

CONNECT

MAKING DREAMS ACCESSIBLE

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Connect



Stanford Medical Youth
Science Program (SMYSP)



Costs \$0



Pays \$0



Housed



Stanford, CA



N/A

Add

Website

Review

Problem Description

High school is a time for students to explore their interests and potential future careers. Unfortunately, many low-income and minority students lack exposure to profitable career paths and access to expensive learning opportunities. Furthermore, lack of representation prevents these students from seeing themselves succeed in high profile careers. There are programs trying to bring in racially and economically diverse candidates into their field. However, many students are not aware that these programs exist and many programs have trouble finding candidates.

Solution Overview

Our solution is a mobile web app that facilitates reflection and exploration of interests and careers and presents students with reasonable opportunities. Using Connect, students can view interests, professions, and opportunities in a gaming fashion through the explore feature. This information gets stored in their homepage for easy reflection or removal. Students can also search for opportunities through our database using a filter and search bar. Finally, students can review opportunities they have participated and leave their mark on the Connect community.

Tasks and Task Flows

Simple Task: Explore

As students see an interest or profession pop onto the screen, they can click “like,” “dislike,” or “unsure”. Opportunities, such as academic programs and scholarships are also thrown in so students can save for later or pass. Opportunities come up randomly is so students can view opportunities that they may have never thought about before. We chose to have Explore replace the professions quiz from last quarter because we wanted the exploration phase to be expansive rather than

narrowing. We also wanted

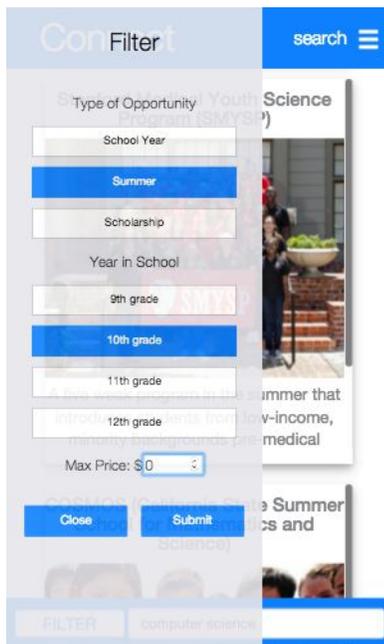
students to be able to continue

exploring interests, professions, and opportunities. This task is also meant for users who may not know what they want to explore. They might find it easier to have interests, professions, and opportunities shown to them rather than seeking them out. It’s also more engaging and fun to go through than a professions quiz.

Medium Task: Search

There are two ways to search through the database for academic programs, summer programs, and scholarships. The first is a filter pane that can be

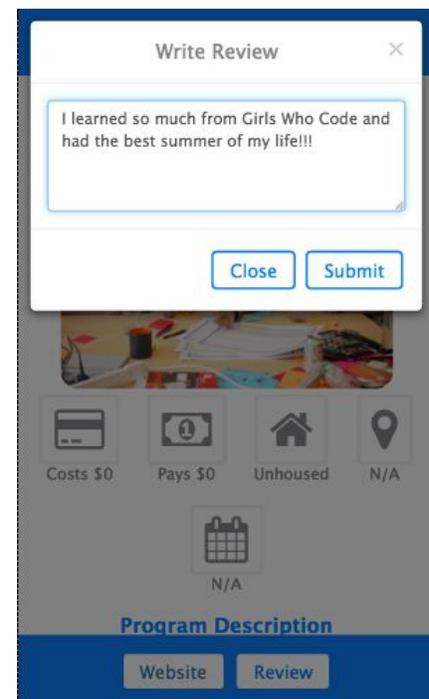
accessed through the filter button at the bottom of the search page. The filter pane allows students to filter through year, type of opportunity, and maximum price they can afford. The second is a search bar that is also found at the bottom of the search



page. The search bar allows students to search via keywords that they are interested in. This task is meant for students who are coming into the app knowing what they are interested in and want to find a specific opportunity for that interest. This user might be categorized as a power user in some way. On the other hand, this is also meant for students who would just like to browse through opportunities to learn more about them.

