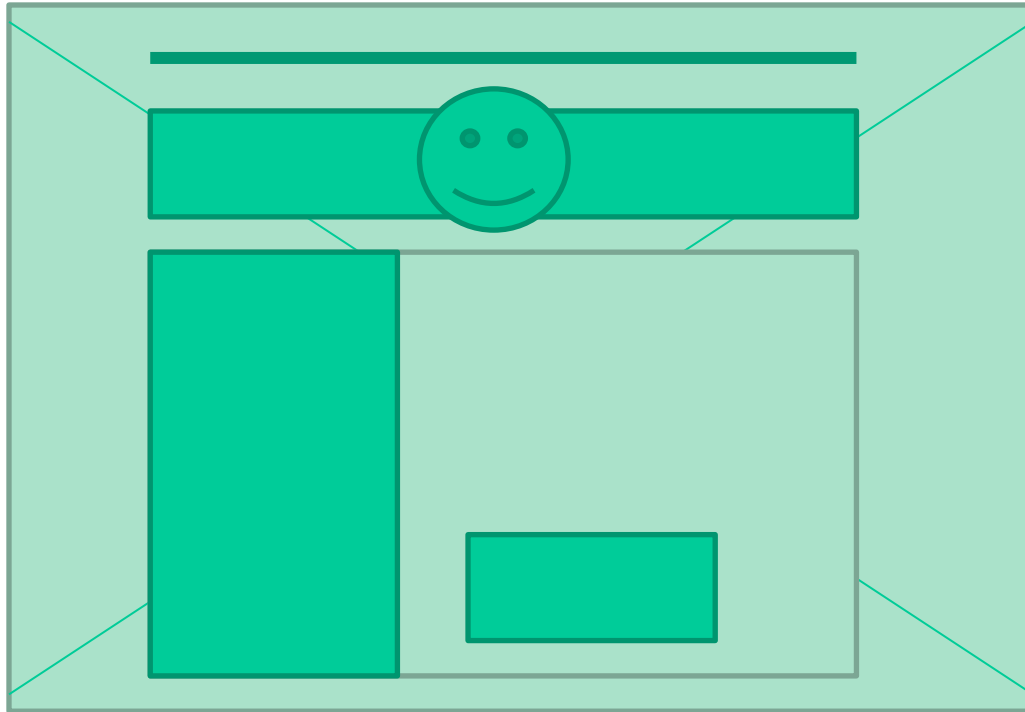


Findings:

- 5 participants liked the “real student” and her story featured in the banner, 4 liked the option to watch a video
- Participants scrolled down to view the area below the banner and kept that view during most tasks
- Scrolling behavior using yellow arrows was not immediately obvious to participants
 - Only 2 participants reported arrows as clickable without prompting
 - Many participants did not expect them to be clickable, but instead thought they acted as a frame to the banner
 - Once the arrows were pointed out, most participants expected the scrolling behavior and responded positively to the content

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Home Page Banner

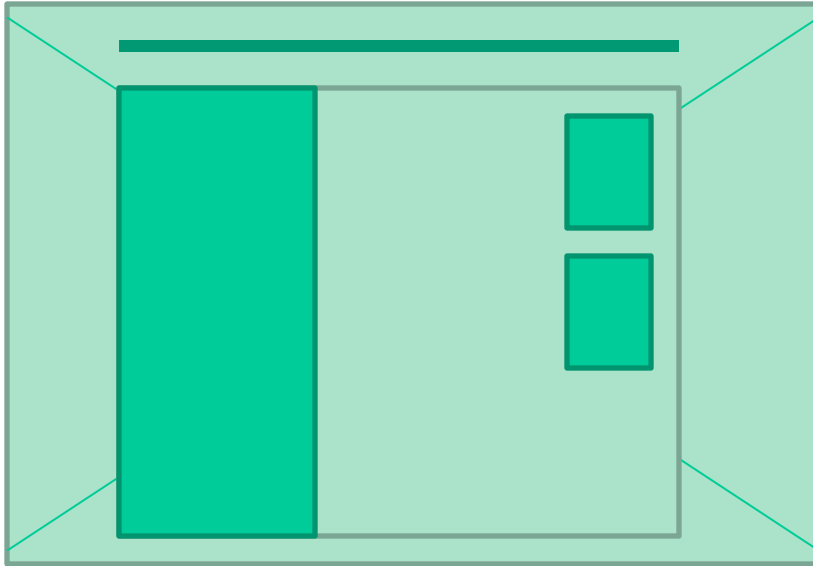


Recommendations:

- Consider reducing the size of the banner to allow more of the rest of the page to fall above the fold
- Consider ways of redesigning the banner to make the scrolling behavior more apparent, for instance:
 - Explore other carousel treatments that may fit with the design
 - Add a button or link next to “Watch Video” that invites users to browse other student features
- Redesign yellow arrows to make them look more clickable, possibly by making them look more 3-D
- Add text below the arrows indicating the next student’s name, or simple the words “next” and “previous”
- Randomize student feature on each page load to suggest that further students’ stories are available



Website: Request a Brochure Task



Findings:

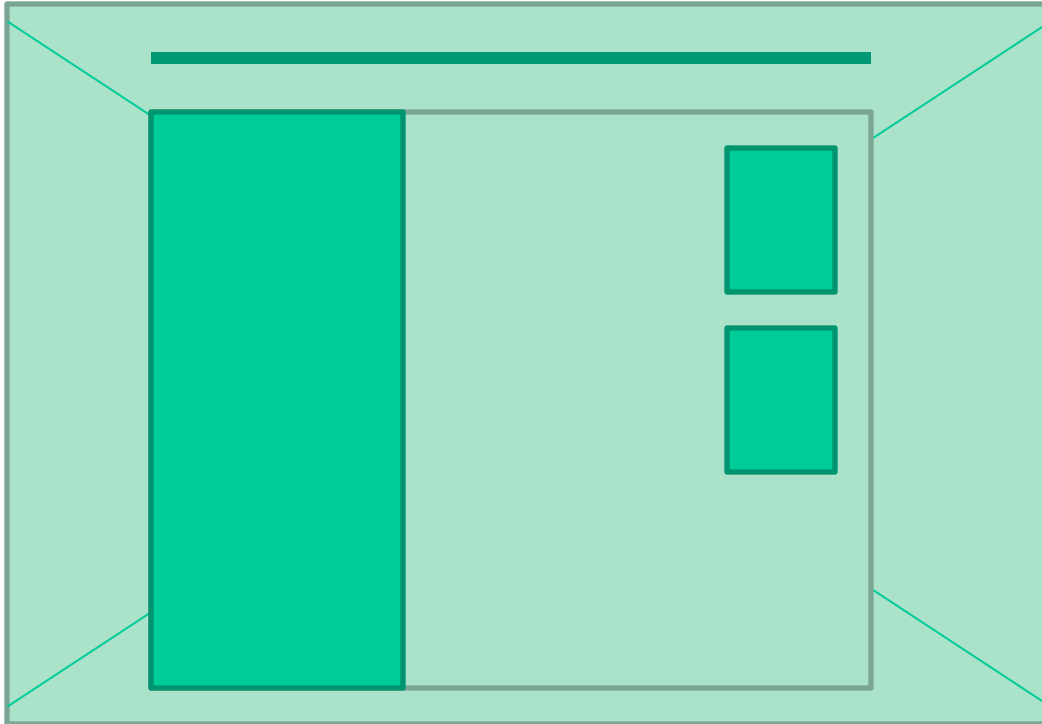
- Task Success Rate: 92%
 - 12 Pass / 1 Fail
- Wording on “Request Materials” button was confusing to 4 participants
 - Were looking for a link with the word “brochure” in it
 - Not sure what materials they would get
- 3 participants said that form looks long
 - *“...a lot to fill out for a brochure” (P2)*

