

Case Study

STUDENT DROPOUT RATE

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**THE IDEAL
COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE**

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THE TEAM

CHI QUACH
UX RESEARCHER



JON RODZ
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PROJECT OVERVIEW



“I didn’t feel prepared for college. At the time, I just couldn’t handle it.”

We all have our assumptions as to why students are dropping out at alarming rates in the United States.

Our research explores the core of the college experience that leads students to dropping out.

THE GOAL

**TO IDENTIFY THE PAIN
POINTS IN THE UNITED
STATES SCHOOL SYSTEM
THAT LEAD TO HIGHER
COLLEGE DROPOUT RATES.**



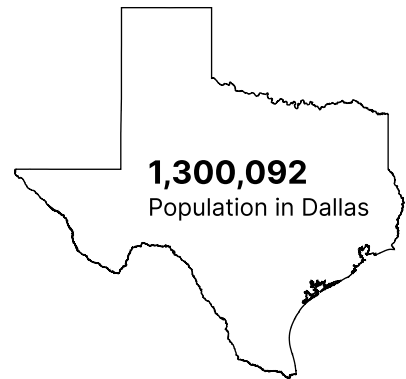
Secondary Research

STATISTICS.

1,000,000+

Students in the US Drop Out Every Year

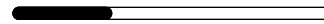
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Students at private colleges are more likely to earn a degree on time than ones at public colleges

Public Colleges

4 year 33.3%



6 year 57.6%

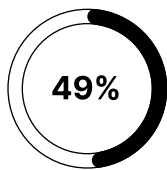


Private Colleges

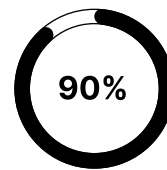
4 year 52.8%



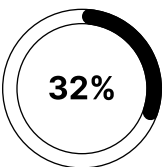
6 year 65.4%



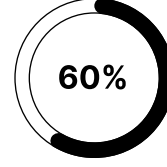
Less than 1/2 of college students graduate on-time



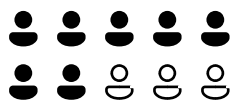
of low-income, first-generation students do not graduate within 6 years of schooling.



of students reported neglecting their studies sometimes because of the money they owed



more than 60% of college students drop out because mental health-related reasons



7 In 10

students feel stressed about their personal finances



Males in higher education

5 Times

the risk of dropout when reporting poor mental health

Sophomore Year

Major changing activity after the second year correlated with modestly lower grades, lower graduation rates, and longer times-to-graduate

People Who Can Affect The College Journey

STAKEHOLDERS.



Students

Undergraduate students doing 4 years who left school or college before they have finished their studies

Possible reasons are mental health reasons, financial difficulty, and indecisiveness

Educators

Someone who has a vested interested in the success and welfare of a school or education system.

Educators, board members, counselors, career advisors and commissioners of education



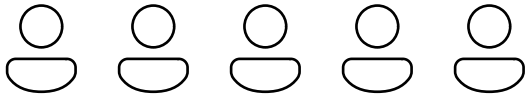
DATA.

We search to find the ideal experience. Our data collection includes interviews, cultural probes, and sensory cues. We sought to understand their pain points and their ideal college experience. The ideal college experience starts before college and after they drop out. The college experience is more like a journey.



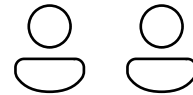
7 INTERVIEWS

In the span of 2 weeks, we were able to interview 7 candidates in total and got in-depth insights from them about what students experience during college in the U.S.



5 Students

Varied from different ethnicities, backgrounds, and financial circumstances.