Complex Task: Review

The complex task is to write a review for a program that you participated in. For each program, a student can add a review about their experience, what they learned, and how it helped them explore their interest. Our hope is that when students are exploring through programs, they can use the reviews to help them understand from a student perspective how the program is helpful. Therefore, after they participate in it, they will go back and review the program themselves. The review is freeform so that students don't feel constrained in any way. When we tested the review feature with students, we also got feedback that if the review was a form, it would feel more like a task and less appealing to students. The review feature was also meant to be the first step towards trying to create a community for students on the app, where they can view and read about other people's experience.



Explore Walkthrough

Connect explore ☰

Interest

Helping
 assisting others - through face to face interactions, legislation, creating tools, etc.

Dislike Unsure Like

Connect explore ☰

Interest

Journalist
 a person who writes for newspapers or magazines or prepares news to be broadcast on radio or television

Dislike Unsure Like

Connect explore ☰

Opportunity

QuestBridge College Prep Scholars

A summer program for juniors that helps them learn about college before they embark on the college application process. There is also a program for seniors in which they apply to

Pass Add

Find Opportunity Walkthrough

Connect search ☰

Carleton Liberal Arts Experience (CLAE)

The Carleton Liberal Arts Experience (CLAE) will select 52 high school students who have just completed their sophomore year and bring them to

REC Youth

FILTER Enter search terms...

Connect search ☰

Girls Who Code

Learn how to code in a group of 20 girls in classrooms all around! Classrooms are held in tech offices and you get to go on a bunch of fieldtrips to learn more.

Stanford Medical Youth Science Program (SMYSP)

FILTER computer science

Connect Filter search ☰

Type of Opportunity

School Year

Summer

Scholarship

Year in School

9th grade

10th grade

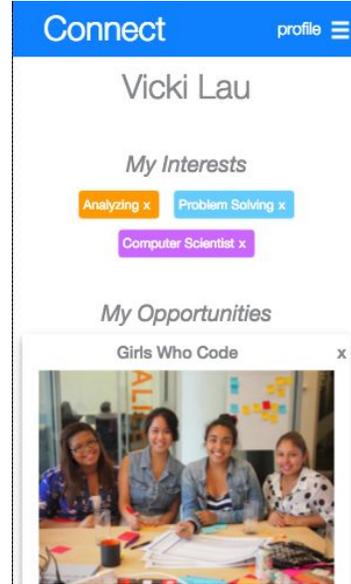
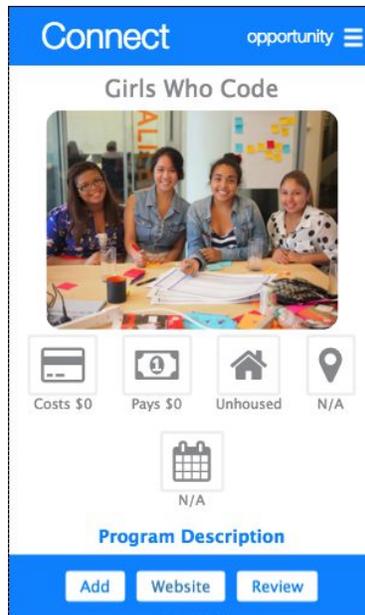
11th grade

12th grade

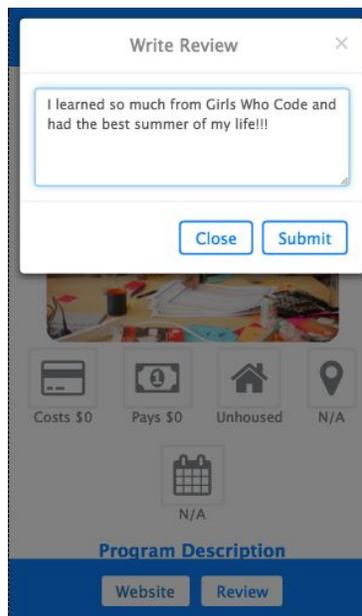
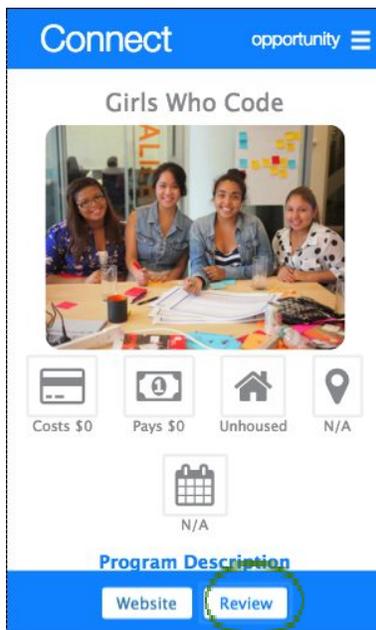
Max Price: \$0

