## PROJECT SUMMARY

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GROUP CHARTER

Our organization aims to create a comprehensive listing of off-campus housing options in the Ohio State University District. Currently, the process of finding your first apartment at Ohio State is confusing and overwhelming – there are many rental companies, with different rules and standards and types of properties. Our aim is to change this.

We want to create a website that would ideally list every property available to rent in the off-campus district. It would include multiple search functions, and the capability for tenants to leave reviews of properties and landlords.

The number-one goal is to make finding a good apartment easy. Secondary goals include creating a community of reviewers where students can rate properties and landlords and give advice to other students searching for apartments.

The primary audience for the website is Ohio State students, specifically those looking to find a new place off-campus.

We want the audience to think “This is the simplest and easiest way to find my new home” and continue searching the listings.

We will use web strategies such as a multi-field search function, a rating system, and the ability to leave comments. This will allow users to make the searching and listings work for them, and tell them what they want to know.

We will measure the success of the site by the amount of traffic, and by seeking out comments from users on whether or not the search tools on our site were helpful.

Theoretically, we would maintain the finished site by allowing users to edit or add information on listings. There would also be a number of employees who would maintain the website, keep up relationships with rental companies, add new listings, etc.
AS-IS ANALYSIS

There is a current site (http://offcampus.osu.edu/) run by the Ohio State University that is attempting to house students in the University District neighborhood.

5 things it’s doing well:

- There is a map on every apartment entry giving the location - Match between system and the real world
- There are several different search parameters. - User control and freedom
- Once can search for a roommate or the option to sublet. - Flexibility and efficiency of use
- Entries offer real-world information and the amenities at each location. - Match between system and the real world
- There is an office located in the union in case human contact is needed. - Match between system and the real world

5 things it’s not doing well:

- There are too many options in some of the dropdown menus, overwhelming the users and sometimes making searches too specific. – Minimalist Design
- When one creates a search, it is impossible to erase just one of the selections refining the search results. One has to start completely over. -User control and freedom & Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors
- The physical regions of the neighborhood aren’t accurate with the actual design of how the community functions. - Match between system and the real world
- The results don’t all contain the same information regarding amenities. Some information is missing on some of the properties. - Consistency and standards
- The wording of finding a roommate is confusing and easily mixed up. -Match between system and the real world
IDEATION

What we are
How you can use it

- Look for apartments
- Local rental companies
- About the area
- About us

Resources
- Competitive
- The Grid OSU
- Limited space
- Local climate

IDEATION

- Search for apartments
  - by area, near campus
  - by # of bedrooms
  - by price

- Visit rental companies
  - Read reviews on companies
  - Write a review for a company
  - Search for apartments by company

IDEATION

- Real estate
- website
- page
- landlord
- information
- search
- review
- bar
- hierarchy
- first
- list
- design
- available
- listing
- issues
- OSU
- also

IDEATION

- wanted
- Realtor
- website
- search
- landlord
- information
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your biggest concerns when looking for your new place to live?
2. Are you aware of any websites that facilitate the off-campus housing search?
3. How effective is the current university site? (offcampus.osu.edu) What parts of this site do you like/dislike?
4. How would you organize housing locations effectively on a website?
5. What issues have made finding off-campus housing a challenge for you in the past?
6. What was your favorite part about searching for off-campus housing?

SUMMARY

We were able to interview two current Ohio State students, one parent, and one recent graduate who works on Ohio State’s campus. Our subjects agreed that price was an important factor in their housing search. They also cited safety, location, and quality of the property/landlord as major concerns.

None of the subjects were aware of any housing-search websites, other than OSU’s website. They were aware of OSU’s website but had never used it. Most agreed that they liked the idea of the many ways to search, but that the site was poorly maintained.

The subjects all suggested that sorting by location would be the most effective way to organize listings. Easily identifiable categories of campus (north, south, east or west of High St., etc.) It seems that most students choose which area of campus they want to live on before they decide anything else. They also suggested being able to search by price.

