User Experience Research Report

Members:
Belinda Bolivar
Justin Buss
Madel Leal
Maryam Seifeldin

Link to document: https://seifeld.in/docs/ux_interviews.pdf

Executive Summary

uLead serves as an repository of information to help undocumented students, administrators, counselors, policy makers, and advocates by providing links to resources and original content. The primary users of the website are counselors and administrator, however, students are now a growing number of users. The team behind uLead asked us to help conduct an analysis of their website in order to create a more user friendly site for all of their users.

In order, provide this service to the stakeholders, we employed several methodologies. First, we conducted an interaction map, where we mapped the key interactions that users would encounter on the site. Second, we created personas and scenarios, based off of the users of the website, in order to get a better idea of their needs. Third, we created interview questions based on those personas and scenarios which were used to conduct a series of interviews.

Our interviews provided us with a breadth of knowledge about how users interacted with the site and what they think could needs improvement.We chose students who were of the targeted demographic and were either users of the website or were aware of it. We took those interviews and drews out a few key findings that we think would be of importance to our client. Drawing on those findings we able to create several recommendations for our clients. We believe that even though they are only one part of our user group that the information that they provided would be helpful for all users.

Our key findings included:

1. Users became aware of the website through other people associated with the uLead website or the organization that created uLead, the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good .
2. We learned that trust played a big part in whether or not students were interested in any site.
3. Those interviewed who were not initially introduced to the website prior to enrolling became interested in it after being introduced.
4. Students often looked at multiple websites and relied on their inner networks to find the information that they were looking for.
5. Students commented that the website appeared to not be updated regularly.

Our recommendations included:

1. Having an updated news feed to highlight any important changes in policy or legislation.
2. Changing the design of the website by creating a more appealing website, so that it is friendlier for users. Creating tabs that are specific to the user whether they be a student or administrator. Highlighting that the site is connected to the University of Michigan.
3. Creating additional content or resources for the students' mental and physical health.

4. Potentially creating a Spanish language option or enabling translation so that students, counselors, and administrators could show information to the students' parents.
5. Creating content specific to institutions.

Introduction

This report is an analysis on the uLead(University Leaders for Educational Access and Diversity) website which aims to support undocumented students who are pursuing post-secondary education. The website offers information via link to resources for students, counselors, administrators, policy makers, and anyone who might be interested in supporting a student when they enter college. Launched in 2013 by National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good launched the uLEAD Network in the spring of 2013, uLead wanted to include all the tools possible so that their website was a catch-all for any information that stakeholders would want to access. This information includes any policy changes at the federal, state, and college or university level, information about advocacy groups, as well as webinars and uLead created modules.

The organization is housed in the School of Education at the University of Michigan, however, it does not receive support from the university. Over the last decade the website has changed from a password protected website to an open resource that allows many different types of stakeholders to view the materials. Users of that site have also changed from strictly counselors and administrators to a more diverse group that includes a growing number of students. With the change in user demographics, the team at uLead, asked for consultation about how to improve the usability of the website for all users of the website.

In preparation for this, we created an Interaction Map which mapped all the key interactions that a user might encounter on the website. We had a few initial takeaways.

1. The use of the map on the homepage was a clear and easy visual that helped with navigating the content on the website.
2. The information in the tabs while relevant, did not seem to be tailored to any particular user.
3. The format of the webpages were text heavy and might not appeal to users who want highlights of that information.

In keeping with these findings as well as the interview with our clients we came up with key questions that this report will answer.

1. For counselors and administrators: What are the resources that user value the most on the website?
2. For students: How did they utilize the website?
3. For all stakeholders: How can the site improve?

Methods

In order to acquire a better understanding of our client and their objective we interviewed the students in charge to gain some insights. Our interview team consists of four students in the School of Information and the University of Michigan.

In interviewing our client we discovered how much the website has changed over the past decade, including how it was originally for counselors and administration before being opened up to a wider range of users. Creation of an interaction map allowed us to become familiar with the layout of the website and see where there could be improvements. In consulting with our client, we discovered that they had plans for changes that they wanted to implement but needed us to come in with a fresh perspective. We discussed the scope of the problem and how we could help by understanding the needs of the users to improve the website.