Recommendations:

- Reword phrase on yellow button, for instance “Send Me Info” or “Mail Me Info”
- Clarify what materials that they can expect to receive and how they will receive them (email, post) at the top of the Request Materials page
- Consider simplifying the request form
 - In particular, consider taking out the Programs of Interest check-boxes, as the choice of major was still an area of anxiety for many participants

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Open House Task



Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 100%
 - 13 Pass / 0 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Open House Banner (10)
 - Schedule a Visit button (2)
 - Visiting Campus in left nav (1)
- Appointment Calendar link
 - Most students found it
 - 3 were looking for “register”
 - 3 wanted it to stand out more

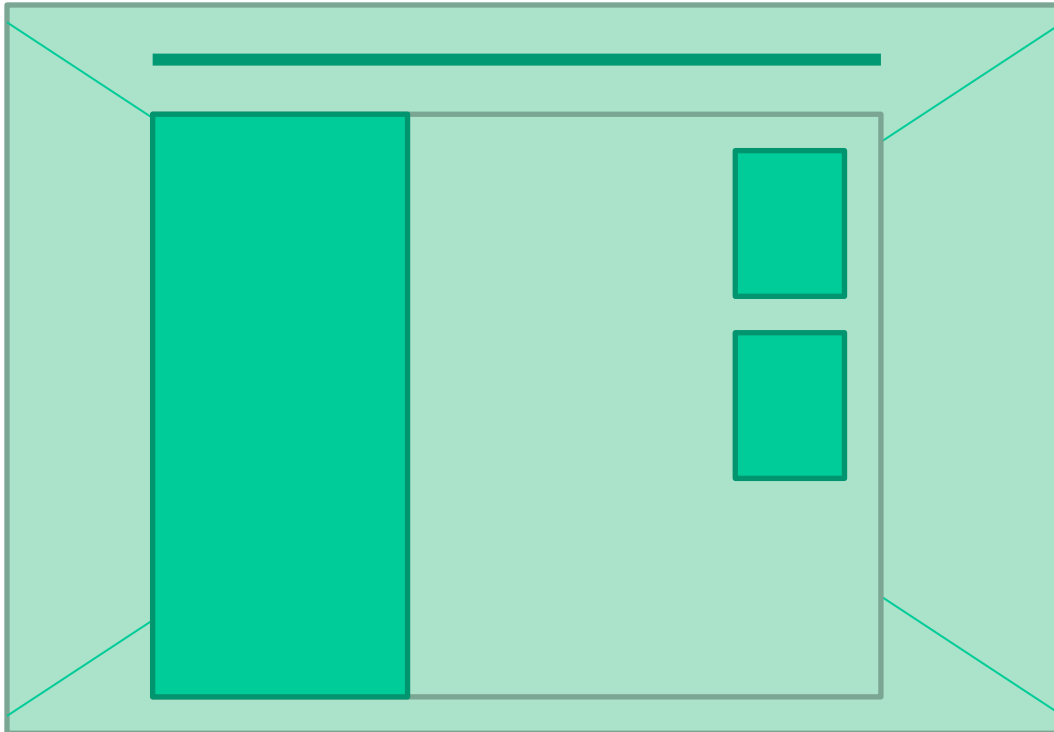
Recommendations:

- Add “Register” button at top right of page to make the next step more obvious



- Registering for a XX Univ. visit account and navigating the appointment calendar may be a barrier to follow through

All participant counts out of 13 total participants



Example of actions and descriptions that could be added to the Visiting Campus page:

Take a Tour

Spend an hour with a current student exploring the campus.

Attend an Info Session

Find out about living and learning at XX Univ. from a member of our admission committee.

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

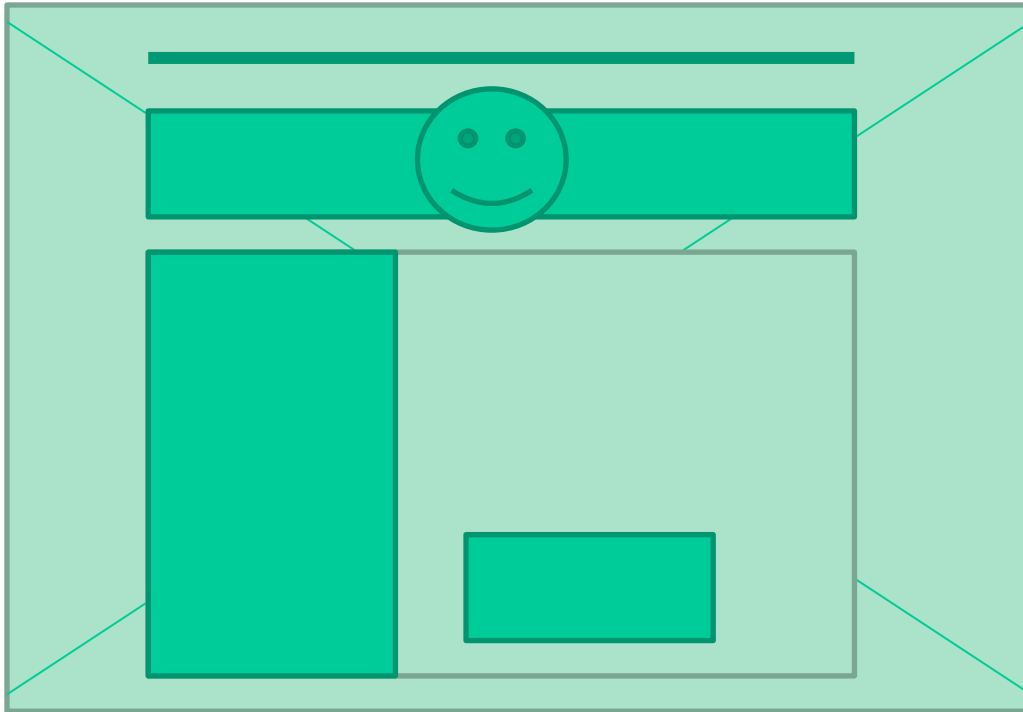
Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 62%
 - 8 Pass / 5 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Schedule a Visit button (7)
 - Visiting Campus in left nav (5)
- The concept of an information session was not immediately clear to participants
 - 5 did not know what an Info Session was
 - 4 considered “Schedule a Visit” to be a single option, rather than comprising multiple types of visits
 - *“Information Session’ says the same thing as ‘Scheduling a Visit’” (P8)*
 - 2 participants clicked to register for Seminar on the Web