Common issues they identified were not knowing the quality or reputation of the rental companies, not knowing which properties were available to rent, losing a prospective place because someone else got to it first, too much paperwork, and finding a high quality place within their price range. Most of the subject’s favorite part of the housing search is when it’s done.
PERSONA: STUDENT RENTERS

Name: Matt Clarke
Age: 19
Currently lives: OSU Dorms
Occupation: Student

Matt and three friends are looking for a place to live off-campus next year. None of them have a lot of time to dedicate to the housing search. They want to live close to campus, have access to off-street parking, and spend no more than $500/month per person. After class and homework, Matt searches online for places in the South campus area.

Needs: Safety, cost, distance to campus/food, amenities, pet policy, accessibility, size/number of rooms, payment method, contact with landlord

Pet peeves: incorrect listings, no information, no pictures, bad search functions, no contact info, lies, no information about availability

PERSONA: PARENT

Name: Joan Burkett
Age: 55
Currently lives: Dayton, OH
Current occupation: Stay at home mom

A mother of 4 children, now aged 23 – 33, who have all been to college and lived in both dorms and apartments. From a small, rural town where there is almost no crime and the city is surrounded by corn fields. Joan wants to help her daughter find a two-bedroom apartment, but can only help by looking online. She wants to find a clean, well-kept apartment in a safe area. She searches housing listings for about an hour each day and emails suggestions to her daughter.

Needs: information easy to access online (parents not in Columbus), easy to send/receive information (co-signing forms), easy to use/understand (not tech savvy), payment methods, information about campus/Columbus

Pet peeves: hard to understand, lack of information/context, too much social media, not intuitive, no contact info
PERSONA: YOUNG FAMILIES/POST-GRADS

Names: Sarah Thomas
Age: 23
Currently Lives: Columbus, OH
Occupation: University Communications

Sarah just graduated from Ohio State and had been offered a full time job in University Communications. She decides to move into a one-bedroom, more “adult” apartment. She wants to be close to campus but not involved in the party atmosphere. She searches for prospective apartments on her lunch break.

Needs: {same as students, plus} better neighborhood, type (apartment v. house), distance to schools/safe routes to school, yard/lawn, speeding/traffic, zoning codes, car/parking, public transportation/bike lanes, near a highway, closeness to grocery stores, libraries, entertainment, etc., renting vs. buying, information about Columbus (new city)

Pet Peeve: no “real” information/facades, too many rowdy neighbors/party atmosphere, noise level
USABILITY TESTING

Part One: Get It Testing

What is the name of the site? What is its purpose?

How is the site organized? Can you name its main sections?

When you look at the home page, what is the first thing you want to do/click on?

Part Two: Task-Based Testing

You want to look for a place to live next year with four other friends. What would you do on this website?

Imagine you have a specific budget in mind.

You want to learn more about a specific place. How do you get there? What more do you need to know? Have your main concerns been answered?

Imagine your landlord just lost your rent check, and you want to warn other people about the problems you’ve had renting from them. Could you do that on this website? How?

Now that you’ve done that, you want to find a different landlord. How would you learn more about your options?

How would you start over?

How would you decide whether or not this is a trustworthy website?

Part Three: Follow Up Questions

Was this an intuitive process? What happened that you did not expect, and did anything frustrate you?

Is this site (or the idea of the site) something you would want to use?

If you live off campus now, how did you find housing? What was the most frustrating part? What resources do you wish had been available to you?
USABILITY TESTING: FIRST ROUND

On November 6th, we celebrated our first day of usability testing. Our pages were finally linked and completed! There were a few hiccups including a page that took minutes to load. We had a total of 6 users who graciously sat through our questionnaire and felt out our website.

**Brie** was our first tester, she said the first thing she was drawn to on our page was the search bar. She expected it to show available places and to search by price and location. She accurately defined the sections of our web page’s material into the section headers. Overall she liked the idea of having all local landlords on one database but wanted our house content to have more information regarding availability.

**Haley** thought the websites purpose was to “find available apartments.” She defined the sections as “search area, red boxes, headers, then map.” Like other testers, she was primarily drawn to the search box. However, she wished the search criteria was easier to understand. She also did not understand our meters such as the party meter, requesting the information we used to get those statistics. She had troubles finding the realtors page (this introduced our first issue of wording: realtor vs. landlord) and also wished there was information on parking and animals available.