To understand our stakeholders we created three personas of the users groups as well as scenarios to get an idea about the motivations of our user groups. We found that these groups would like to have a one stop shop for all of the information that they need.

Target Population

Our two population targets are counselors/administrators and undocumented students.

Undocumented Students:

For this population we focused on students who were in the 18-29 age bracket. This population must have been admitted to a college or university. We excluded students who are under the age of 18. While we tried to find students without any direct connections or relationships with our clients we were unable to. However, we understood the hesitancy of this group to be contacted by us directly. It was necessary for us to rely on our client for recruitment.

Counselors and Administrators:

This population must have worked with undocumented students and must be affiliated with an education institution or an advocacy group. Our client provided us with

some contact information for potential interviewees. We attempted to recruit counselors and administrators that we thought would also fit our criteria.

Recruiting Methods

Our recruitment methods had to be discreet due to the sensitive population that we were considering recruiting. Due to this, the team at uLead worked their sources to aid us in finding participants. We also contacted those who worked or connected with advocacy groups who might be able to get in touch with students.

Instruments
Analysis Methods

After figuring out who we should look for when it came to respondents, we formed questions to ask them. We started with general questions about their experiences as undocumented students both positive and negative, how they navigated their way to university, and most importantly for us, what resources they used to gather information. After finding participants in our main target group we conducted two interviews with two students. They were within our age range, identified as female, and were in two different colleges at the same university. We conducted an additional interview a school counselor who has worked with high school aged as well as adult aged undocumented individuals who were seeking higher education.

Our methods of analysis included recording interviews, transcribing the interview, and analysing. In order to ensure the safety of our participants we took the additional steps of not recording any identifiable information about any students mentioned, using interviewee codes during our interviews and destroying the tapes of the interviews. We looked for any similarities from the participants. Particularly, we tried to find out what they were really looking when they were applying for admission or what information they sought when considering higher education.

Findings and Recommendations

Summary Results

For the most part, our interviewees thought that the website was an excellent resource for a lot of information. Initially when the students were applying for their programs they did not use uLead but once they were introduced to the site they enjoyed it. When discussing their application and admission process, it became clear that there were some areas where the site was lacking. The one that stood out was that although a lot of information was available, it did not seem to be updated regularly.

Key Findings

Our interviewees revealed several findings that we believe will be key to our client improving the layout of their website. Our users did not initially use the uLead website at the beginning of their application journey. The counselor did not know about the website until we described it to them. They utilized many other websites including the website from the University of Michigan which is specifically for undocumented students. While the uLead team is based at the School of Education, the website it not housed on the U of M website. They heard about it when introduced to it through various connections to the National Forum. They found out about how to navigate their way through this process through the network of people around them and if they had found uLead earlier it could have helped them.

Once our users were on the website they felt that there were several factors that detract from the quality of the website. They said that the information on the website felt very outdated, although according to our client, the site has been updated. Our users also noted the appearance of the website. While they mentioned that the map on the homepage which directed users to their state of preference was very helpful, they also mentioned that the colors used on the site were not friendly. Furthermore, they felt that the website did not seemed tailored towards students.

There were a number of services and resources that our student users felt that were missing from the website. Originally, created for administrators and counselors, students are also looking for those same resources. On the site there a many resources that are friendly to advocates and people connected to undocumented students networks but there are not services specifically for students. One interviewee mentioned their struggle to find scholarships to pay for school, and found the scholarship information on the site irrelevant and outdated. One of the striking findings is the many difficulties that these students went through while applying for their school programs.