Close Submit

FILTER computer science

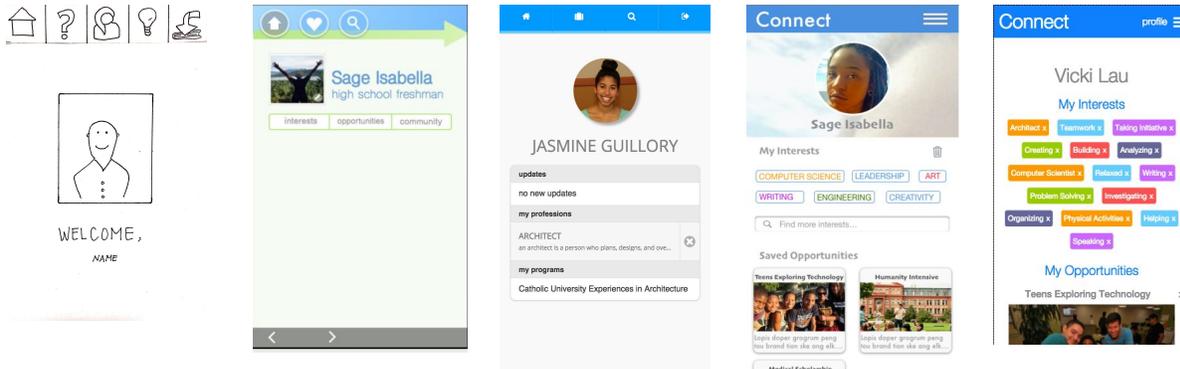


Write Review Walkthrough



Design Evolution

Homepage

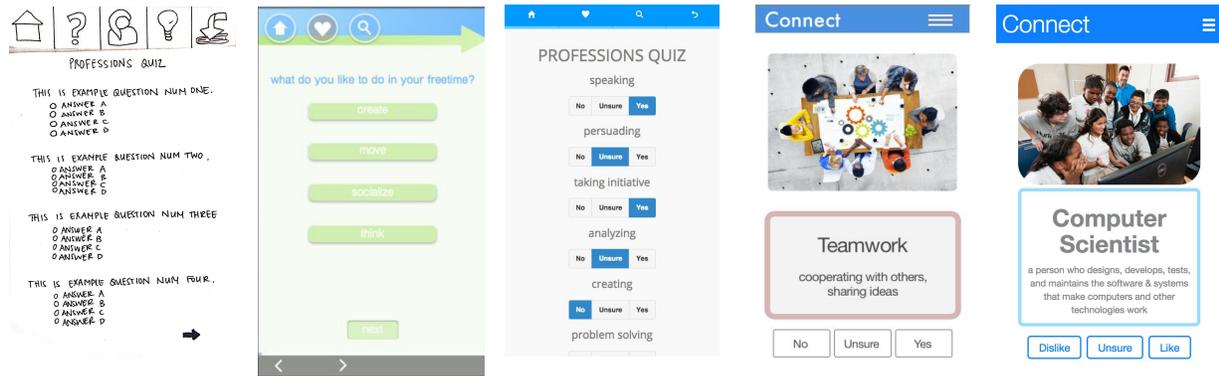


Purpose: The purpose of the homepage developed from a simple landing page that welcomed the user to a dynamic page that serves as a reflection pinboard. In our first four iterations, the homepage was the landing page when the user logged in. In our final iteration, we changed the landing page to the Explore page.