Recommendations:

- Differentiate the types of visits more clearly on the “Visiting Campus” page, see example on left
- Consider renaming the Schedule a Visit button to something more broad like “Visit Campus”
- Add register button (see previous slide for example)

Website: Facebook Task



Findings:

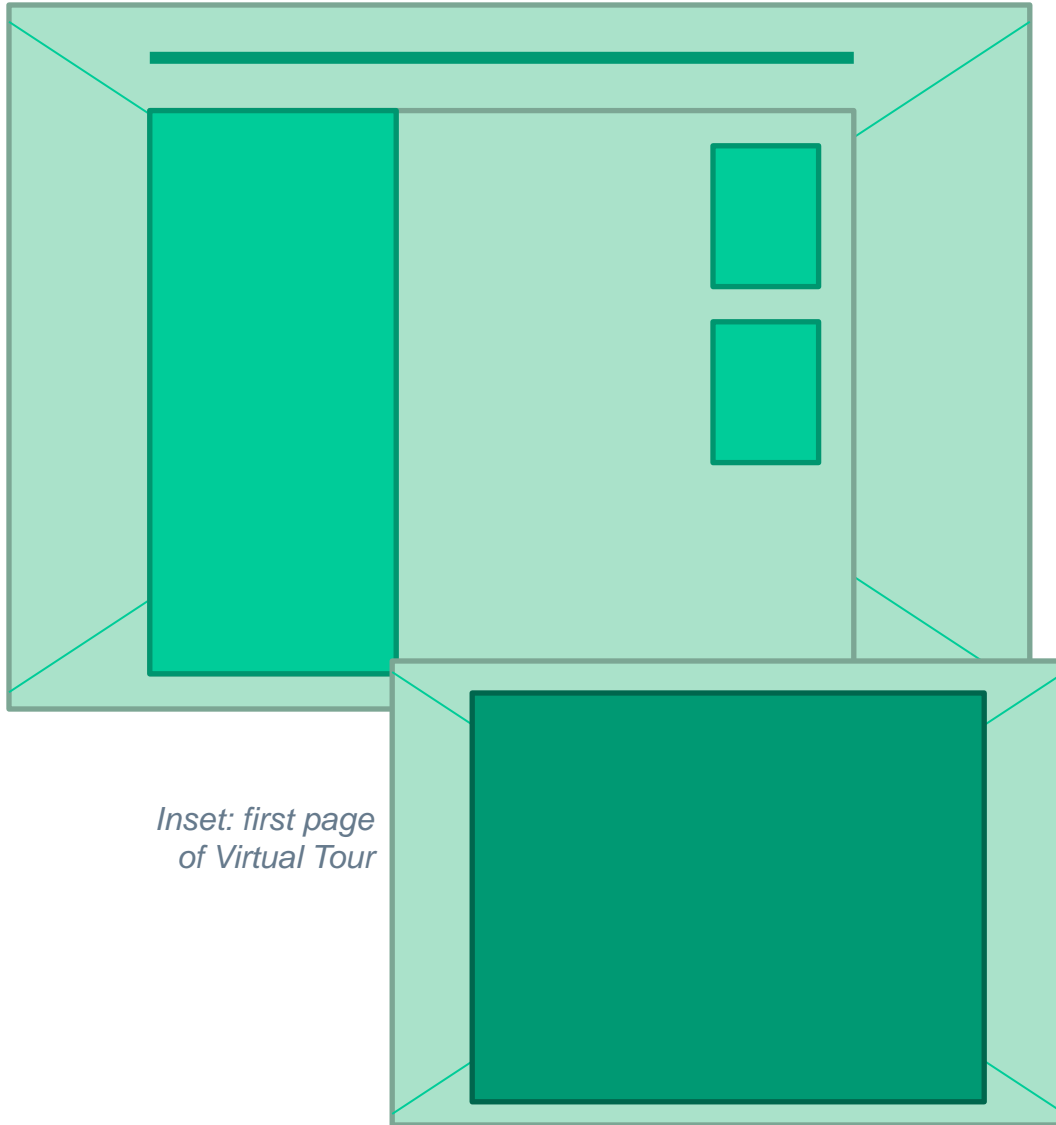
- Task Success Rate: 100%
 - 13 Pass / 0 Fail
- All participants saw the Facebook logo clearly
 - Some participants were unfamiliar with some of the other icons (Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube)
- One participant noted he would go to Facebook and search for XX Univ.

Recommendations:

- Add mouse-over text to the social networking logos to help clarify. For example, “Visit XX Univ. on Facebook”

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Explore the Campus Online Task



*Inset: first page
of Virtual Tour*

Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 92%
 - 12 Pass / 1 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Virtual Tour Banner (12)
- Participants found the Virtual Tour banner on the home page helpful
- Participants responded positively to the Virtual Tour

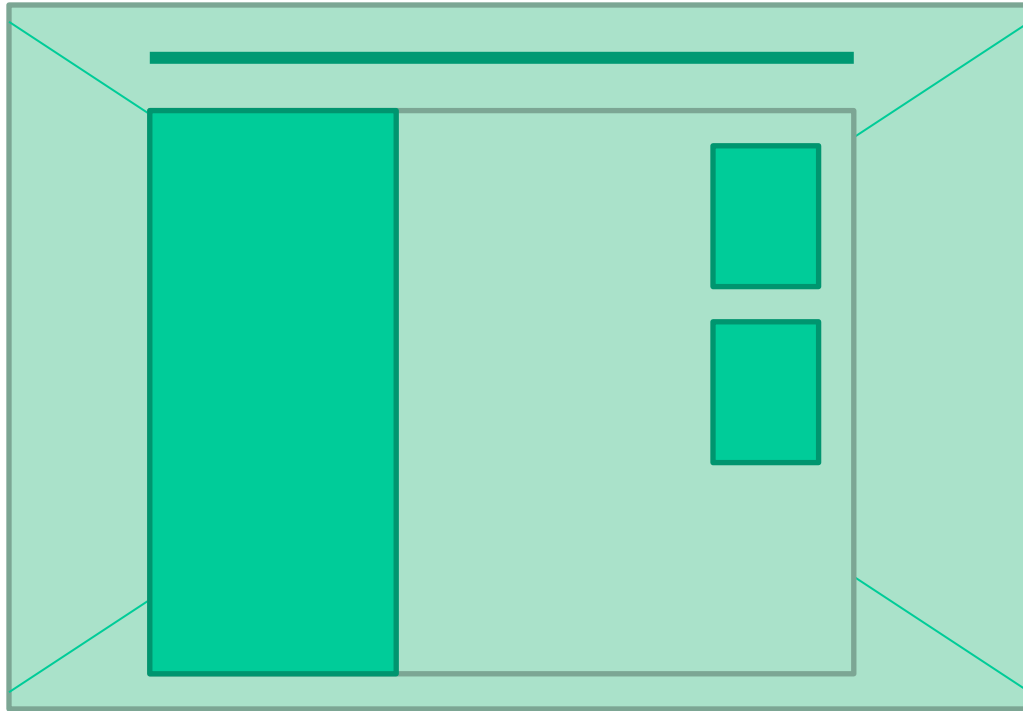
"This is cool how they did this. It's helpful for people far away who can't go in person." (P3)

