University's Admission & Financial Aid Website Redesign Report

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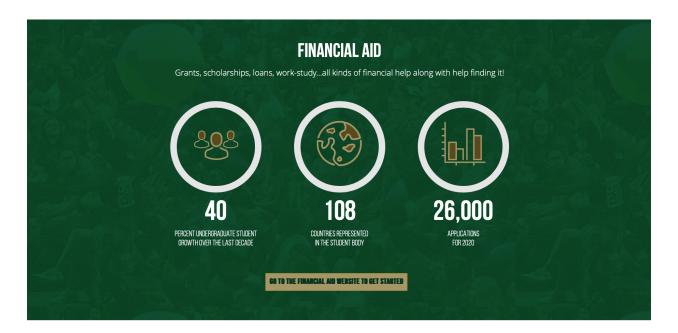
Chapter 1: Design Critique Learnings

Visual Design Critique

The website is consistent in terms of visuals but there are few key issues plaguing across the design. Some issues identified were the inconsistency of layouts, having some distracting backgrounds like the video background present in hero section of landing page, and mismatch of contrasts.



In few sections the scaling is quite off matched. For example, the screenshot below shows how large the icons are which is quite unnecessary, considering that the number of visual aids such as icons used in the website are way too less than what it's supposed to be.



Appropriate usage of white space and re-arranging the visual hierarchy would improve the visual design of the website making it more interactive for users to use the website.

Interaction Design Critique

There are few inconsistencies in interaction related behaviors across the website. For example, the buttons embedded in card is quite inconsistent. Since one of the button's texts takes up to 3 lines of spacing, it creates an unnecessary gap in between.





This holds good for all resolution screen, starting from mobile device to desktop monitor resolutions.

In few places, the font weight is also inconsistent making it difficult to read in certain browsers and screen sizes. Below is a screenshot of a button which was taken from a 1920*1080 resolution monitor:



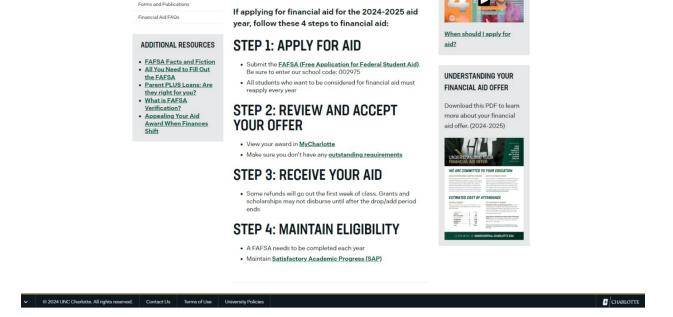
The same button looks normal on a 1660*1240 resolution monitor:



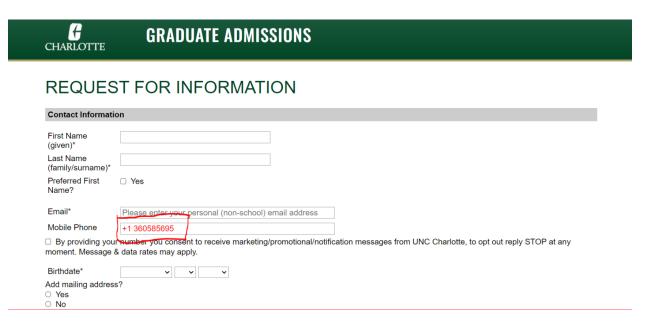
Apart from this there are several other interaction issues such as non-availability of progress indicators, confusing navigation bars, etc. These can be addressed by having few stuffs like sticky sidebar, form progress indicators to see the progress made by user, etc.

Heuristic Evaluation

Based on the heuristic evaluations done for the UNCC admission and financial aid website, there were some key points taken from it. Some challenges faced includes points like "There's no warning before a user leaves a page with a partially filled form, which could lead to unintended data loss if they accidentally navigate away or close the tab", which relates to error prevention, or stuffs like not having any tooltips or contextual help sort of interactive tools which might help users in troubleshooting issues which they face are some of the weaknesses identified in the website.



The few strengths identified were on how the errors are handled while filling form, such as labelling the data in bright red color, which makes it easier for the users to recognize, diagnose and recover from errors.