Navigation bar: We transitioned from a button navigation bar to a hamburger menu because students found it difficult to understand what the icons represented. Additionally, we added text next to the hamburger menu that denotes what page the user is on.

Color choice: We decided to have the interests as colorful buttons because the homepage seemed not interactive and fun. The colors give off a more fun feel than grayscale.

Explore



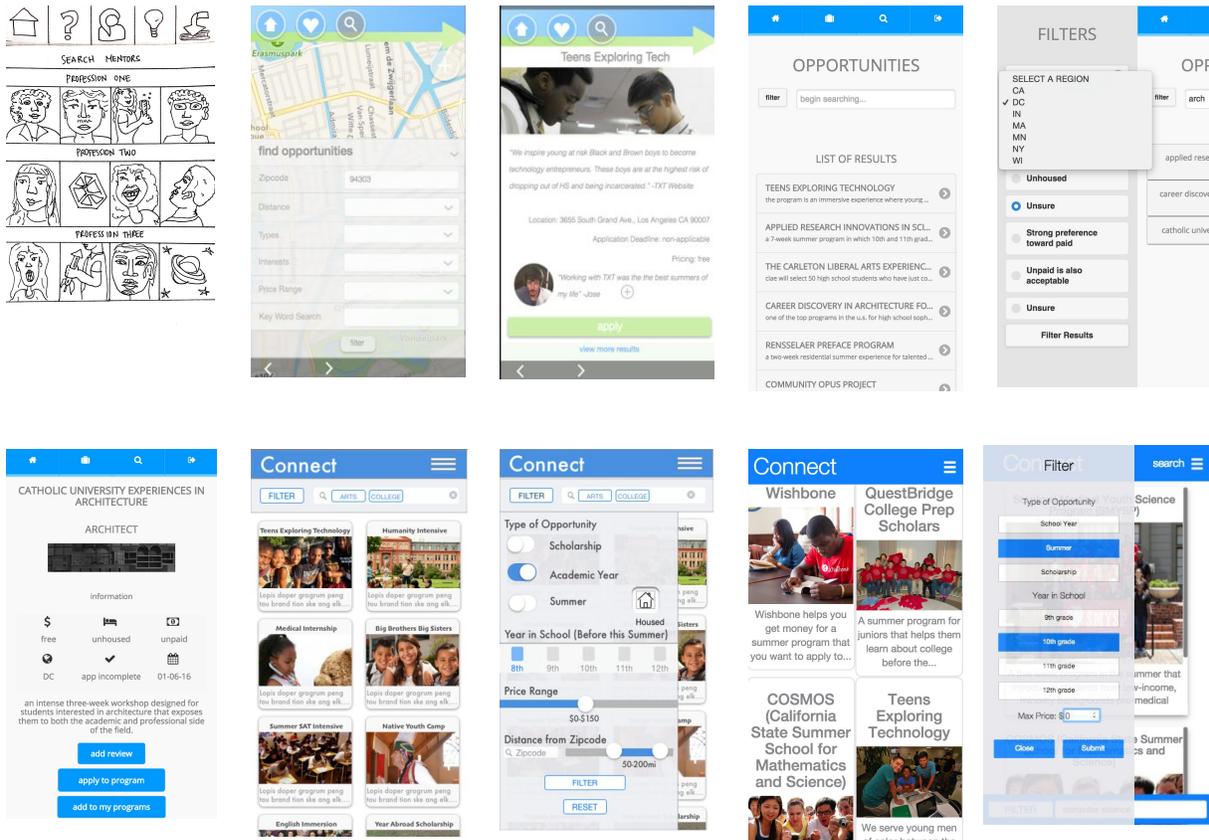
Overview: The explore page changed from a simple professions quiz to an interactive way to learn more about yourself and opportunities. We found that the profession's quiz exposed students to careers, but also narrowed exploration. Additionally, students wanted to see more personality based questions.

Images: We found that students craved seeing more images and it usually hooked students into using the app more. Images allow students to see what something means or see themselves as computer scientists or someone who likes teamwork.