Recommendations:

- Consider redesigning Virtual Tour page to give more of the look and feel of the actual virtual tour itself, e.g. by adding a preview image.

All participant counts out of 13 total participants

Website: Apply as Freshman Task

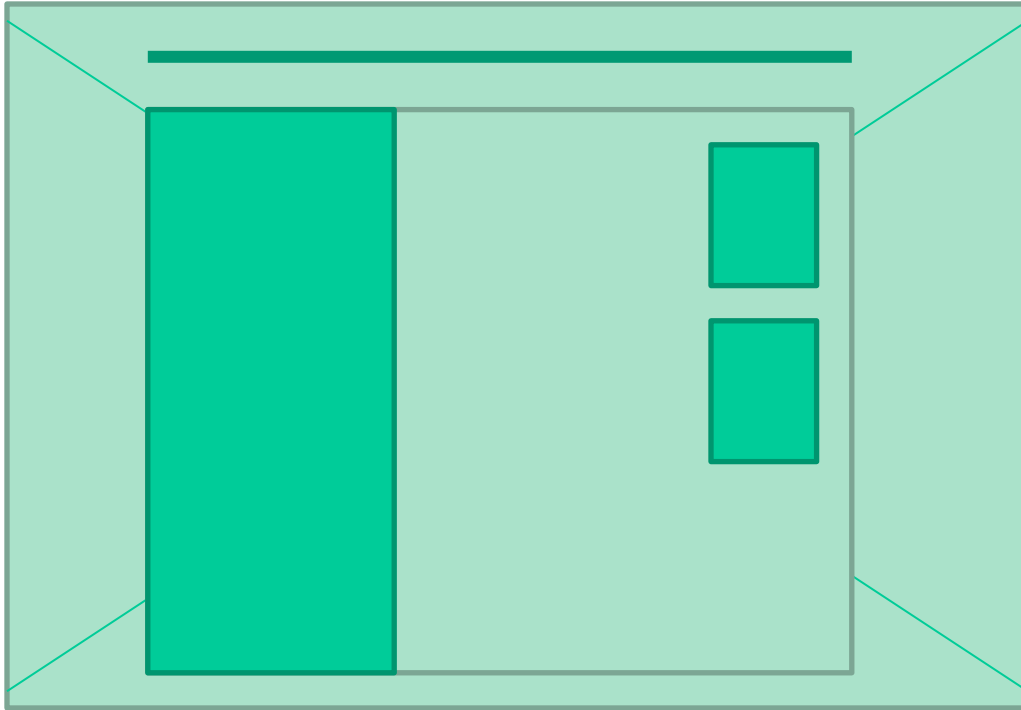


Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 100%
 - 13 Pass / 0 Fail, however only 1 participant went directly to the Freshman Applicants page
- Common Path: Apply Now button (12)
- 2 participants noticed the Freshman tab on the homepage and assumed that Apply Now would therefore have information specific to applying as a freshman
- Information on Freshman Applicants page was helpful to many, particularly the various deadlines

“Oh, this is really helpful about early decision and early action.” – P6

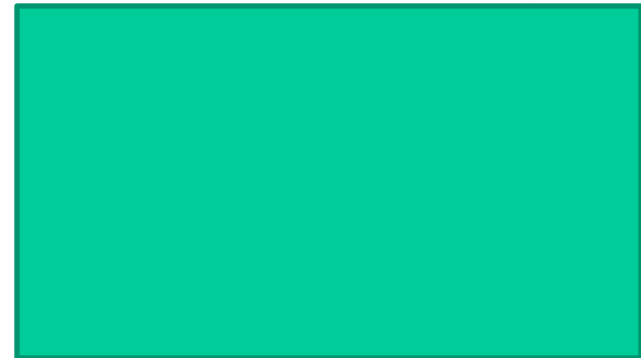
Website: Apply as Freshman Task



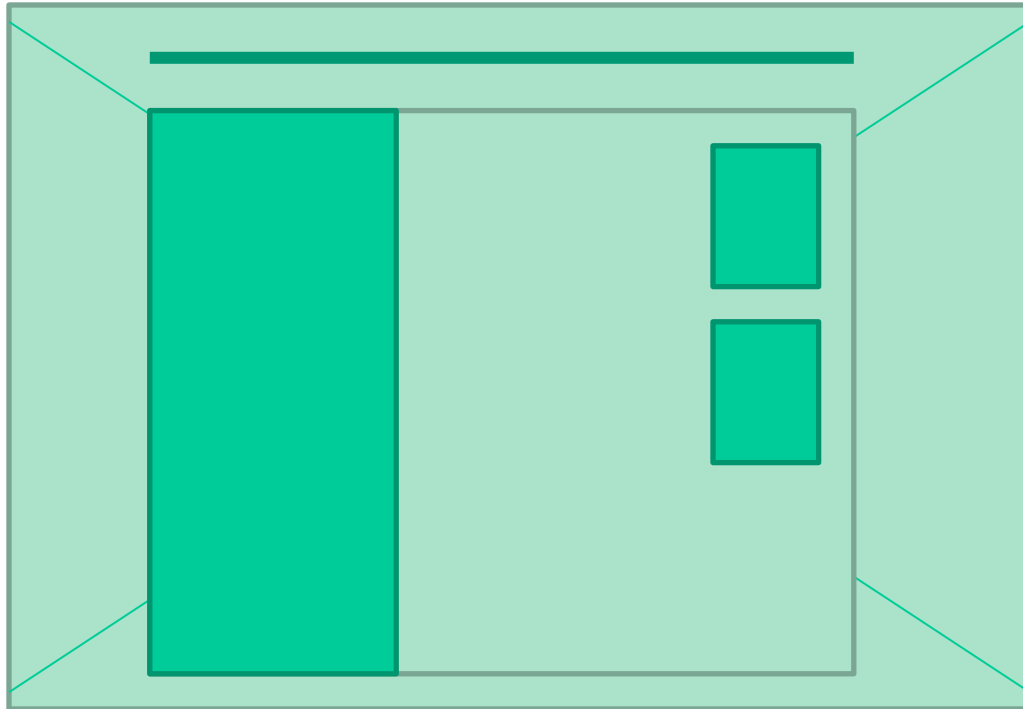
Recommendations:

- Think through the flow of a user who wants to learn about applying and then actually apply
 - Consider eliminating the Apply Now page, which may be redundant with the Applying page and the Freshman Applicants and other audience-specific pages
- Take into account the audiences specified by the tabs on the homepage. “Apply Now” button should take the user to a specific audience page consistent with the tab titles

Tabs specifying specific prospective student audiences from the homepage:



Website: Internships Task

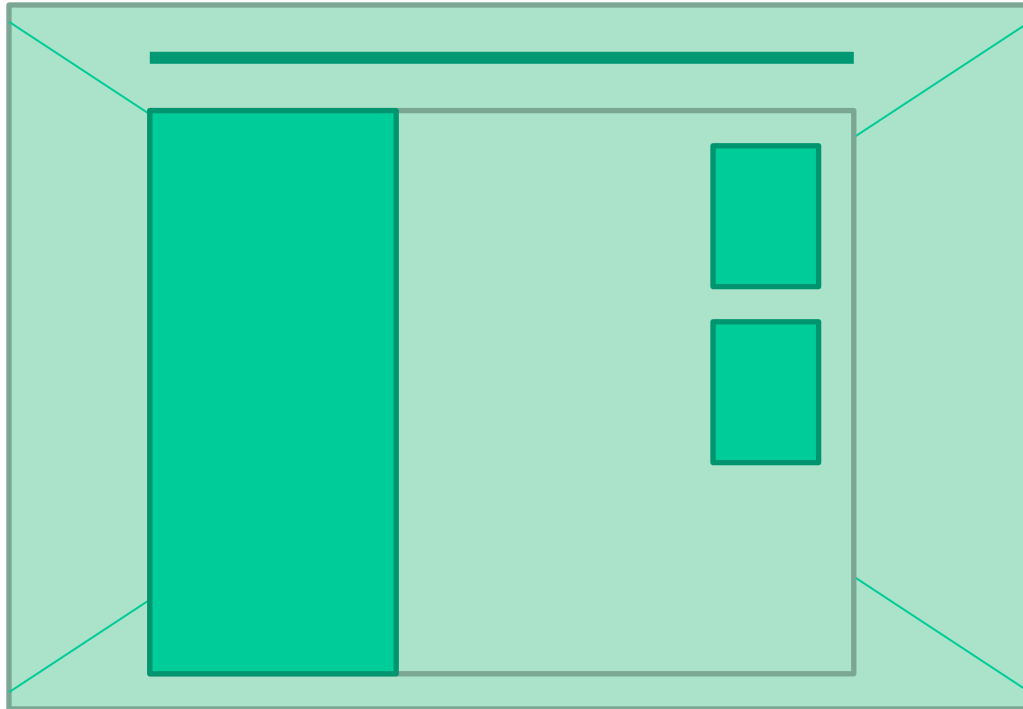


Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 75%
 - 9 Pass / 3 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Experiential Learning > Internships (5)
 - Career Services > Internships (3)
 - “Discover our Internships” through banner (2)
- Participants were unsure what category internships would fall under, so some used the process of elimination to choose one item from left navigation
 - *“I don’t even know what it would be under.” (P4)*
- Participants were mixed on the term “Experiential Learning” – 7 participants described being initially confused about what it meant, 2 felt it was clear and appropriate
 - Secondary items under Experiential Learning helped participants figure out the term’s meaning
 - No strong consensus on a better phrase, some participants suggested using “Real World” or “Hands On”

All participant counts out of 12 participants

Website: Internships Task

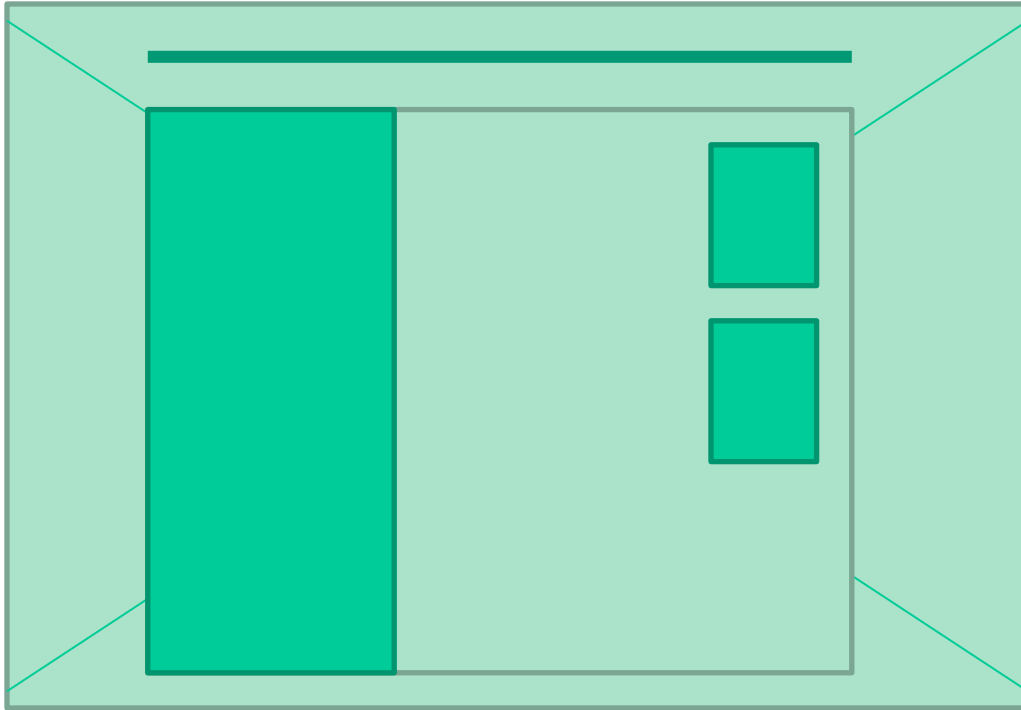


Recommendations:

- Consider getting further feedback on other names for Experiential Learning, such as “Real World Learning” or “Hands On Learning”
- Add a link from the Career Services page to the Internship page at the end of the paragraph about internships