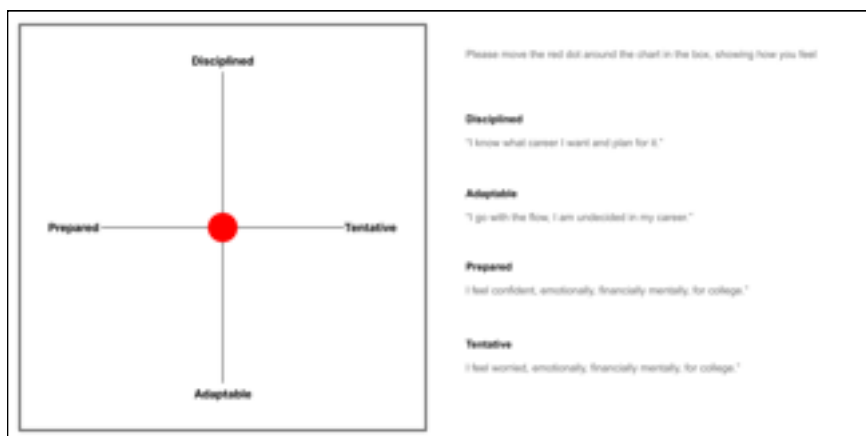


2 Educators

Have more than 20 years of experience in the education field.

CULTURAL PROBE

Ask our interviewees to fill in cultural probes where we asked questions about their feelings before, during, and after college; their school and home environments; their priorities in life; and what their ideal experiences in mind looked like. Our goal is to get a deeper understanding of their experiences and give them personal space to express their thoughts and emotions.



One of the charts that we designed for the interviewees to move the red dot to show where they stand in their career paths.



SYNTHESIS.

The ideal college journey for U.S. students. We created the 'Framework' that compasses the wide net of all students who drop out of college. The user experience research team developed a methodology that focused on students' ideal college journey to inform our design efforts.

I did sign up for classes and the counselors said that she didn't apply and just didn't go	I did get approved for financial aid, I didn't get into the program so I didn't continue	I didn't believe it was for me and I've never been a school person	I couldn't be at school learning everything all over again, I wanted to go the fast route	Check in more, but also I needed to be more proactive. It has to go both ways.	Yes, I did the Pell grant, and that's pretty much it	I would have to ask my mom for gas and basically everything
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It sucks out my free time	I felt stressed out and anxious because of failing classes pretty bad	I saw myself asking for favors, I don't like doing that, it felt like a burden asking someone to pay, but while working I can pay	I interned with a cyber security and learned more than at school so school felt like a waste of time getting my career started and improving my skills	My counselor missed the other application that was needed, he gave me the basics and it wasn't specifics, there wasn't much to the conversation	Anxious, sad, thought of not doing well, feel like not smart	My counselor never let my mom know, there was never any specifics, she was there when I asked her for needs or help for financials

350+

RAW DATA

POINTS

				Internally I didn't feel prepared mentally and financially, it wasn't about applications	For mental health it was a sacrifice, I'm still happy where I am today so I think I took the right path because I had to learn a lot	I feel high school focused on the best and the bottom of the barrel like us doesn't get the support
					I didn't feel prepared for college, time management I had no experience, at the time I couldn't handle it	My school was focused on a certain group of people, the white students the most compared to us, Latinos
					I was majoring in business, my first semester, I had first year seminar, I liked my teacher	My school was focused on a certain group of people, the white students the most compared to us, Latinos
				I'm not sure, in the beginning I was doing most of work and then I found myself doing work, and overtime I stopped going entirely	I lost of direction after dropout	Honestly, there's no other reasons why besides academic and financial, I just felt like I'm not doing this
I have ADHD so it feels like a battle trying to learn especially trying to learn Math. So trying to learn math (not in my preferred way) was a stressor	I joined college because I felt the pressure so it was last minute,	I was in college for 2 and a half weeks and even before starting I was doubtful of my decision	I wasn't involved a lot in the college community	I thought I was going to be an architect, but now I feel like I can be in every aspect of technology	I would've have finished my age but it's cool that I have people in the industry	A lot of people still don't take advantage of what they learn and they don't go to the industry they learn
At school I feel like it was temporary because it was all for a limited time, at school I would ask class related questions	Beautiful environment, welcoming atmosphere, food trucks so my experience was enjoyable	I feel counselors looked at me like another one of the lost causes	I feel like I deserve where I'm at, most people aren't CTO's at 20 for a StartUp so it took a lot to get here	I received good support before dropping out	I kept working, I worked cashier jobs and saved up	The stressful thing about those online classes was being able to attend those classes, being home without any distractions
Because of stress, I constantly lost weight no matter how much I try to eat to gain back the weight	Advisors seemed like they didn't like their job and refused to engage with their students	College classes were easy at first, getting harder as the homework starts piling up	At first, everyone was like why? When I talked about it everyone said do what's best for you	I feel like the school intentionally made the workload heavy you have to manage your time that you don't have real interaction with the world	Gradually dropped out, picked up more shifts at work so I would skip 1 schoolday one week, 2 the next and so fourth	Overwhelmed because have to refuse hanging out with friends to do classworks
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From 350+ data points we
grouped and sorted them
into 26 themes

