

Heuristic Evaluation of [College Companion]

1. Problem/Prototype Description

[Insert one sentence description of the project idea and UI you are evaluating.]

2. Violations Found

1. H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity 3 / Found by: A, C, D

- The interface used the string “Save” on the first screen for saving the user’s profile, but used the string “Update” on the second screen. Users may be confused by this different terminology for the same function.
- Fix: Use the same string on each screen.

[...create your numbered list of violations here]

H1: Visibility of Status

- Going back to home after selecting universities does not preserve those selections. Only the username is preserved. (D) (3)
- ‘Back to CeCe’ button is unintuitive. Initially I thought the CeCe was a chatbot. Clicking on this button led me to the home page. I expected to be redirected to the chatbot. ©(D)(2)
- Back button on the home page is confusing. It transitioned back to sign up even after signing up. (A)(D)3
- There are progress bars below each application, but it is not clear what the progress bars mean aside from perhaps a feel-good mechanism for the user? What does 50% mean? 75%? The progress bar only showcases the color scale, without showing numbers. The color scale is unintuitive, since the user doesn’t know what the two colors represent. (B)(A) (D) (2)
- After clicking Add To Cart inside the Disneyland Institute page, there is no confirmation as to whether the school has been added. The user is instead redirected to the Search Colleges page where Stanford University is now shown as “In Cart”. (A)(2)
- The user only has the option to add Stanford University (which is displayed as Disneyland Institute) to their cart, but when the user views their cart, 3 schools appear. “Add To Cart” is clickable for Stanford University, which adds Disneyland Institute (not Stanford) to the cart, but the same button is not clickable for any other school, even schools which are clickable themselves like Disneyland Institute and Tangled College. This is unexpected. (A)(1)
- When searching through colleges, there is no way to know how many have already been added/submitted/completed. © (B)(2)
- The screen after successful submission of the application is the same as the welcome page for a new user. The only difference is what Cece the chatbot says. This might be confusing for the user, or diminish the sense of achievement. (B)(1)

H2: Match Sys & World

- ‘Back to Cece’ smiley is perhaps best placed after the text not before. (1)
- The college cards provide a \$ sign to indicate how expensive the tuition is. However, there’s no clear documentation as to how the number of \$ signs corresponds to the tuition. The user might infer from similar apps such as Yelp, but it’s still unclear. (B)(3)

- There is a list of universities recommended to me. I am a bit confused about how and why those have been recommended to me. If there is a place where I was supposed to input information about what I am looking for in a college, I totally missed that. ©(D)(A)(4)
- Below the list of recommended colleges, there are other college listings. The ordering/ranking of those listings does not appear to be logical. Perhaps these are listings that I have already viewed, or they are part of a certain category, but the grouping of these did not seem clear to me. ©(A)(4)
- On the essays page for a given application, there is an option to link a google doc with a paperclip next to it. The paperclip brings us back to the start of the application screen which is not what I was expecting. From other sites, paperclip icons usually prompt you to upload a file or otherwise link a file. ©(A) (3)
- The button in the bottom right of the search page looks like a settings button but has confusing functionality that does not bring one to settings. ©(D)(3)

H3: User Control

- On the “app submission” page, if the user clicks back, it leads them to the registration page. This shouldn’t be what the user desires. The user is expecting to go back to the college cart.(D) (A)(D) (3)
- On the “app submission” page, the user should be able to view and edit previous selections more easily, instead of having to click into the application itself. (A) (B)(D)(3)
- With the current transitions, I was stuck in a loop between View Cart and Search more pages. (D) (4)
- After searching for a college, there is no option to exit out other than to go back to the home screen. One can encounter this by clicking on the General box in the App Overview section on my application for a certain school also. (A)(D) © (4)

H4: Consistency & Standards

- In the screen for searching colleges, it is not clear to me why some schools are placed with horizontal scroll in the top row, but other rows have 1 element. © (A) (B)(2)
- On the search result page, the user clicks “in cart” to remove a college from the cart. On the “Your college cart” page, the user can’t use the same button. Instead, the user needs to click the upper right icon to remove a college. Users might be confused by the different button and positioning of the button for the same function.(B)(2)
- In what order will the schools be displayed to the user? Currently, most schools say “recommended based on location”, one says “recommended based on academmm interests”, and one is blank. I cannot easily identify a pattern in the order. (A) ©(2)
- In its smaller view, Disneyland Institute is said to have 1 Optional Essay and ACT/SAT Test Scores Required. Clicking into Disneyland Institute, the requirements change to 2 required essays and optional test scores. The requirements change throughout the prototype. The application deadline for Disneyland Institute changes from February 24 in the smaller view to January 5 in its own page to March 5 in the College Cart page, etc. The deadlines for the other schools are similarly not consistent. (A)(1)
- P17 scrolling is incomplete. Cannot see the ‘View Application’ button of the last college. (D) (A)(4)