All participant counts out of 12 participants

Website: Liberal Studies Major Task



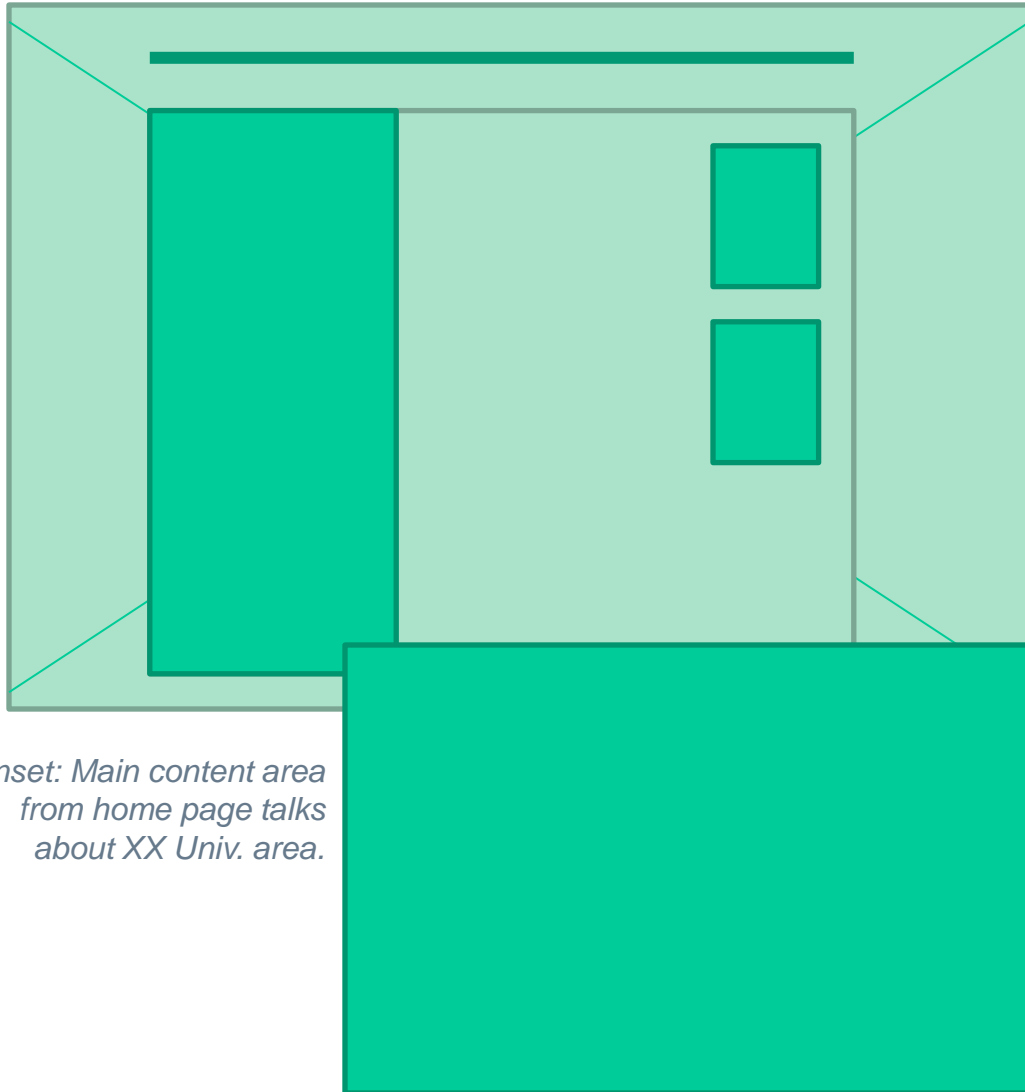
Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 67%
 - 6 Pass / 3 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Academics (left) > Liberal Studies Major (5)
 - Academics (top) > Liberal Studies Double Major (1)
 - Others got lost in the top nav, one even got to another LSM page (<<URL>>)
- 5 participants first instinct was to look in the Academics category of the top navigation
 - “Kind of confusing that it’s difficult to find at the top, but easy to find on the left. Thought they would have the same things.” (P5)*
- 2 participants were confused by liberal arts vs. liberal studies major

Recommendations:

- Consider highlighting the LSM more on the Academics page to introduce prospective students to this unique concept
- Consider having links from XX Univ. pages to the corresponding Undergraduate Admissions page when appropriate

All participant counts out of 9 total participants



Inset: Main content area from home page talks about XX Univ. area.

All participant counts out of 9 total participants

Findings:

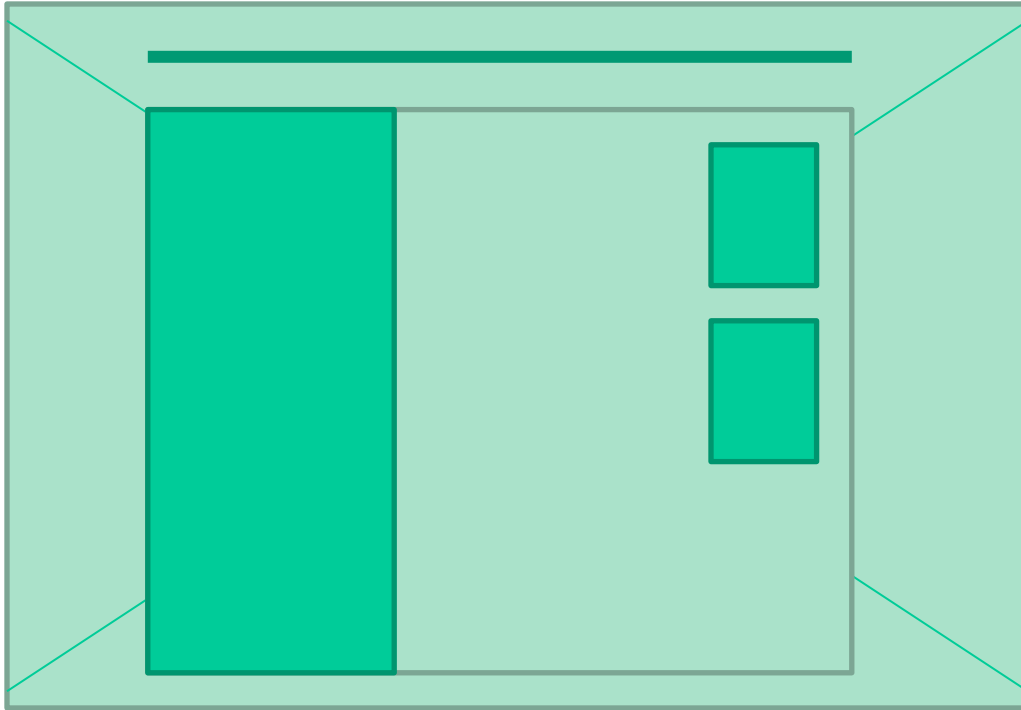
- Task Success Rate: 55%
 - 5 Pass / 4 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - Left nav: Campus & Community > XX Univ. Area (5)
 - Top nav: Campus Life > XX Univ. Area (2)
 - Remaining 2 never got to a satisfactory page (1 went to Campus Life in top nav but stalled there, 1 went to Visiting Campus in left nav)
- Page is dominated by text, which was counter to participants expectations

“It doesn’t really show like pictures or anything.” (P4)

Recommendations:

- Continue developing page with more pictures and content
- Consider linking to this page from the main content area where XX Univ. Area is mentioned (suggested by P6)

Website: Technology Task



Findings:

- Task Success Rate: 100%
 - 9 Pass / 0 Fail
- Common Paths:
 - 9 – Left Navigation
- Secondary navigation items were not as prominent or self-explanatory as they could be
 - Some participants remained on the landing page until prompted to notice secondary navigation items
 - Some were confused about what secondary nav items were

Recommendations:

- Introduce and provide context for secondary navigation items on the landing page

All participant counts out of 9 total participants

Any questions?