Recommendations

Starting locally with enhancing the state of Michigan information page would be a great start in helping users. One of our users mentioned several websites that they enjoyed and how those websites utilized a rating system by institution. While having a rating

system for every institution would require a large effort by the uLead team and a major collaboration with it users, it could become a powerful resource. However, given the sensitivity of the population that might not be completely feasible. Perhaps having a breakdown by institution about their various policies could be helpful. As every institution has different rules and regulations when it comes to undocumented students. Interviewee 3 mentioned that they often worked with their local community college to help students get a higher education and how those students then went on to a four year institution. Highlighting initiatives such as that a the local level could be useful. It could also be problematic due to the current political climate but finding a way to get this information out to the community would be of great use. The scale of doing this nationwide would be vast, however, highlighting initiatives in Michigan would be a great start.

The audience that the site was originally created for is not the only audience that is currently using it. This needs to be reflected in future iterations of the site. Interviewee 1 stated that it would be helpful it could provide help for students with the application itself. They mentioned the difficulty of applying to places where the option for undocumented students to check a box for their immigration status did not exists and how stressful it was to figure everything out. Counselors provide this service by walking students through this process as well as the FAFSA. A simple walkthrough of an application process, including, all that is needed to complete an application would be helpful. It could be especially good for students who might not have access or might not trust counselors or administrators. Many of these students do not know that it is possible for them to go to university, showing them that they have that opportunity would immensely help the community.

Designing a website that is more appealing to students will create a better atmosphere for all users. Students would become more willing to use the site and other users would be more likely to recommend this resource to students. Changes to the website could be as simple as changing the vocabulary to something more straightforward on the front page to make it more appealing. Reconfiguring the layout of the website to include information that specific users might want such as having different tabs for different stakeholders (Students, Administrators and Counselor, Policy Makers, Advocacy Groups) is a simple way to appeal to different stakeholders.. That way they can easily get to the information that they want instead of clicking around and trying to find it. A more dynamic and colorful site would help make it more attractive and make it feel like a site users want to visit. Enabling translation or including some Spanish language resources could be helpful communication with the parents of students.

In order to improve the website additional content related to mental health and other support services would be needed. Some of the situations and hardships that the students go through such as trying to take care of their families and running out of money for tuition, are very difficult situations. Having services that advise on stress management, physical health, mental health services, and other services would be good with dealing with

all the invisible challenges that is group is facing. The counselor mentioned how difficult it was to advise or help students with any mental or social challenges due to cultural differences. Having resources that our provide at the local or national level would be immensely helpful with stress that students feel.

Having the most up to date and relevant information on an issue that can rapidly change is important. While the client did related to us that the website is currently being update their newsfeed was not active. It is extremely important, especially with all of the rapid changes, to be able to go to a source and be able to see the most current changes at the state and national level. Perhaps showing the newest changes in legislation and policy at the top of the homepage would be sufficient.

Discussion

Overall, our interviews revealed a general affinity/trend towards really enjoying the resources that the site offered when the finally found the website. We think the uLead website can accommodate the needs of both these target groups, but our interviews elucidated the thought processes and perspectives of potential users in a way that can ground our recommendations throughout this semester's process of testing.

We noticed that ours users commented that they thought the website was not currently being updated. It seemed that they were introduced to the site by people already familiar with the website but did not find it on their own. Students felt that the site did not have the information that they really need such as tips for school applications. For the purpose of testing the usability of the system we will be conducting a comparative evaluation of the different resources our interviewees identified. This will help us understand the landscape of other websites used to navigate resources and how they compare to uLead's network websites. We hope that this analysis will shed light on key issues that we could hone in for the usability test and lend itself to further analysis of the systems usability.

Conclusion

We believe that uLead is a wonderful resource that services a diverse group of users. The people that have visited the it have commented that they think that having a resource with all of that information in one place was invaluable. There are some simple changes that could be made to improve this website which could include reactivating the newsfeed, changing the layout which could help specific users find what they want quicker, including information about the application process, and including mental health links for students. Not all of these changes have to happen at once, but anyone of them would be a

good start. After having spoken with the students in charge, we feel that they understand the changes that are necessary to make the site even better for all of their user groups.