Playing card outline: We switched to using a playing card type border so that it felt more like a game. The playing card also allowed us to contain the heading, image, and text in a single unit. We also added the text into a box that will have a scrollbar to read through instead of just taking up space on the screen. This allows us to have all the playing cards on the screen without having it go past the footer.

Footer: We also added a footer to our explore page so that the 'dislike,' 'unsure,' and 'like' button can all be found in the same location and maintain static throughout all the cards. This also changes to 'pass' and 'add' when an opportunity is shown to highlight that we are now looking at an opportunity, not an interest/profession.

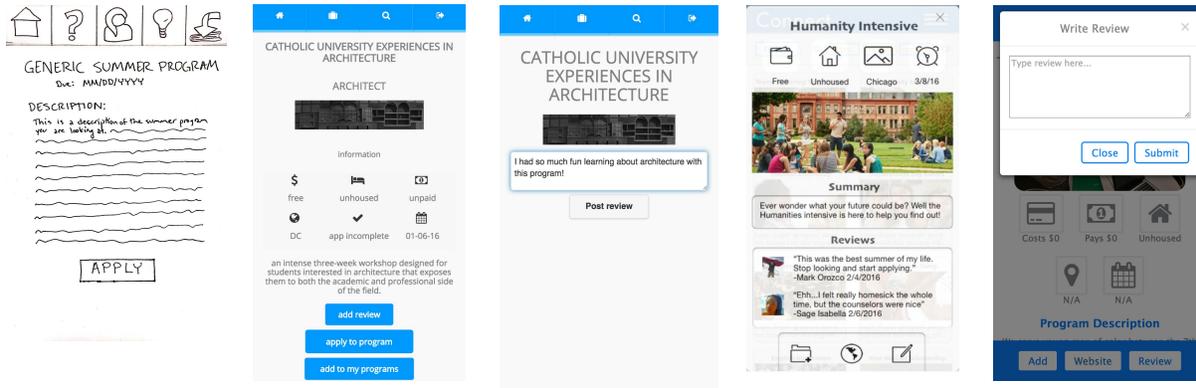
Search



Filter panel: We narrowed down our filter options based on feedback from students during testing in order to have a filter that is not as cluttered as before. We also made the filter transparent so that when a student clicks the buttons on the filter they can see the items appear/disappear behind that filter panel.

Filter footer: We also added a sticky filter footer that contains the filter button and search bar. We recognize that these items are usually at the top of the page as we had it before, but we wanted to keep consistency from the 'Explore' page where all the action buttons are found in the sticky footer. The footer also remains constant so that you see it despite scrolling through opportunities.

Review



Popup module: We made the review a popup module that faded the background a bit instead of a separate new page. This allows users to quickly tap out if they accidentally clicked on the button or see what is happening behind the popup module. It also models a lot of different review buttons on other applications so it feels more familiar to use.

Add Review Button: In order to keep the consistency from the 'Explore' and 'Search' features, we added a sticky footer to the individual programs pages so that you know where the action buttons are clustered.