When asked what was the purpose of our website **Conner** answered “find place for Ohio State.” His interpretation of the page’s hierarchy was 1-search, 2-sign up, 3-reviews. Once he noticed the listings had amenities available, he wished that was the first piece of information for each listing. Like Haley, he wanted more background information of where the meters came from. He also wished the review page was connected so he could fill out both the individual house and realtor at some time. Lastly, he noticed there was no pictures of Columbus on the pages suggesting the designers were either not students or not from the area.

**Mario** was especially competent at critiquing our webpages. First he thought price should be the most important piece of information for apartments. Even more important than search! And he also wanted bigger pictures. The star rating was confusing for him, he didn’t know if it was for quality or price. He also tried to rate his landlord on the page for his specific place. The listings did not have enough hierarchy for him and he also struggled with the landlord vs. realtor wording issue. Overall he “would not trust this website” because of design issues like type face and pixelation.
Like Brie, Steph was able to organize our website’s content into the sections by the headers. She thought the arrow in the search box was misleading, “do I type there...or no...?” She wanted a better search results hierarchy. She also noted that a reiteration of the search criteria she chose on the first page, should be available on the results page. Steph wanted the place review to be closer connected to the landlord review and also the landlord page to have quick information bulleted out for each realtor. She judged the trustworthiness on the look and reliability of results. To make it better she suggested a pros and cons page of making housing decisions and also a both the per bedroom and total cost to be available.

Our last tester, Haley, (a different Haley) couldn’t find the landlord on each listing and also wished there were stars on the landlord pages. When asked whether she preferred the wording choice of landlord or realtor, she liked landlord better but though realtor might be more professional sounding.

Overall, the six usability tests brought some very important issues to our attention. These two weeks we have been working on fixing up our design issues, rewording some of the confusing material, and creating a functional and easy-to-understand search process. Thank you to our testers!
USABILITY TESTING: SECOND ROUND

After making some changes based on the first round of feedback, we interviewed 6 more individuals: Hannah, Jason, Kristen, Cierra, Nadia, and Luke. From their input we realized there was a lot of work to do before the final site was complete! We decided to add or delete some elements that were confusing to the flow of the website and also work on a more uniform design for all the pages.

Our first subject, Hannah, was very active, tried out many of the links and even played around with the sizing of the page. She expected most of what was there. She noted confusion with the cost of rent (per bedroom or total?), where to submit the search box, and also wanted the footer to have more information in order to show reliability. Furthermore, she reviewed the landlord on the house’s review page.

Jason was not as active as our first subject, but still helpful nonetheless. He was drawn to our large search bar but was confused on the hierarchy of the red boxes vs. the search. He also wanted contact info and images for each realtor. Overall, he said the website’s organization was not intuitive for him.

Kristen thought it was really cool we had reviews but wished there was more contact info and locations for the landlord on each listing page. Also, the search bar for the overall website was confusing since there is another search bar to look for housing.

For Cierra, the website was helpful and intuitive, but she thought the realtor page should go straight to their website. She also liked the ability of a clickable map, although it was not functioning yet.

Like some other subjects from day 1 testing, Nadia thought the site was organized by the bright red boxes instead of the section headers. She noted that the listing did not have smoking information for the houses and that there was no submit button! Overall she said she would use the website because it “caters to what people want,” despite it “lacking certification.”

Luke wanted more information about the results of the search before he actually clicked on each one. He was confused by the review writing, he couldn’t figure out how to find the realtor reviews. However he did like the individual realtor page, reading what Living OSU had to say, before going to their separate website. Luke was the first subject who though “my account” was about money and paying bills.
PROTOTYPES

Welcome to Living OSU!

We're here to make living off-campus easy. With the most comprehensive database of available housing options, and an easy-to-use search feature, finding your new place will be a breeze.

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Maecenas varius est non lorem pharetra, a ullamcorper augue tellus. Integer euismod luctus, eu auctor ac turpis. Aliquam non nunc iaculis. Nulla est enim eu, sodales neque.

Donec dapibus erat elit, ac lobortis diam accumsan vehicula. Etiam tempor sem a nisl tempus sagittis. Cras at odio mi.

Ready to get started? Fill out your preferences here.
FINAL DESIGNS

Mock-Up

HTML/CSS