- Top bar is inconsistent across the pages. In the homepage, the top bar overflows to date and time.(D)(1)
- Pg 17 the header 'Your college cart' has the same styling as the button 'Search More'.This confuses the user thinking the header is a button(D) (A) (3)

H5: Error Prevention

- No option to unselect some universities. (D) (2)
- Users are not allowed to revisit sections inside the application (General, Academics, Essays) when they have been completed. If users cannot review their application before submitting, this would cause many errors. (A) (D)(3)
- The prototype does not give a way for users to retract information that they may have inaccurately entered; for example, if a user accidentally chose "Spring 2021" when they meant to choose "Fall 2021". This is particularly noticeable in the CeCe sections. (A) (3)

H6: Recognition not Recall

- 'Skip this question for now' does not skip to the next question. It transitions to the home tab and deletes the flow. Users have to remember their answers once the flow is rewired. (D) (3)
- Of the 3 application requirements, the smaller view only lists the essays and test scores, not the rec letters required. (A) (1)
- When I click "start application" I lose all of the information about the specific school's application requirement. It is a bit of an involved process to get that important information back and it is way too much information to try and remember. © (2)

H7: Efficiency of Use

- Power users (e.g. applying to 20 colleges) may have a tedious experience with answering the same questions over and over with CeCe. (A) (4)
- CeCe chatbot seems like an important feature because it is the only way to complete an application. There is no icon to summon it on demand. (D) (4)

H8: Minimalist Design

- Several elements shift when clicking "Add To Cart": the time, Recommended For You, the location icons, etc. (A)(D)(1)
- Pg23 edit button is blue and the rest two are yellow.(D)(1)
- The App overview page does not seem distinct enough from the main application page for it to be its own page. As a user, it is not clear the difference in the pages when I click "App Overview" in the bottom of the screen vs. when I click the back arrow to bring me back to the application overview. Both are a single click and bring you to almost identical information, yet they look like different pages. © (1)
- The difference between the chat button and the "LET CECE PICK" button is not clear to me. If they do the same thing, which it appears to me that they do, I do not think there is a need for both buttons. ©(2)

H9: Help Users with Errors

- If the user accidentally clicks “in cart”, the college is removed from the cart. Removing a college should be a significant action for the user, so there should be a pop-up message that notifies the user what it means. (B)(4)
- Could not type after pressing ‘search a college’ bar (D)(2?)
- ‘Academics’, ‘essays’ are bold but ‘general’ has different typography.(D) ((1)

H10: Help & Documentation

- The current UI doesn’t seem to have a documentation page for the user. There should be a question icon around terms such as “letters of rec”, “net price calculator”, etc., since some users of the app are high school students who are just starting out with college applications, and might not know jargons. © (B)(3)
- ‘Recommended based on’ is crucial information that is hard to notice. It's too grey and small relative to other icons. (D) (1)
- It is not immediately intuitive that a chat bot exists and what it does (a)(b)(c)(d) (3)

3. Summary of Violations

Category	# Viol. (sev 0)	# Viol. (sev 1)	# Viol. (sev 2)	# Viol. (sev 3)	# Viol. (sev 4)	# Viol. (total)
H1: Visibility of Status	0	2	4	2	0	8
H2: Match Sys & World	0	1	0	3	2	6
H3: User Control	0	0	0	2	2	4
H4: Consistency & Standards(S)	0	2	3	1	1	7
H5: Error Prevention(S)	0	0	1	2	0	3
H6: Recognition not Recall	0	1	1	1	0	3
H7: Efficiency of Use	0	0	0	0	2	2
H8: Minimalist Design	0	3	1	0	0	4
H9: Help Users with Errors	0	1	1	0	1	3
H10: Help & Documentation	0	2	0	1	0	3
Total Violations by Severity	0	12	11	12	8	43

Note: check your answer for the green box by making sure the sum of the last column is equal to the sum of the last row (not including the green box)

4. Evaluation Statistics

Severity / Evaluator	Evaluator A	Evaluator B	Evaluator C	Evaluator D	Evaluator E
Sev. 0	0%	0%	0%		
Sev. 1	33.33%	10%	8.33%	58%	
Sev. 2	36.36%	10%	55%	18%	
Sev. 3	66.67%	40%	33%	58%	
Sev. 4	62.5%	20%	38%	75%	
Total (sevs. 3 & 4)	65%	30%		65.0%	
			35%		
Total (all severity levels)	48.84%	30%	33%	51.16%	

*Note that the bottom rows are *not* calculated by adding the numbers above it.

5. Summary Recommendations

[merge the general recommendations you made here]

Evaluator A

Using the framework of the Nielsen heuristics, I view the biggest opportunities for improvement for the CollegeCompanion prototype as H4: Consistency & Standards, H1: Visibility of System Status, and H5: Error Prevention.