Raw Data



Themes

I saw myself asking for favors, I don't like doing that, it felt like a burden asking someone to pay, but while working I can pay

26 THEMES

We did not drop out of college overnight, it was a gradual process

We feel college is a waste of time because it's not preparing me for what I want to do

We feel stressed because we are dependent on our family to pay for college

We feel burdened because we struggle to keep up with costs unrelated to college

Mental health plays a big role in our ability to perform well academically

We felt the need to drop school to keep up with living expenses

We can't ask our parents for college guidance because they don't have the college experience

After dropping out of college, we feel lost about the future because we have no clear path

We feel relieved after dropping out of college because it was one less thing to worry about

Our colleges fail to provide the support that meets our college advising needs

We dropped out of college, even though our tuition is fully covered by scholarships and got good financial advising from the school and government

Our friends believe we should continue with our education and are sad we aren't, but overall are supportive of our decision

We don't feel college was the only way for us to develop personally and professionally

We feel like the environment and the class work in high school play a huge role in preparing for our college readiness.

We feel overwhelmed by the college workload, it was draining and didn't allow for social interaction and self-care

We feel stressed about online classes because of lack of engagement due to distractions internally and instructor engagement

We feel frustrated by our advisors' lack of engagement

We feel overwhelmed by the pressure of not knowing what major to choose.

We enjoyed the sense of community at college but it did not play a role in our decision to drop out.

We feel that regardless of the amount of college advising we got in high school, we still ended up dropping out of college.

Although there was hesitancy, we felt supported by our family when we made the decision to drop out

When we're not in college, we're working. We aren't just sitting around.

We don't feel that college offers the professional network we need to develop our careers

College was not something I thought about and gradually was pressured more through high school

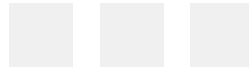
We felt college didn't align with what we wanted to do with our life

We don't feel college was the only way for us to develop personally and professionally

We felt the need to drop school to keep up with living expenses

From 26 themes, we grouped
and synthesized into 8 insights.

Themes



Insights

Students look for authority figure engagement at home and school for guidance and support, especially during high school.

8 INSIGHTS

Even when college tuition is covered, students work to keep up with the cost of living, impacting their academic performance and influencing their decision to drop out.

Students look for authority figure engagement at home and school for guidance and support, especially during high school.

Students recognize that college does not always provide the necessary professional networks, professional development, and personal development to grow in their careers.

The process of dropping out is a gradual one, with many contributing factors that may adversely affect a student's college experience.

Mental health deteriorated during college because of excessive workloads, lack of social life, and lack of personal time, which negatively impacted academic performance and, in turn, leads to dropping out.

Students find relief in their decisions to drop out, alleviating the primary stressors in their life, but struggle with determining their new direction.

Students struggle with finding the value in continuing to pursue an education when their college experience is not aligning with what they want to do in life.

Students are overwhelmed and lost when determining what career path they want to take while attending college and after dropping out.



I FEEL CONFIDENT.

At the core of every experience is the emotions people feel. An ideal journey for setting up someone's future and dream is how they feel about it first. The future and dreams determine the steps of going to college or a career after graduation. The emotion of feeling a certainty about their ability to do in themselves, confidence is key.

01. **ENGAGED**

Part of being able to be confident is engagement with the people who are helping them, a sense of camaraderie and compassion allow for students to reach up.

04. **EMPOWERED**

To feel like students have the power to control their path creates confidence. Introspection and exploration, two sides of the same coin can create harmony leading to empowerment.

02. **PREPARED**

Being ready to overcome obstacles is crucial to feeling confident. For students having the foundation of academic readiness is one part and knowing how to be involved with what they want to do is the other.