Having the user control and freedom to move across the website is also a good strength identified in the webpage. User can click on the logo at any time to get back to the homepage. Instances like this are few of the strengths identified in UNCC financial aid and admission website.

Chapter 2: Main Personas and Interviews

Persona Introduction

The three personas created initially were as follows:

Taylor Kim: Taylor seeks a specialized networking platform tailored for cybersecurity professionals. She wants to effortlessly connect with experts, access the latest industry insights, and share her own expertise. Her goals are to expand her professional network, stay updated on emerging threats and technologies, and establish herself as a thought leader. She aspires to lead a cybersecurity team, publish influential research, and become a recognized speaker at industry events. Taylor feels passionate about making a difference in cybersecurity but is sometimes frustrated by the lack of specialized networking options and time constraints due to her demanding job.

Frustrations faced were:

- Current professional networking platforms lack specialized cybersecurity communities
- Difficulty finding mentors or peers for advanced and niche topics
- Limited time for networking due to a demanding job schedule.

Raj Patel: Raj envisions a networking platform designed specifically for healthcare administrators, offering industry-specific discussions, resources, and peer connections. His goals include building a robust professional network, staying informed about healthcare innovations, enhancing his skills through professional development, and collaborating on industry challenges. He aspires to advance to a senior executive role, implement operational improvements that set industry standards, and gain recognition as a leader in healthcare administration. Raj feels deeply committed to improving patient care but often experiences isolation due to his demanding role and niche focus.

Frustrations faced were:

- Feels professionally isolated due to the demanding nature of his role
- Limited ability to attend in-person conferences and events
- Existing networking platforms do not cater specifically to healthcare management professionals.

And finally, this was the persona which I decided to keep for my project and find candidates who seemed relevant to my persona's character:

Kayla Jen: Kayla is the first in her family to attend a university. Due to this Kayla is stuck learning the ins and outs of the financial aid process on her own. Kayla knows she must take out loans to go to university and is also able to earn grants because she is an instate student. Kayla faces an issue where when it comes to information in relation to grants and loans it is so much that she tends not to even know where to start or how to apply.

- Kayla facing difficulty in understanding complex financial aid forms and processes.
- Kayla is overwhelmed by the amount of information on the website.

Interview Process

To refine our personas for the university website redesign project, I focused on recruiting participants who are first-generation undergraduate students actively navigating the admissions and financial aid processes. I reached out to few people in dining buildings like Prospector and Student Union to find such students who are first generation undergraduates. The candidates were freshers who recently joined UNCC and all of them were ready to participate in the interview as all of them faced certain issues in admission and financial aid process.

These were the interview questions asked to the participants:

- 1. Can you describe your overall experience with using the admissions or financial aid section of the website?
- 2. What are your primary goals when visiting the admissions or financial aid section of the website?
- 3. What are the biggest challenges or frustrations you have faced while navigating the website?
- 4. How do you prefer to find information about financial aid or admission requirements?
- 5. Can you describe a time when you struggled to understand the process for applying for financial aid?
- 6. How important is it for you to have detailed instructions and examples when applying for financial aid?
- 7. What kind of support would make your experience with the admissions or financial aid process smoother?
- 8. How confident do you feel about being able to complete the financial aid application process on your own? What factors influence this?
- 9. If you could redesign one section of the website to make it more helpful for students like you, what would you change?

Persona Development

Overall, the candidates expressed how they struggled to navigate throughout the website. They mentioned on how difficult it was to navigate across to different pages. The navigation was too complex, and on top of that most of the pages were nested as subpages which made it difficult for users to find them.

Participants found that the website was overwhelming with information which made it difficult to navigate. The labels and organizing of data were also unclear.

Participants also complained that it was difficult for them to understand few technologies and terminologies used across the website. The consistency of these terminologies was minimal as well.

There are only few interactive support tools present on the website. FAQ section is one of them. But users usually prefer getting their questions answered as soon as possible through tools like Live Chat or Phone helpline. The interview data revealed that users had difficulties navigating the admissions and financial aid website and understanding the available resources due to the complexity of the information structure and unfamiliar terminology. Main requirement was for clearer instructions, preferably structured in a step-

by-step format, which would reduce the memorizing load and make it easier for first-generation students to apply for financial aid confidently. The identified themes emphasize the importance of designing a website that balances information with accessibility and user-friendliness.

