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CSE 403
Written Project Proposal

UW Insider

Vision

Our product is inspired by an experience that many college students share, which is wishing that we'd made better decisions about majors, classes, jobs, living situations, etc., throughout our college career. Isaiah Mathieu (one of the group members) believes that if he had access to the information he has now about classes, majors, professors, etc., he would have planned his college career much differently. He would have tried to graduate as a CS major (instead of CE) as quickly as possible instead of choosing Materials Science Engineering then switching to CE and needing 5 years to graduate. This is just one of the many things he'd do differently if he was suddenly a freshman at UW deciding what to do with his next 4 years. He made poor decisions along the way because he didn't have access to the information he needed to make good decisions—it was stored in the minds of UW students who had already gone through the system.

Many students share Isaiah's plight, so to address this we intend to build a website where students who have learned from their experiences at the UW can share advice with newer or future students. This advice can range from the process of picking/switching majors or looking for jobs, to choosing classes or finding a place to live. This information is vital to students trying to make these difficult and possibly life-altering decisions.

Currently the best way to get this kind of insider information, aside from talking to students, is the UW subreddit. But clearly a simple subreddit is limited because of the reddit format. A visitor who is interested in information about CS has to wade through irrelevant posts about other majors. We envision a tree-like structure where general information about the university will be located at the top then users can traverse down the tree to specific majors then classes/professors. There's a website called studentsreview.com that boasts a similar service but it's difficult to navigate, doesn't offer information on specific classes, is not mobile-friendly, and has a poorly laid out UI.

Our service will be called UW Insider, which emphasizes the insider nature of the information on the site: it's generated and vetted by students and contains the kind of valuable information that official UW sites won't offer such as certain majors not being particularly useful in the real world, certain professors have trouble teaching some or all classes, average salaries of graduates, tons of free food at tech talks, etc.

Software Architecture

The structure of our application will be one that allows users to share advice or seek answers to their questions by asking the community. Advice could span from very general things such as picking majors, getting jobs, or where to live to very specific things such as which classes to take, where to get help, or how to set up printing from your PC in 002. Whatever our

users need help figuring out about UW will be a potential topic addressed on our website. Users will be able to upvote the most helpful advice and answered questions which will do a rough sort of most relevant information. This along with a well-organized layout for our UI will make it easy for our users to find informative answers to all their questions and advice that can help impact their future decisions at the UW.

This service will be a website with a desktop and mobile version. Eventually we would like to build an app, but for now we will stick to a website since it is easier to create long posts if you are on a platform that has a full keyboard. Most college students frequently use laptops/desktops, especially when planning their path through college so our website will be perfect for planning as well.

We plan to use PHP to generate the pages, javascript to handle user interaction, and a database such as Postgres to store the content. AWS seems like a good choice to power the backend.

Challenges and Risks

For our application to be useful we need to have many users who are willing to take the time to share their advice with others. We will need to create initial content and discussions in order to attract community members that will eventually sustain the advice offering and seeking. Additionally we face the problems of misinformation, but this is mostly mitigated by implementing an up/down-vote system.

Another major challenge will be figuring out how to structure the site so that it is easy to find information, contribute advice, and seek answers to questions. A poorly structured site will make it difficult for users to find or post advice in the right sections which is a vital part of our application. We intend to conduct extensive user research and validate UI mockups before deciding on the structure and layout of the website.