05. **SUPPORTED**

The college journey is a long road, one that students walk alone. Others may walk it with you. But no one can walk it for you. So support is needed to guide the student in ways that allow the students to choose.

03. **ALIGNED**

To be aligned means to be able to do what students genuinely feel is right for them. When many diverse paths are presented, students must take charge.



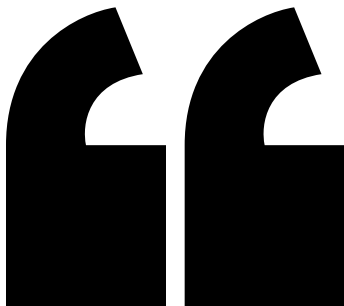
**“Confidence is just as
important as persistence.”**

My Ideal College Journey Is...

ENGAGED.

A college journey that is...	
Compassionate It is reaching out to students who gradually miss class more often.	Camaraderie It is camaraderie: It is a strong, trustful connection with the community, faculty, and friends.

Engagement starts in high school with authority figures, such as parents, teachers, counselors, advisors, and administrators. High schools, colleges, and universities need to offer a more comprehensive array of engagement opportunities to meet the demand of today's students. Education is no longer simply about acquiring a degree or diploma. It's about ensuring that students are confident about their future. We need to do better at engaging with students so they can succeed.



“When classes first started, I was keeping up with most of my school work and then I found myself doing less and less, and overtime I just stopped going entirely”



01.



ENGAGED.

My Ideal College Journey Is...

PREPARED.

A college journey that is...

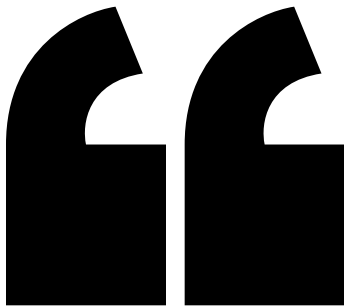
Foundational

It is academic preparedness when going into college and the world.

Involved

It is networking, real-world experiences, more information about resources, & hands-on experience.

Taking giant leaps from high school into the world takes time and resources to develop the skills needed to navigate a career in their field. Augmenting their already existing education in the field and experience in the real world. Likewise, academic preparedness means students will perform and manage well in college. This process starts early, and students need a space to create the educational foundation and the know-how to get involved career-wise with the real world.



“I am involved with the community at work. I can talk to the people who are actively in the industry I want to work in, I can grow my career.”



02.



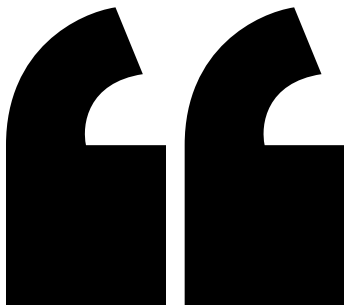
PREPARED.

My Ideal College Journey Is...

ALIGNED.

A college journey that is...	
Initiative It makes students feel calm and grounded when looking for a career path, even when there are multiple options.	Diverse It is a better understanding of all my career options for students.

At the end of the student's high school career into the next stage, adulthood begins. Choosing a direction is an enormous task, especially when there are multiple paths and some that students may not be fond of. A calm and grounded space makes students feel confident in choosing decisions, paired with the diversity of those paths. A deep understanding of the career options will alleviate the uncertainty during this time.



“After dropping out of college I’m still not sure what to do afterwards. Not knowing what to do afterwards. Dropping out was one less thing to worry about mentally. It definitely helped”



03.



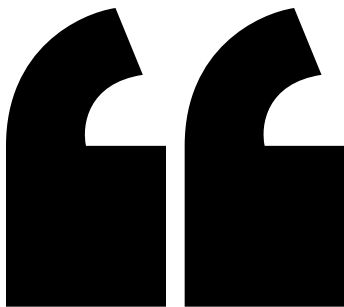
ALIGNED.

My Ideal College Journey Is...

EMPOWERED.

<i>A college journey that is...</i>		
Balance It is the space to learn how to balance school, work, and life.	Explorative It is exposure to career paths and showing what that career entails in an explorative way.	Introspective It is a student learning who they are and how they want to contribute to the world.