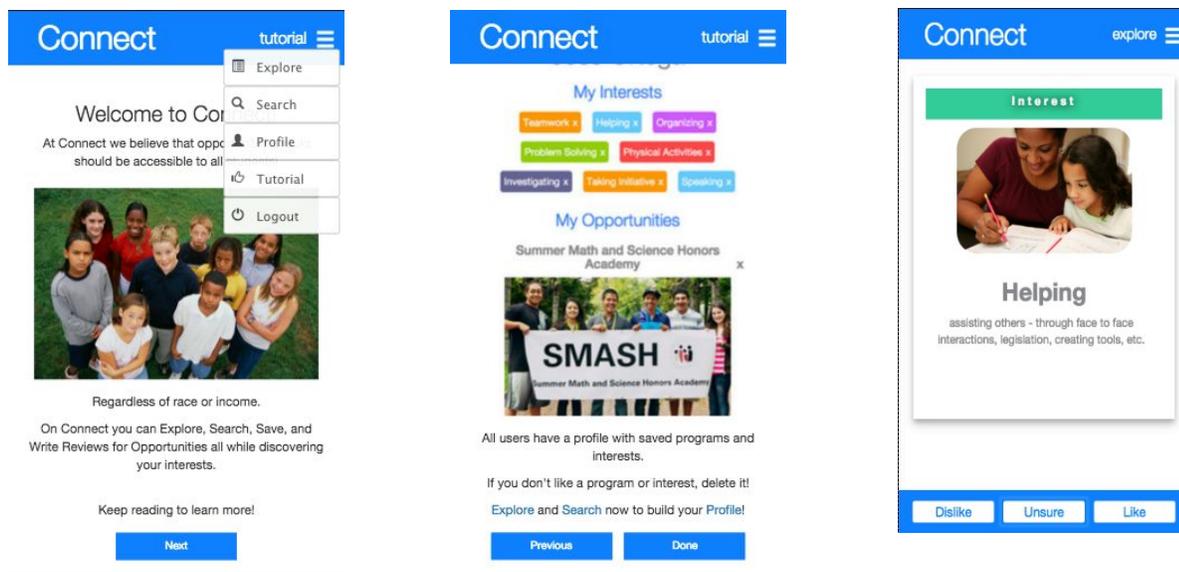
Useful Evaluation Techniques

The evaluation techniques that were most valuable to our prototypes usability were the interviews that we had with students from high schools via a teacher connection. Those interviews were fruitful in the sense that students were prepared to talk to us and had a lot of helpful advice on how to make the app more fun to use. We also thought it was most helpful when we allowed students to walk through the app without much guidance but prompting them with scenarios such as "imagine you now participated in X program and want to write a review" instead

of just saying “write a review for a program” because students would fixate on questions such as “what program?”

Final Interface

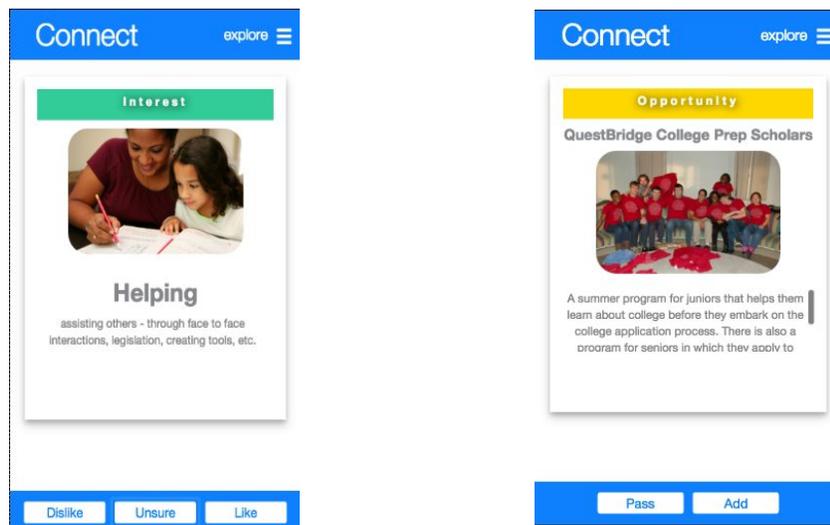
When a user registers for a new account, the user is brought to a 7-step tutorial that explains Connect’s purpose and the features available. The user can either click through the full tutorial or click on the hamburger menu on the upper-right corner to skip to the Explore, Search, or Profile page. At the end of the tutorial, clicking “Done” will bring the user to the Explore page. The Explore page is the landing page for returning users after log in.



On the Explore page, the user is shown interests one at a time and is asked to provide feedback on the interests in the form a “Like”, “Dislike”, and “Unsure” click. After every 3 interests shown, an opportunity is served up. The user can scroll through the program description and either add or pass on the opportunity by clicking the appropriate button. Interests and opportunities are clearly distinguished from each other with the colored header and the change in button

options. The Explore page is meant to be a constant process that is only limited by the number of interests and opportunities in the database, similar to Tinder's model. The user can either click through the Explore feature until there are no more interests or opportunities or click the hamburger menu to jump to a different page.