Due to the overwhelming experience reported by users, improving the information visualization of the website is prioritized to make key sections that are frequently visited easier to locate. Providing clear, organized steps for applications and financial aid processes is critical for user confidence and success. This should include visual aids, checklists, and explanations which is easier to comprehend for first- generation students. Easy access to support can alleviate user confusion, especially for first- generation students. Live chat, FAQ sections, and online resources, such as webinars, would address individual concerns effectively. The areas addressed are main obstacles for accessing and understanding the admissions and financial aid sections. By simplifying navigation, offering structured guidance, and expanding support options, the website can better meet the needs of its wider audience, which ensures the users to feel confident and supported throughout the application process.

Chapter 3: Top Three Needs and Design Ideas

Identification of Top Three Needs

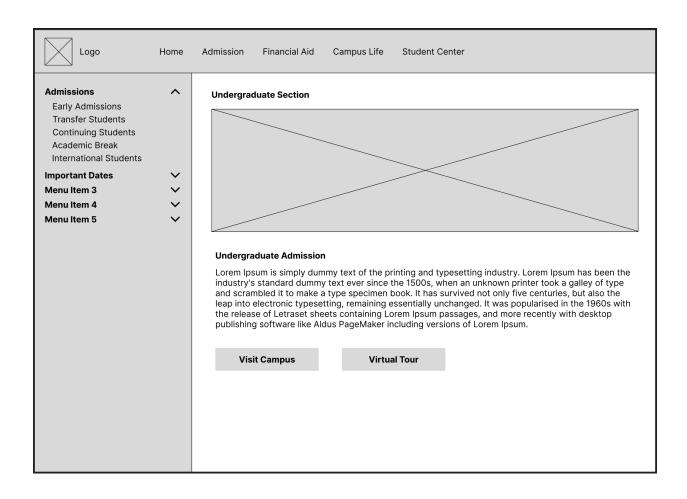
Navigation Complexity: The current website structure lacks proper navigation, making it challenging for users, especially first-generation students, to locate important information. Simplified and organized navigation will help users access admissions and financial aid resources more effectively.

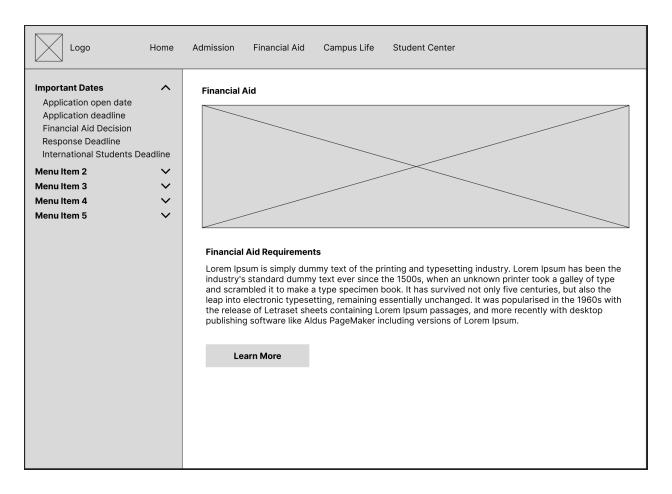
Lack of Step-by-Step Guidance: Users need proper, step-by-step instructions for completing the admissions and financial aid processes. By providing guides, visual aids, and checklists, the website can have an easier and more confident application experience for all users.

Insufficient Support Resources for Diverse Needs: The absence of immediate accessible support resources (such as live chat, detailed FAQs, and webinars) limits users' ability to address specific queries and challenges. Enhanced support options would provide essential guidance and assist first- generation applicants in successfully navigating the application process.