Personas & Scenarios

Personas are user profiles that give a face and a name to what a site's intended audience is. Based on our initial client interview, we created three personas: a student, Sarah Claudio, a counselor, Jason Brand, and an administrator, Julia Cordova. The student persona was based on the data collected from our two interviews with students. For the counselor and administrator, we focused on their goals and needs in navigating supporting undocumented students. Our three scenarios align with our three personas, giving a potential situation where uLead would be useful.


Sarah Claudio, undergraduate student in LSA, 1st year
Profile: Undocumented Student at the University of Michigan
Sarah is excited to go to college and has had a lot of support from her high school counselors to look for resources to support undocumented students. Over the years she's developed a good relationship with her counselor, but is nervous about attending U of M because she isn't sure what resources are available.
Goals:
- Locate resources for undocumented students.
- Interested in funding opportunities.
- Would like to learn more about uLead Network and see if she can connect with someone from uLead.
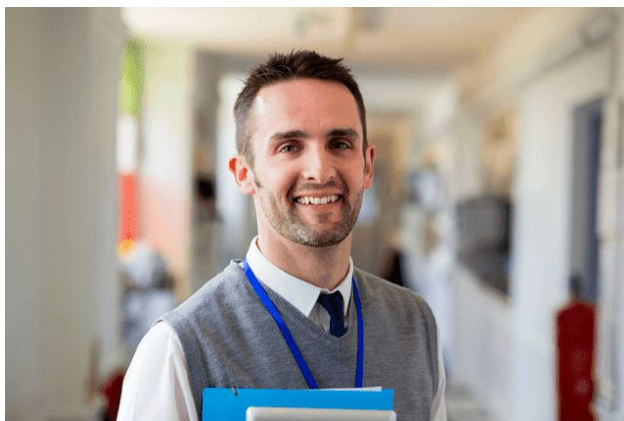
Jason Brand, college counselor
Profile: Jason is a college counselor at local community college. He mainly works with students interested in transferring to a four year university. He's been assigned a caseload of self-identified undocumented

students that needed additional support to locate resources, he knows he needs additional support to facilitate his work. He recently heard about uLead Network's website and is interested in learning more about what resources are available for undocumented students.

Goals:

- Support undocumented students interested in transferring to four year university.
- Gather resources and a network of people that work directly with undocumented students.
- Interested in learning about resources available to students and also locally per state.

Julia Cordova, College Administrator over at the College of LSA

Profile: Julia has recently been promoted to be the Director of DEI initiatives over at the college of LSA, UofM. Her role is to find resources for students from diverse backgrounds. Recently, she's been approached by a group of students that are working on gathering more resources and support for their undocumented peers. The group consists of allies and students that identify as undocumented students. Julia, was a college advisor for over 15 years at a different school and has worked with students that were undocumented. She's interested in learning what resources are available to better support the student organization.

Goals:

- Find resources about policies around undocumented status at universities
- Find any webinars or trainings available for admin on her team to better support students.
- Connect student organization with these resources so that they have more information and feel adequately supported.

Scenario 1

Sonia who is a high school student is getting ready to apply for schools. She's been top of her class and has excelled in all her classes. She's interested in going to U of M but she's nervous about her undocumented status. Her parents don't know about the application process and can't support her financially. As deadlines are approaching Sonia is becoming more and more concerned about the possibility for her to apply to schools.

Sonia searches the website for various institutions and finds that its hard to find out if schools will help her financially. In addition she wishes that this information was available in Spanish so that her parents could understand the process better.

Sonia wishes for a website that will help her navigate and find resources for schools. And she hopes to establish a stronger network so that she can feel more comfortable going to someone if something were to happen with her immigration status. It's already hard enough to be undocumented she is often times fearful of what could happen if someone finds out.

Scenario 2

A student organization at U of M has approached Julia Hernan an administrator at LSA. She's been asked to find resources to help current undocumented students find funding for school. The burden to be a student and not have a network of support has been causing undocumented students to pressure administration to do something. Julia is someone that students trust and therefore have asked her to help them find a website or build something in which students could have access to.

Julia wants to help but does not know where to start or what would helpful. There's a lot of information out there and she's not quite sure in which direction to point students. She's hoping that maybe there are organizations that could help.