A student's process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights, means balancing life, thinking within then exploring without. A student must face many challenges in their daily lives. However, the challenge for students is balancing personal, educational, social, and academic. This leads to growth, and this allows students to not only make their academic performance better but also be happy doing that.



"It's hard to focus, it's hard to balance which subject that I should work on first, it's hard to balance work."



04.



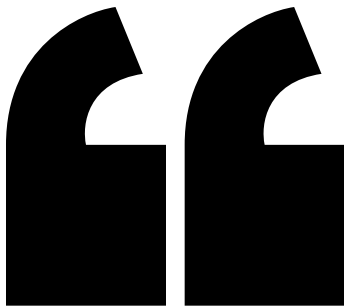
EMPOWERED.

My Ideal College Journey Is...

SUPPORTED.

A college journey that is...	
Assisted It is college support from high school counselors and parents.	Considerate It is financial support that covers education and alleviates living costs.

A higher education helps students gain the necessary skills to successfully enter the job market, providing them with the independence and resources they need to grow. Even when tuition is covered, students are held back by the cost of living. There are many financial burdens outside of tuition, and so students end up having to work, taking time away from their education. An ideal journey includes systems that are considerate, forgiving and assistive.



"I had to do almost everything for myself applying to colleges and applying to schools when it comes to school because they didn't go to school or finished high school"



05.



SUPPORTED.

My Ideal College Journey Is...

SUPPORTED.

A college journey that is...

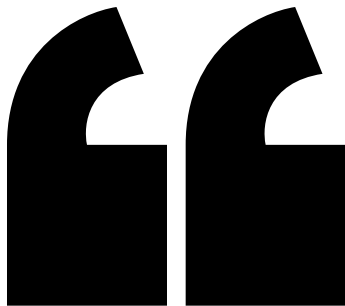
Operative

It is necessary career tools and programs students can use to succeed after college.

Inclusive

It is the mental health support students need to overcome obstacles on all fronts.

One of the most important aspects of a student's experience is access to support systems when needed. Support should not be held to any standard because everyone needs different things throughout their college careers. It should start before college, which helps individuals reach their full potential in school. College can be stressful, so it is necessary to provide students with tools they can use after graduation to make climbing the ladder easier.



"I feel like schools help you with problem solving your life but tools (computers) is a little different, and I feel a lot of people don't apply the differences"



05.



SUPPORTED.

Design Opportunities

CONCEPTS



01. ORGANIZER APP

Our research shows that students need more tools, especially tools that support them. Balancing, managing, and assistive. There are many ideas out there, and one that the UX researcher team suggest has multiple features:

Untitled App for college students. With features like a detailed class planner, grade tracker, and resource center, it helps you visualize the college experience and plan each academic year. You'll see how much time you have until the deadlines on assignments and tests so you can avoid missing out.



02. FINANCES

Accumulate a community of people interested in providing financial support to students and act as an exchange between donors and students. Students can be rewarded for sharing their academic progress with the community.



03. PROGRAM

A program that partners with colleges, high schools, and community organizations to give high school students the resources they might need and existing opportunities. Offer workshops and talks geared towards any topic.