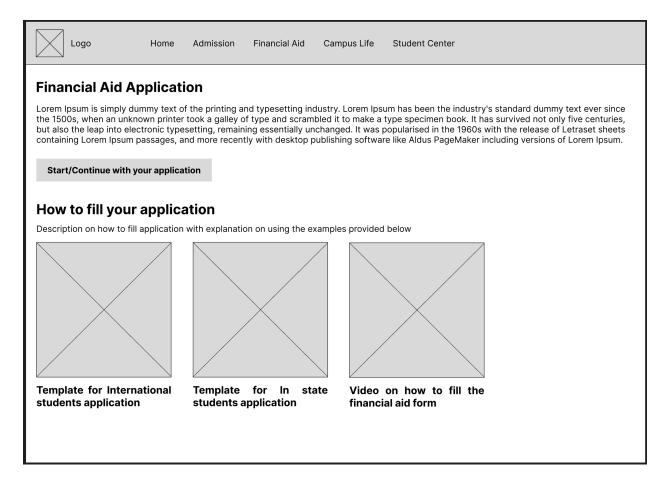
Design Ideas

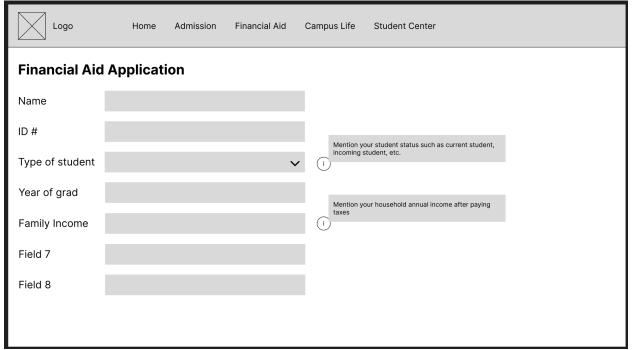
Navigation Complexity: Having all the common topics under one section and grouping them together will make it easier for the users to navigate across the website. Having a sticky sidebar type of structure which users can use to navigate anytime will also help them to stay and navigate across the website whenever needed.



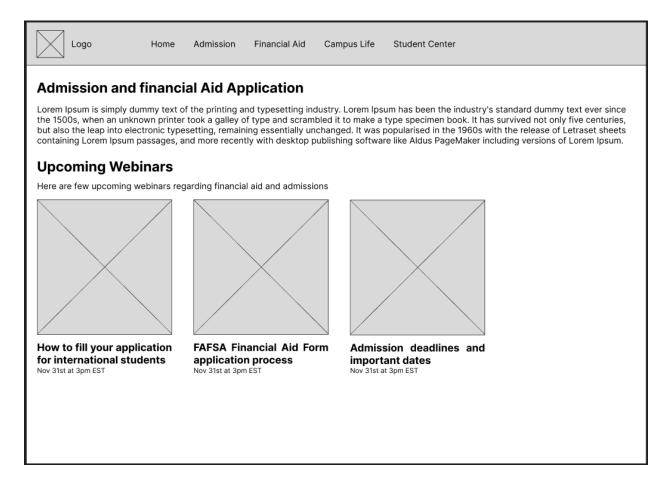


Lack of step-by-step guidance: Having few templates for filling up the forms as an example will be helpful for students. Having multiple examples forms for different category of students like international, instate, etc. will be helpful for all students especially first-generation students who must fill up the form on their own without the help of anyone. This will be helpful for parents as well who are helping the students to full the form. Having popovers in the application form which has information/hints about the fields will help users to know on what they must fill exactly to submit the form without any mistakes.





Insufficient support of resources: Having a discussion forum sort of feature will allow the users to ask and clarify their doubts as soon as possible, or just lookup the doubts asked previously by others. This will ensure that the user won't spend a lot of time just to get replies from concerned authorities before going ahead with the form. After that they can continue with their application process instantly without having to wait for a long time. Also having few guidance sessions like webinars and seminars conducted right before the admission or financial aid process begins will help the users to clarify their doubts directly with the professionals.



Chapter 4: Usability Testing

Participant Recruitment

It wasn't much of an issue for me this time to recruit my participants. The participants from previous interview helped me to get some more of them who were new to UNCC and were first generation students. After talking to them for a while I could figure out on how difficult it was for them to get through the application process. All the participants had similar issues, and it was associated with my persona as well. The participants were informed about them being recorded throughout the usability testing process. I asked them to

provide their consent to record their audio and screen while performing the testing. The consent is also noted in the audio files submitted for this assignment.

Task Assignment

Task 1:

You're in the homepage of UNC Charlotte admissions website. I want you to navigate to the application form which you must fill. During that process I even want you to check the application deadlines so that you can get to know by when you'll have to submit the application.