Thank you!

Please contact with questions:

Fiona Tranquada
Senior Usability Consultant
Design and Usability Center
Bentley University
ftranquada@bentley.edu
781-891-2678

Appendix

Participant Profiles

#	Gender	Year*	Grades	Visit College Websites?	Emails from schools?
P1	M	Senior	A/B	Frequently visit	Do not receive emails
P2	F	Junior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P3	F	Senior	B/C	Frequently visit	Receive emails
P4	F	Senior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P5	M	Senior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P6	F	Junior	A/B	Frequently visit	Receive emails
P7	M	Senior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P8	M	Senior	A/B	Frequently visit	Receive emails
P9	F	Junior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P10	M	Senior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Do not receive emails
P11	M	Junior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P12	F	Senior	A/B	Do not frequently visit	Receive emails
P13	M	Senior	A/B	Frequently visit	Receive emails

* Year refers to high school class which the participant will be entering Fall 2010

Participant Tasks: Emails

Task #	Tasks
1	<p>This is one of the emails you already looked at. Please take a moment to look over the email and tell me your overall impression of it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•What do you think of the layout?•What do you notice first?•What would you do with this email?
2	<p>You decide that you are interested in visiting XX University to learn more about the school. Show me what you would do with this email.</p>
3	<p>Using the same email, show me what you would do if you were interested in hearing more about a current student's experience at XX University.</p>
4	<p>Using the same email, show me how you would find XX University on a social networking site.</p>

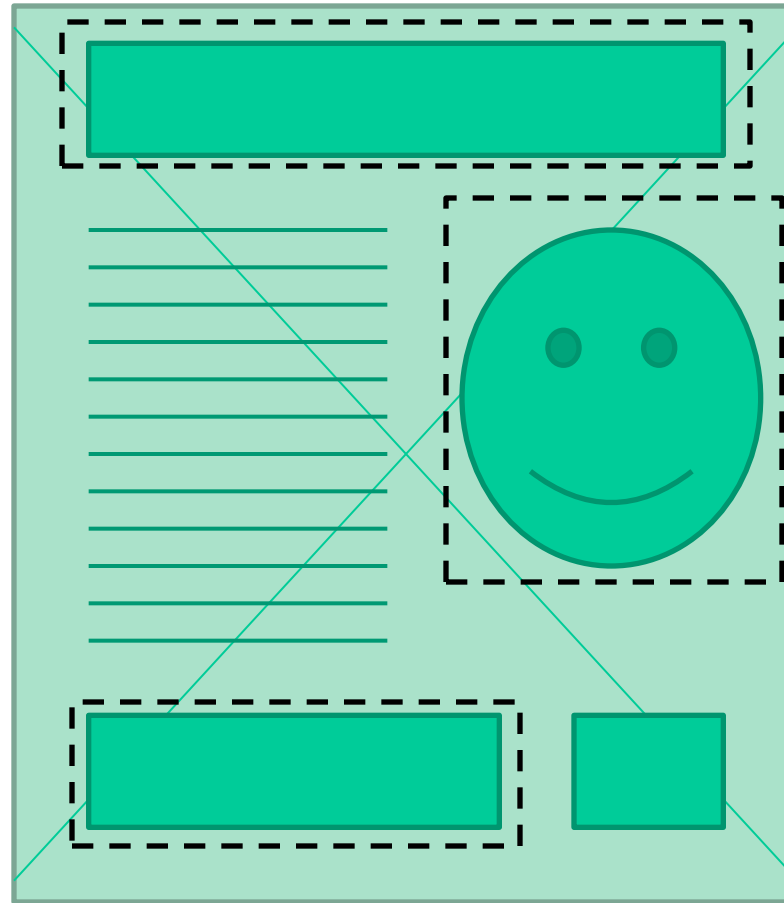
Participant Tasks: Website

#	Task Description
1	XX University is one of the schools you'd like to learn more about. Take a minute to look over the website again and tell me your overall impressions of it. At this point, please stay on this page. What do you think of the layout? What do you notice first? What would you do with this site? What are the sections of the page that are clickable?
2	You're interested in learning more about XX University. Show me how you would request a brochure about the school.
3	You think that attending an open house might be a good way to learn more about XX University. Show me how you would register for the next open house.
4	Your guidance counselor recommended that you attend an information session to learn more about the university. Show me how you would register for an information session.
5	A friend told you about XX University's Facebook page. Show me how you would find XX University on Facebook.
6	You want to have a better sense of what the XX University campus is like. Show me how you would explore the campus online.
7	You've heard that XX University offers live video chats where you would be able to talk with XX University students, faculty and staff online. Show me how you could sign up for one of these sessions. (This task was eliminated after P1.)
8	You have decided that you want to apply to XX University. Show me how you would apply to XX University as a freshman applicant.
9	You've heard that college internships are a great way to secure a job for after graduation. Show me how you would find out about the kinds of internships XX University students have had.
10	You've heard that XX University offers liberal arts majors in addition to business degrees. Show me how you would find more information about what kinds of liberal arts majors are available.
11	You currently live in California and are not familiar with the XX Univ. area. Show me how you would find more information about the area.
12	You want to learn how to use the latest technology as part of your college experience. Show me how you would find out what kinds of technology resources are available at XX University.