My thoughts under H4 broadly aim to create a consistent, predictable user experience. The major points here (by which I mean aspects that may derail the user experience and cause confusion/frustration) are accurate linking between screens, making sure the deadlines and requirements for one given school stay the same from screen to screen, and ensuring that the user will definitely discover all the important elements (such as schools) by maintaining consistency of horizontal or vertical scrolling.

My thoughts on H1 aim to inform the user. Since CollegeCompanion targets the very real need of students who find the college application process overwhelming, it seems incredibly important for the app itself to give lots of clarity to users. As such, adding confirmation such as screens or animations, and clarifying what “making progress” means, will hopefully be helpful.

Finally, with regards to H5, I think error prevention is one of the most important pillars of an app that handles something as important as college applications. Ideally, I think users should be able to freely edit and experiment with their applications in a way that flows smoothly. To that end, it would be wonderful to allow users to review their applications and have access to undo and redo options (particularly with CeCe).

I love the direction of the app and the playful, friendly conversational tone; I can already feel how a cheerful companion like CeCe can make the college application process more approachable and less stressful. I am super excited to see how Team CollegeCompanion expands on CeCe’s voice! In addition, I really like the coherent colour scheme present in the app: the dark blue and yellow are complementary and successfully give an academic feel to the app.

The UI is intuitive and user-friendly overall. The main things I appreciate is the intuitive “card” and “cart” design, which directly borrows from user habits from online shopping scenarios. It would be even better if the UI can offer as many ways to edit selection of colleges and application materials as possible.

Another highlight (and pitfall at the same time) is the chatbot Cece. For the user, it might not be necessary to have an option “let Cece pick” when they start the application. The reason is that the three options are sequential - you need to pick the enrollment then first, then academics, and finally essays. Therefore, even though there’s a feeling of randomness provided by Cece, it’s actually the same if the user goes through the process on their own. In addition, if the user is expecting to get the application done, it’s unclear as to how much value “let Cece pick” provides.

Evaluator C

This application looks awesome so far! My first recommendation is to make the ranking for lists of colleges more clear before searching. After the recommended colleges, it is unclear how the ones below it are ordered. One option is to list them alphabetically with the ability to jump to different letters. I would also recommend making the search bar functionality a bit more clear so that users know what they are able to search. One option would be to put a little tool tip message explaining how to search when a user first navigates to this page.

I would also recommend making it more clear how to use CECE and that it is a bot that you can chat with. Perhaps this can also be in the form of a tooltip when a user first has the option to interact with CECE. The tool tip could explain how it works, as well as some tips for how to best interact. I know this is at the top of the text when chatting with CECE, but I think it could be more clear to have it before as well.

Lastly, I think it would be nice to have some sort of FAQ page as well as a testimonials page. The application process is already nerve wracking and adding a brand new tool to that could be intimidating. Perhaps these two pages could ensure users of its ability to mitigate stress by combining all necessary information into one platform.

Evaluator D:

The unique selling point of the app seems to be a) it has a friendly, interactive chatbot that breaks the applications into chunks b)it has fancy AI based recommendations for colleges. For a), adding more personality to the chatbot with an icon, visual design might be helpful. For b), I recommend documenting the recommendation process or taking some data from the user before to make it feel like the recommendation is personalized to the user.

It is hard to distinguish the uniqueness of this app from Common App or existing solutions. One recommendation might be to add features for those who want to do the application entirely on the phone. Some features to consider:

- a. Handwritten text to PDF features for those without computers
- b. Voice to text features for visually impaired students
- c. Recommendation of external scholarships/financial aid/ gofundme fundraising etc.
- d. Have CeCe ask deep brainstorming questions about essays, life etc.

It might be a good idea to have the app deliver information about the school. Currently I can apply to places but cannot research places through it. Collegeniche.com has some good design about how summaries can be given in card like structures.

Severity Ratings

- 0 - not a usability problem
- 1 - cosmetic problem
- 2 - minor usability problem
- 3 - major usability problem; important to fix
- 4 - usability catastrophe; imperative to fix

Heuristics

H1: Visibility of System Status

- Keep users informed about what is going on

H2: Match Between System & Real World

- Speak the users' language
- Follow real world conventions

H3: User Control & Freedom

- "Exits" for mistaken choices, undo, redo
- Don't force down fixed paths

H4: Consistency & Standards

- Words, actions, and UI elements should be consistent across the entire platform
- Follow platform and industry conventions

H5: Error Prevention

- Minimize error-prone conditions
- Remove memory burdens, support undoing, and warn your users when necessary

H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall

- Make objects, actions, options, & directions visible or easily retrievable

H7: Flexibility & Efficiency of Use

- Accelerators for experts (e.g., gestures, keyboard shortcuts)
- Allow users to tailor frequent actions (e.g., macros)

H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design

- No irrelevant information. Focus on the essentials.

H9: Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, & Recover from Errors

- Error messages in plain language
- Precisely indicate the problem
- Constructively suggest a solution

H10: Help & Documentation

- Easy to search
- Focused on the user's task
- List concrete steps to carry out
- Not too large