Task 2:

Now get back to the application form. Imagine you're done with it. I want you to fill the financial aid form as well. Navigate to the financial aid section and open the form. You're filling this form by yourself. What would you do if you run across a field in the form which doesn't make sense to you.

Task 3:

Let's say you don't figure out on what the field is at all due to complex terminologies. And you don't want to proceed with the application until you fill this section. Go ahead and try to debug this situation showing how you would

Follow-up questions

- 1. How was your experience with the website while trying to locate the application form and deadline related information?
- 2. How easy was it to navigate across the website?
- 3. Was it confusing to figure out what to do when you're unsure about the information you're providing while filling out the form?
- 4. Were there any other things which you expected while filling the application form on the website?

Usability Findings

Most part of the interview went well. The participants were able to figure out on what task they had to perform and the ways in which it can be done. The tasks were straightforward as well, which allowed the users to seamlessly go through the wireframe.

There weren't any challenges which I encountered during testing. It was simple and straightforward. It was quite surprising to see how users' perspective varies and is completely different from each other even for the same task. For example, when I provided them three distinct wireframes for a problem, I got three different responses from all three users. And their reasoning was also valid. So, it was difficult for me to choose which solution made more sense based on their feedback.

Changes Made

There weren't many changes required to incorporate into my design. The main changes included structuring the sidebar to make it more effective and visible to the users. I made sure the font size is increased to keep it accessible for all age groups and all types of users

including the ones with visual impairments. Had to let go off the header navigation with drop down and just keep it to a simple navbar as users preferred sticky sidebar more than a dropdown nested navigation. The buttons were spaced out even more to make sure that most of the stuffs are easily readable and doesn't clutter the webpage. The whitespace was used efficiently by adding some information cards and filler cards so that it doesn't give a blank look for users to see. Incorporated icons wherever possible so that there are more visual cues for the users while browsing the web page.

Chapter 5: High-Fidelity Prototypes and Changes

Evolution Explanation

Initially, the low-fidelity prototypes focused on core functionality and layout, providing a simplified wireframe to test key elements like navigation structure, placement of call-to-action buttons, and information hierarchy. Feedback from usability testing revealed pain points and opportunities for improvement, which were addressed in the high-fidelity prototypes with increased visual detail, interactivity, and alignment with user needs. **Low-Fidelity Design**: The original wireframe featured a basic vertical navigation bar with static links to major sections (e.g., "Admissions," "Financial Aid," "About Us"). Users reported difficulty understanding the hierarchy and had trouble locating frequently used sections like "Scholarships" and "FAQs."

Usability Feedback: Test participants noted that the navigation was not intuitive and lacked clear categorization. They also requested a sticky navigation feature to improve accessibility on longer pages.

High-Fidelity Prototype Changes:

Introduced a sidebar for consistent access to navigation options across all sections. Organized links into collapsible dropdown menus with labels like "Admissions Process," "Financial Aid Tools," and "Resources," making it easier to locate specific content. Enhanced the visual design with color coding and hover effects for better clarity and user engagement.

Screenshots and Annotations



Home

Admission

Financial Aid Campus Life

Student Center

Simple Navigation



Undergraduate Admissions

Graduate Admissions

About Us

At UNC Charlotte, we believe every student's journey to higher education is a unique and transformative experience. Our mission is to provide personalized support and accessible resources to help you navigate the admissions process with confidence and ease. As North Carolina's urban research university, we are dedicated to academic excellence, innovative research, and fostering a community that inspires personal and professional growth. With over 29,000 students, 170 undergraduate majors, and world-class faculty, UNC Charlotte offers an exceptional environment for learning, exploration, and achievement. We understand that applying to college can be exciting and challenging. That's why we strive to make our admissions process clear, efficient, and welcoming for all prospective students. Whether you're a first-year applicant, a transfer student, or pursuing graduate studies, our team is here to guide you every step of the way. UNC Charlotte celebrates diversity and fosters an inclusive campus culture where students from all backgrounds feel valued and supported. We are committed to creating a learning environment that empowers every student to succeed and thrive.