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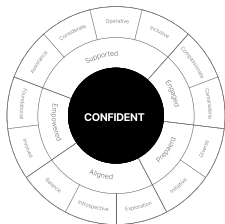
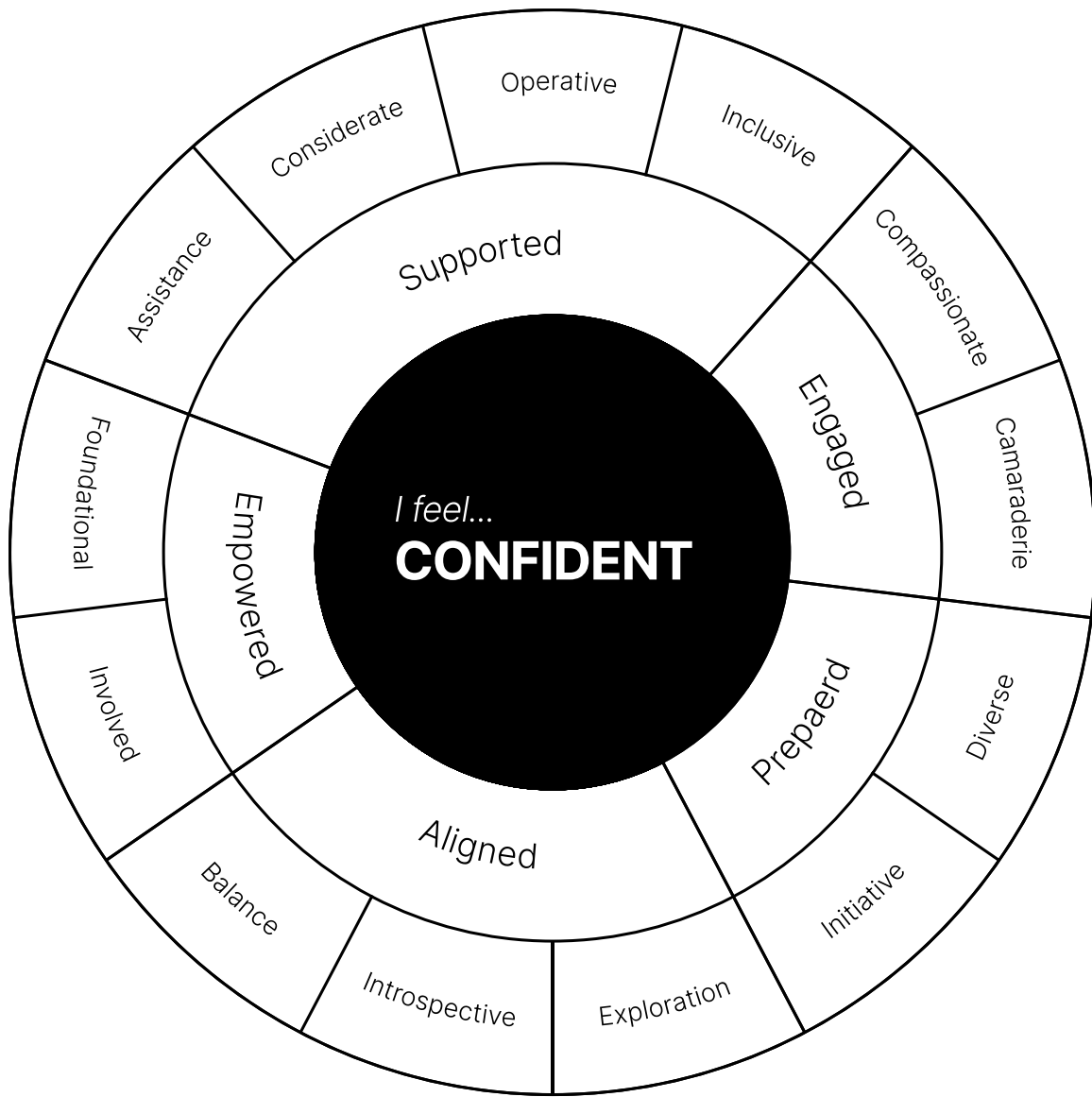
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FRAME WORK.

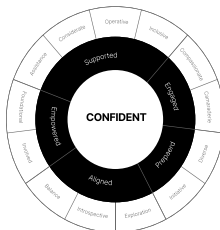
The ideal college journey for U.S. students. Creating the 'Framework' that compasses the wide net of all students who drop out of college. The user experience research team created a methodology that focused on the ideal college journey for students to that will inform our design efforts



EMOTION

The "I feel..."

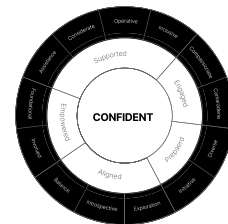
At the core of experience is emotion. Any interaction with the journey results in an emotion.



BENEFITS

The "I am..."

The benefits that directly tie between the system (whether that be a program, product, service) and the emotion.



FEATURES

The "It is..."

Specific ideas about how people want the key benefits delivered. These ideas are pulled directly from insights.