As someone who cares deeply about students she's also wondering if there is a network of other administrators who would also be interested in providing support for students that have undocumented status. She's not super tech savvy but she's reached out to her immediate networks emailing them for support. She's hoping that this will facilitate locating resources and other useful information to better support students.

Scenario 3

College counselors at LSA have been wanting to put together resources for undocumented students. After what happened with DACA last year they realized that they needed to mobilize in order to better support undocumented students. They understand that the identity of these students must remain anonymous and want to make sure that they are respectful of how they approach the work.

Jason who has been a counselor for many years has been tasked to find resources to better

support students. He's interested in learning more about what the process looks like for students and what type of challenges undocumented students face. Even though he hasn't directly worked with undocumented students (that he knows of) he's hoping to connect with other counselors and administration around providing support.

Unfortunately, Jason doesn't know where to start. The information online is overwhelming and he wants to be respectful of student's identity. He's made some attempts to reach out to organizations that help with immigrant rights and is planning to continue to research for potential resources, although he really hopes to find an online website for this.

Interviews

DISCLAIMER: IF/WHEN A SITUATION WITH ANY UNDOCUMENTED PERSON COMES UP, REMIND THE INTERVIEWEE NOT TO USE THEIR NAME OR ANY IDENTIFYING DETAILS WITH US

INTRO SCRIPT:

[Introduce self and note-taker]. Thanks for agreeing to this interview! For context, we're a group of students at the School of Information performing an "audit" of sorts for the uLead Network as a project for class. uLead is a program affiliated with the University of Michigan that centralizes resources for undocumented students and the university counselors and administrators who want to help them. We run a battery of tests in order to understand the current relationship between the website and its users and ultimately recommend changes to our client based on this research. We're here to interview you as a potential user of the website to get an idea of the contexts in which you might use the website and the goals you'd be trying to reach when doing so. All of your answers are completely confidential; none of what you say will be shared with anyone, even uLead, without removal of you name and any other identifying information. Information from all the interviews we perform will be aggregated into a single report and any quotations included in the report will be anonymized. If we have your permission to record this interview, it will be immediately transcribed and the record of your voice will be destroyed. The interview will take an hour or less, and you are entitled to end our conversation at any point. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you do not have to answer it. If you provide any response you do not want recorded or used in our analysis, we will respect your wishes. Do you have any questions at this point? [pause and answer any questions]. Ok! If you're ready, we can get started.

COUNSELORS & ADMINISTRATORS:

Warm up:

1. We have a sense of what you do, but can you tell us about your job, what your day typically looks like?
   a. What are your most important responsibilities? What are some of the challenges you face in your position?

Questions:

1. Have you dealt with undocumented students' issues? How often? What are the issues like?
   a. Are there any resources you think would have been helpful in dealing with these issues?
      i. What do you look for in the resources you use?
      ii. What do you find frustrating in
   b. Are there any resources you already tend to lean on when dealing with these issue? Why do you use these resources?
2. How often do you interact with undocumented students, to your knowledge?
   a. If you have interacted with them, what are some of the issues that have come up with respect to your professional position?
3. Do you have any questions so far? Is there anything you'd like to share with us at this point?
4. What would you say is your level of familiarity with the policies or regulations in your state around immigration?
   a. How familiar are you with regulations about undocumented people and students in particular?
   b. Would you know what to do if an undocumented student came to you with a question about how their status affected their education?
5. Describe the last time an undocumented students' issue came to your attention in the context of your job.
6. Are you familiar with the ULead Network? If so, how were you introduced to it?
   a. If so, have you ever used the resources on the website?
      i. For what purpose?
   b. What type of device did you use to access the site?
   c. Was it helpful? In what ways?
   d. What things did you find frustrating?

STUDENTS:

Warm up:
1. Can you briefly describe your journey and experience as an immigrant?
    a. What are the challenges you've experienced as an immigrant?
    b. What was your best moment or day?
2. What are you studying?
    a. Do you know yet what you want to do with your degree?