Eye-tracking: Description of Statistics Calculated for Regions of Interest

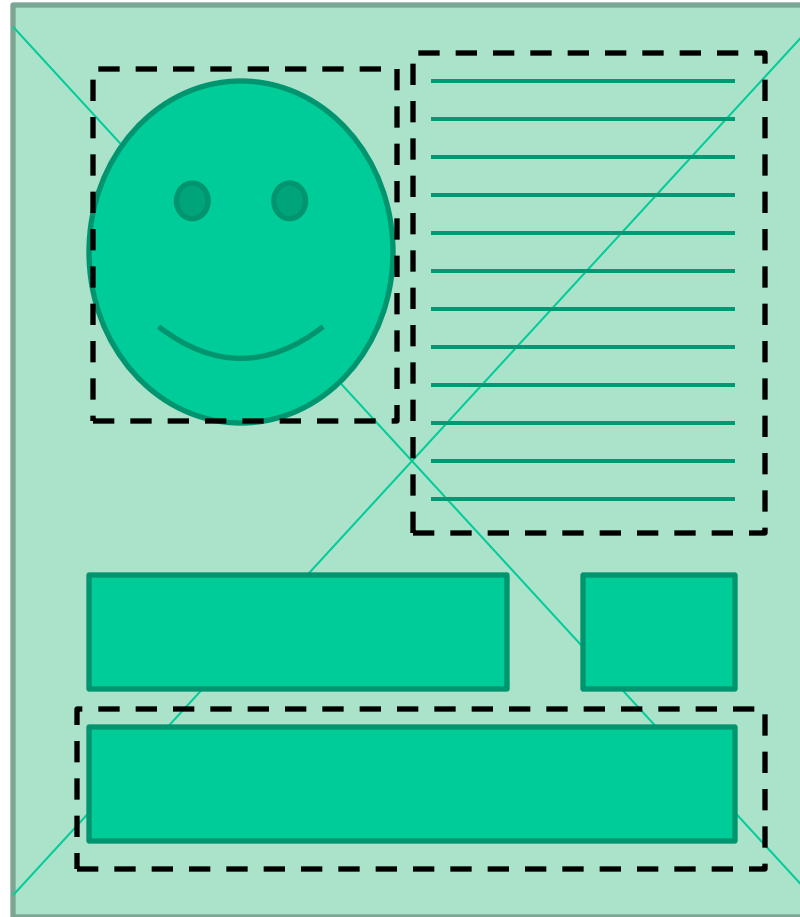
Type of Statistic	Description
Sequence	Order of gaze hits into the AOIs based on Entry time, lowest entry time = first in Sequence
Dwell time	Dwell time average ms = sum (all fixations and saccades within an AOI for all selected subjects) / by number of selected subject Dwell time average % = dwell time average * 100 / (current time - start time)
Hit ratio	How many subjects out of the selected subjects looked at least one time into the AOI - "total hit count" / "number of selected subjects"
Revisitors	1. Number of subjects with more than one visit in an AOI 2. Total number of subjects with at least one visit into an AOI e.g. 3 revisitors out of 7 visitors
Average Fixation	Sum of "average fixation time per subject in an AOI" divided by number of selected subjects

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by Region (Templ. 3a)



Whole15 s., all participants

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by Region (Template 1c) 46



Whole15 s., all participants

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by time period (Template 1c) 47

0-5 s., all participants

5-10 s., all participants

10-15 s., all participants



E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by time period (Template 3a) 48

0-5 s., all participants

5-10 s., all participants

10-15 s., all participants



E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by Time and Gender (Template 1c) ⁴⁹

First 5 s., all participants

Whole15 s., all participants

Whole15 s., females only

Whole15 s., males only

E-mails: Eye-tracking Findings by Time and Gender (Template 3a) ⁵⁰

First 5 s., all participants

Whole15 s., all participants

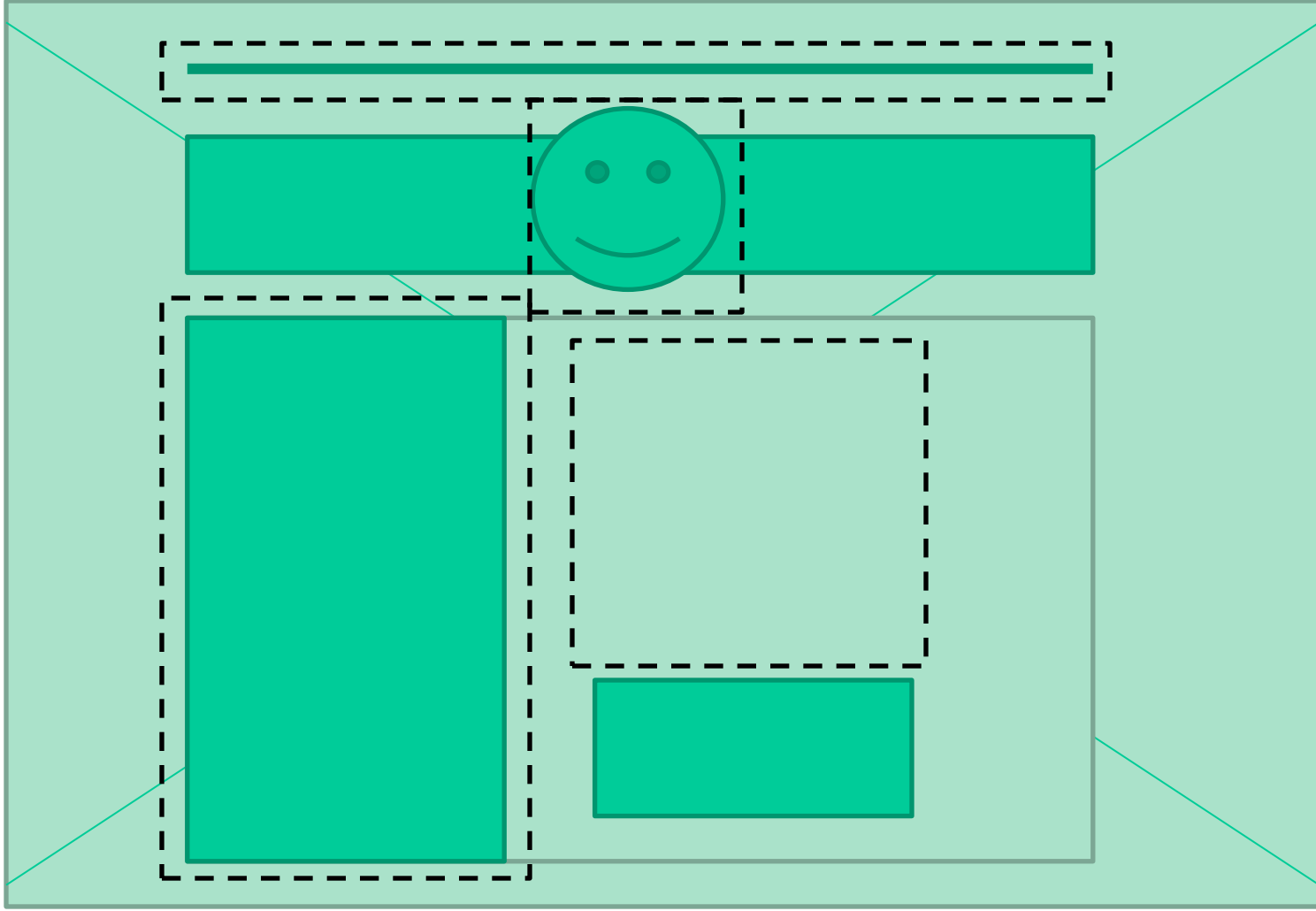
Whole15 s., females only

Whole15 s., males only



Website: Eye-tracking Findings by Region

Whole 15 s., all participants



Website: Eye-tracking Findings by gender

Whole 15 s., females only

Whole 15 s., males only



Website: Eye-tracking Findings by time window

0-5 s., all participants

5-10 s., all participants

10-15 s., all participants