Ideally, the Explore feature would collect data behind the likes and dislikes on every interest and use that data to find an opportunity suggestion the user would find interesting. Because this complex algorithm goes beyond the scope of the class, we were unable to implement it as we chose to focus on other important aspects of our app. Currently, the interests and opportunities that are shown in Explore are randomized.

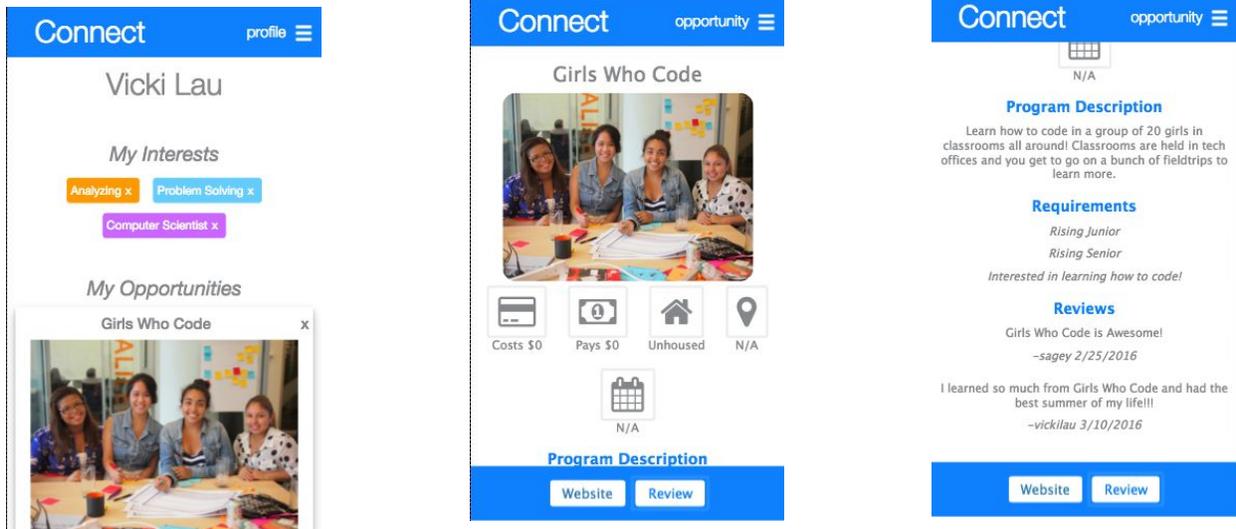


The interests and opportunities that are “liked” and “added” on the Explore page are immediately attached to the user’s profile. On the Profile page, the user can easily delete interests and opportunities if they no longer find them relevant by clicking the “x” next to the interest or opportunity. The colors of the interest do not have any meaning and were added to make the page more visually appealing.

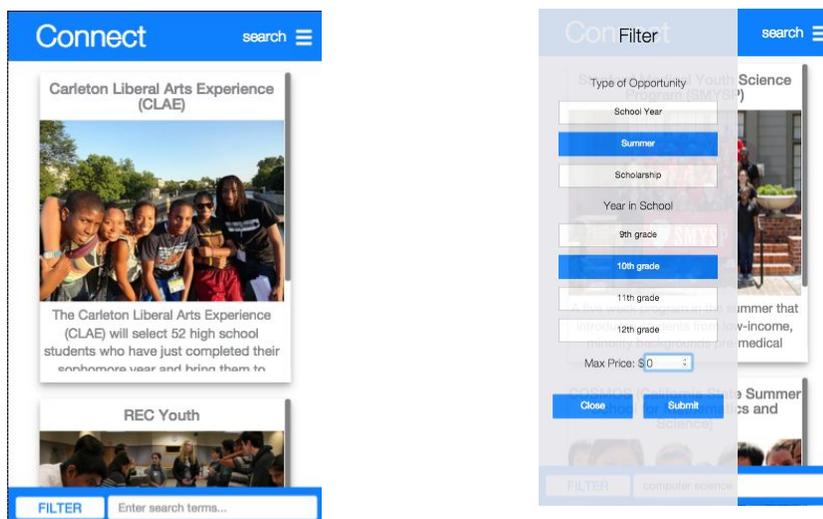
Clicking on an opportunity will bring the user to that opportunity's information page.