Questions:

1. Do you know where to find resources about and documentation of the political policies regarding your current status?
    a. Where have you looked in the past? What do you look for in a resource to help you with this issue?
    b. Did you use any resources available online to help you navigate the college application process?
2. Can you tell us more about your college experience? If you recall what was the college application like?
    a. What about kind of challenges you faced when registering for classes?
    b. Are there things that you had to do differently when you were going through this experience?
    c. Could you walk me through what that looked like?
    d. Were there people or online resources that were helpful?
3. Just so we have a sense of it, how familiar would you say you are with the policies and regulations in your state around immigration? There is no wrong answer to this question.
    a. How familiar are you with regulations about undocumented people and students in particular?
4. Do you have any questions so far? Is there anything you'd like to share with us at this point?

5. Would you feel safe going to university staff and administrators if an issue came up with your immigration status?
    a. Do you feel like university staff and administrators are equipped to help you with an issue with your immigration status?
    b. What do you wish people in these positions were more aware of in relation to this issue?
6. Are you familiar with the ULead Network? If so, how were you introduced to it, and have you used it?
    a. What did you use it for?
    b. What kind of device did you use to access it?
    c. Was it helpful? In what way?
    d. What frustrations did you experience with it?

OUTRO SCRIPT:

And that's all we have! Thanks for talking to us. Is there anything else related to these questions that you'd like to add to our conversation? [pause and allow response]. Do you have any concerns? [pause and allow response]. Ok! If anything else comes to mind, feel free to reach out to us. Again, if you want anything excluded from our report, we will respect that. We can send you the report we generate based on this and a few other interviews if you're interested. If you'd like an update on the ultimate findings and recommendations of this project, we can also send you one in late April if you'd like. Again, thanks for your time and have a great day!

[student interviews removed for their privacy]

Interview_2/26_transcription

- Currently a KA school counselor in Detroit, 19th year:
    - High school, all girl environment
    - Alternative ed
    - Career tech
    - Works with treal upper bound
    - Has worked urban/suburban
    - Also with adult ed

- Communicating with students and supporting them
  - Working with the students' challenges
  - Most rewarding: seeing students graduate, seeing them mature socially and emotionally
- Worked with them in one capacity directly, and with ESL students indirectly
  - Had students in alternative ed (DACA students) hoping to finish their high school educations before "anything" happened
  - Individuals come to live with family
    - While they're here, trying to earn income and learn culture
- Different types of support
  - Employment support
  - Academic support
    - Seek to help them achieve a high school diploma, so they can enter college
    - Financial situation, college or career/trade path
    - Has a relationship with the local community college: highly utilized
    - Has paper career inventories to help students make choices
- Does not feel well versed
  - Students typically have temporary visas
  - Helps students walking through actual applications
  - Has students meet with representatives of colleges
  - Has hosted FAFSA night to help with that application process
- Depending on the student's interests, different resources recommended:
  - With a certain level of english proficiency, students receive certificate
- Not familiar with uLead
- Ever had an issue looking for student resources?
  - Yes.
  - People who come with professional certifications/high school diploma from other countries and unable to transfer anything because of lack of english proficiency/knowledge about how to do so
    - Would like to be able to refer them to be able to transfer their credentials
    - Transferring high school diploma from another country when there are issues getting a copy
    - For example, had a student with a college degree and cannot use it here. They have to start their college degree over
- Students with health (mental or physical) problems
  - Mostly with general ed problems
  - Difficult to address through the barrier of language and culture

- - - ■ Difficult to help some women because of cultural necessity of going though
- Last time with undocumented student
  - Alternative ed student: mother and student undocumented
  - Were deporting mother, before student was to graduate
  - Had to redo student's schedule to expedite schedule so they could graduate before mother's deportation (of unknown date)
- Frequency:
  - unknown
  - Is tasked with taking documentation, but it's only taken at registration, could expire during student's time at the program.
- Work with local community colleges:
  - Because of location, easier to work with CC because many students in the same area
  - Affordability
  - University works with other universities, articulation agreements to transfer to 4 year university (11 colleges)