Less cluttered icons











Campus Links

Resources

Resources

Resources



Admissions

New Incoming Students Transfer Students Continuing Students Academic Break International Students

Check Application Status Important Dates

Early Admission Deadline Rolling Admission Deadline Last Date To Apply Decision Date

Connect

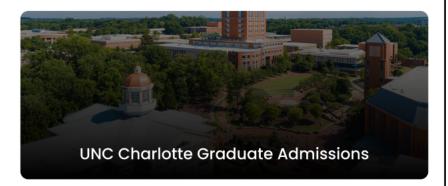
Admission Events
Visit University

Additional Details

Defer Semester Dual Enrollment Dual Degree

Sidebar with all the relavant informations

Home Admission Financial Aid Campus Life Student Center



Start / Continue Your Application

Graduate Admissions: Unlock Your Potential at UNC Charlotte

Pursuing a graduate degree is a transformative step toward deepening your knowledge, advancing your career, and achieving your aspirations. At UNC Charlotte, we are committed to providing graduate students with an exceptional academic experience, supported by world-class faculty, state-of-the-art facilities, and an inclusive community of scholars. Our Graduate Admissions team is here to guide you through every step of the process, ensuring your transition into advanced education is seamless and empowering.

UNC Charlotte offers over 100 graduate programs, including master's, doctoral, and certificate options across diverse fields of study. Whether you're aiming to refine your expertise in engineering, business, education, health sciences, or the arts, our programs are designed to equip you with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in a competitive and ever-evolving global marketplace. Many of our programs integrate cutting-edge research opportunities, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration, enabling you to tackle real-world challenges while contributing to academic innovation. Our graduate community is as dynamic as it is diverse, with students from across the nation and around the world converging on our vibrant urban campus. We pride ourselves on fostering an inclusive environment where ideas flourish, cultures are celebrated, and lifelong connections are formed.

Visit Campus

Virtual Tour

Campus Links

Alerts Jobs Make a Gift Maps / Directions

Resources

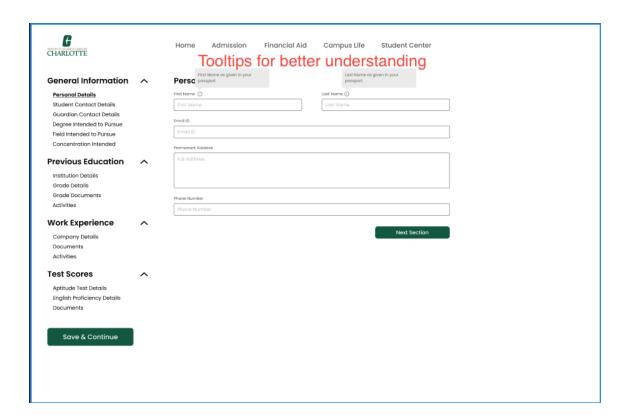
Alumni & Friends
Faculty & Staff
Prospective Students
Community
Current Students

Resources

Alumni & Friends
Faculty & Staff
Prospective Students
Community
Current Students

Resources

Alumni & Friends
Faculty & Staff
Prospective Student
Community
Current Students





Before You Begin

Guide On How To Apply Upcoming Webinars Documents Required Talk To Us

Aid Basics

Your Aid Your Bill Consumer Information Estimating Cost Forms & Publications Financial Aid FAQs

Important Dates

Application Open Date Priority Deadline Awarding Date Billing Period

Types of Aid

Federal Work-Study Scholarships

Applying for Aid

FAFSA Summer School Aid Transient Study Aid

Home

Admission Financial Aid Campus Life Student Center



Most commonly visited links at main section

Go to FAFSA Application

Guide on How To Apply

Financial Aid: Invest in Your Future at UNC Charlotte

At UNC Charlotte, we believe that financial barriers should never stand in the way of pursuing a quality education. Our Financial Aid Office is dedicated to helping students and their families navigate the financial aid process, providing personalized support and resources to make higher education accessible and affordable for all. Whether you're an undergraduate, graduate, or transfer student, we are here to ensure that you have the tools and knowledge needed to make informed decisions about funding your education.

UNC Charlotte offers a wide range of financial aid options, including scholarships, grants, work-study opportunities, and student loans, designed to meet the diverse needs of our students. Our scholarships recognize academic excellence leadership, and community engagement, while grants provide vital support for students with financial need. The Federal Work-Study program allows students to earn money while gaining valuable work experience, and our student loan options are structured to help you invest in your future responsibly.