An opportunity's information page summarizes the main points about that program or scholarship. The 5 icons under the image help users quickly determine the cost, pay, housing, location, and due date of the opportunity. The requirements for the opportunity are listed to help users avoid wasting time on opportunities they are not eligible for. Reviews from other Connect users are listed at the bottom to help users decide whether the program is right for them. The action buttons are contained in a blue sticky footer at the bottom of the page to be consistent with the action buttons in the Explore page. If an opportunity is already added to a user's profile, the "Add" button is not displayed and only the "Website" and "Review" buttons are visible. Clicking on the "Website" button will bring the user to the program's web page to learn more about the program and/or apply to it. When users complete an opportunity, they can click on the "Review" button to write about their experience (as shown in Task Flows section).

Currently, any registered Connect user can add a review for any opportunity. Ideally, a user should only be able to write a review after the user has applied and attended the program. However, we were unable to implement this feature because that would require some form of communication with the programs on our database to determine whether a user attended the program. Because we added these programs ourselves, we do not have a connection with them.



If a user desires to search directly for an opportunity rather than go through the Explore page, the user can go to the Search page. The filter button and search field are contained in a blue sticky footer to be consistent with the other pages in the app. Search terms are tokenized and programs that contain any of the tokens are displayed, similar to how Pinterest search works. The search goes through the opportunity's title and description. Additionally, it searches through the opportunity's "interest" tags. These tags are not visible to the user and were attached to the opportunity when it was added into the database. The tags are similar to the interest tags that are attached to a user's profile when they like an interest on Explore. The user can also filter the opportunities displayed based on the type, school year, and price.



Making it Real

We are a team of three undergraduate seniors and one master's student all with strong computer science backgrounds. We are a diverse group of mainly minority students who have a passion for social justice. Having experience as low-income and or minority students has shown us the unique needs of our target users. We hope that our experience can help other students reach their full potential.

We currently envision Connect as a non-profit company. We plan to incorporate a LinkedIn-inspired model to our application in which we have two types of "customers": non-paying, low-income, and minority students looking for opportunities and paying companies and organizations looking to conduct outreach with low-income and minority students for their scholarships and programs. We believe this model will be successful because we have an enticing value proposition for both customer types.

By paying for our platform, companies and organizations gain access to a student base that they normally wouldn't be able to reach. A lot of companies are currently trying to increase diversity in their workforce but do not have exposure to or connections with students from low-income and minority backgrounds. Many companies have programs and scholarships for disadvantaged high-school students as a way to start recruitment and name branding early on and would find Connect to be an easy platform to advertise on. Although we see the fee that these profitable companies pay as our main revenue stream, we do not want to limit opportunities to just those.

Non-profit organizations will also be able to advertise their opportunities on Connect either for free or for a much smaller fee. For students, they gain access to opportunities they otherwise wouldn't find or would have to search endlessly

through the internet to find. We aim to have Connect's market size encompass all low-income and minority high school students in the United States. To provide adequately for these students, we aim to have as many programs and scholarships for low-income and minority students across the nation as possible in our database.

We plan to have key partnerships with high schools and academic enrichment programs to establish credibility with our target users. We aim to have these high schools incorporate Connect into their career center as their prime resource for helping students find extracurricular opportunities and scholarships. If we can successfully establish this relationship with high schools, companies looking to conduct outreach will find this platform very viable and will be enticed to become our customer.

Connect's long-term goal is to provide low-income and minority students an easily accessible way to discover, explore, pursue their passions, and be successful despite the barriers they face due to institutionalized racism and classism.

Summary

Connect started as an idea to empower low-income and minority students. Through two quarters of needfinding, ideating, and prototyping, we discovered that the main issues preventing these students from pursuing competitive careers are a lack of exposure to professions and a lack of exposure to opportunities. By ideating and listening to feedback from our users we created a feature that helps students explore opportunities and professions they may never have heard of. We created a platform that encourages students to constantly explore, experience, and reflect upon their experience and themselves. Although Connect is a small solution to a multifaceted problem we believe that Connect can help make dreams accessible.