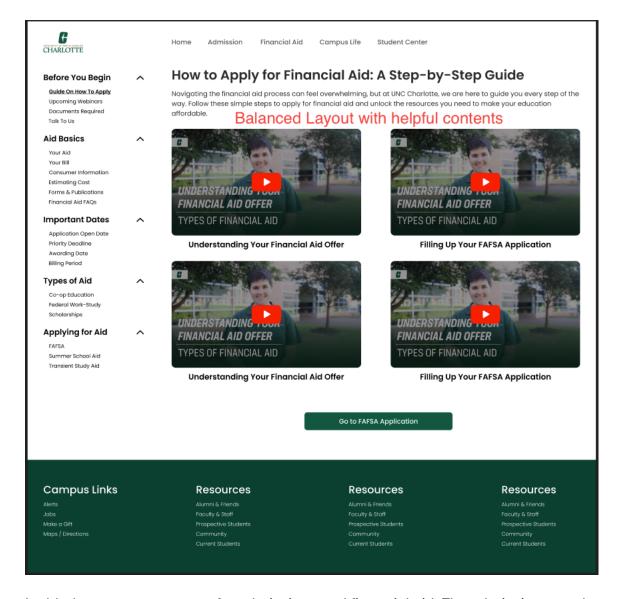
Our commitment goes beyond providing financial aid—we aim to empower students with the knowledge to make sound financial decisions. Through resources like our financial literacy programs, workshops, and one-on-one counseling sessions, you'll learn how to manage expenses, plan budgets, and prepare for life after graduation. Our goal is to equip you with the skills and confidence to take control of your financial well-being, both during your time at UNC Charlotte and beyond. Navigating the financial aid process can feel overwhelming, but our experienced team is here to guide you every step of the way. From completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to understanding award letters and exploring additional funding opportunities, we provide clear, personalized support tailored to your unique situation.

Campus Links

Resources

Resources

Resources



I added two separate pages for admissions and financial aid. The admission page has a common landing page for both graduate and undergraduate schools. The icons are now easily visible with stats rather than it being way too proportional. The two buttons at landing page will respectively lead to graduate and undergraduate section of admission. The start/continue application button is now visible right at the landing page which is easily accessible for users. The left section now contains sticky accordions had several sub links presents in them. This makes it easier for the users to navigate to any required page at any time ensuring the freedom to navigate.

The application forms now contain tooltip wherever it is necessary to give more information regarding what the user must enter in the respective field. The user can also save the application at any point of time with a button included in the left column of application forms.

The financial aid section has a detailed guide on how to apply for financial aid, with several video guides present in the page which helps users to understand on all the necessary documents required before starting an application form.

The help section also contains a sub-link which lists out the upcoming webinars which students or parents can register into to understand the application process. It's all located in one place which makes it easier for users to find and understand.

Chapter 6: Interactive High-Fidelity Prototype

The interactive Figma design of the High-Fidelity Prototype can be found here: https://www.figma.com/design/Jo0OqZYXn73DBC3V9FeMPK/UNCC-Admission-and-Financial-Aid-Redesign?node-id=136-2&t=gT61Y3qGjL1M43LN-1

https://www.figma.com/proto/Jo0OqZYXn73DBC3V9FeMPK/UNCC-Admission-and-Financial-Aid-Redesign?page-id=136%3A2&node-id=136-3&nodetype=canvas&viewport=-2272%2C583%2C0.82&t=vTsB5UpvHPYqH3in-1&scaling=scaledown&content-scaling=fixed&starting-point-node-id=136%3A3

Instructions:

The landing page of the prototype is scrollable. Here the "Admission" and "Financial Aid" links in the navbar are clickable. The undergraduate and graduate admissions buttons are also clickable. They lead to the admission details section.

In this page, the "Start / Continue Your Application" button is clickable. This leads to the application form which shows the tooltip interactions. On clicking the "Financial Aid" link in navbar, the user will be redirected to the financial aid section. Here the "Guide on How To Apply" and "Upcoming Webinars" links are clickable. This will lead to the respective pages