INTEGRATING ACCESSIBLE DESIGN INTO GRAPHIC DESIGN CURRICULUM

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Accessible design is design in which the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered.
—University of Washington

OVERVIEW

- **Accessible design is the law.**
  The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination based on disabilities.

- **Accessible design is good design.**
  Preventing access to information because of poor design decisions in unethical.

- **Design education regularly leaves accessible design out of curriculum.**
  According to World Health Organization (WHO), there are at least 2.2 billion people globally that have a vision impairment. Failing to teach accessible design perpetuates the cycle of exclusion.

QUESTION

Will accessible design become an integral part of a designer's process if it's reinforced throughout a student's education?

Accessible design was embedded into lessons within five graphic design courses. The courses ranged from introductory to advanced levels with projects in digital and print design.

Sample Topics

Typography

- **Clear typographic hierarchies** help people scan for the most critical information.

- **Typeface selections.** Use legible and readable typefaces. High stroke contrast, small x-heights, and extra condensed fonts can be difficult to read.

- **Alignments.** Left aligned and justified alignments are most accessible, especially with large amounts of copy. They ensure users are easily able to find the next line of text when reading left to right.

User Interface Design

- **Usability.** Information is easier to discover when it's placed in a location that is familiar and expected. Have a consistent navigation and follow common mental models.

- **Cognitive Load.** Be cognizant of how much information a user can take in at once before becoming overwhelmed.

- **Forms.** Label forms with clear descriptions of what a user should enter, not with sample content.

Color

- **Don't rely on color for critical information.** People with low vision or color blindness will have difficulty understanding the content.

- **High color contrast.** The closer colors are on the color wheel, the less legible they will be when placed on top of one another. Use color contrast checkers to ensure your colors are accessible.
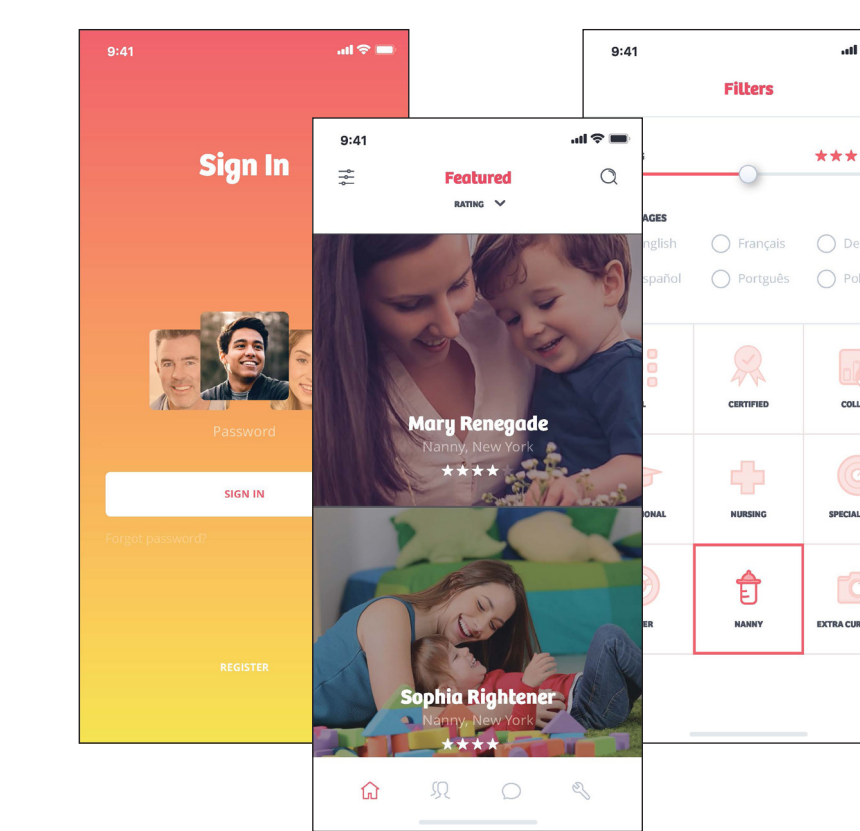
Courses & Projects
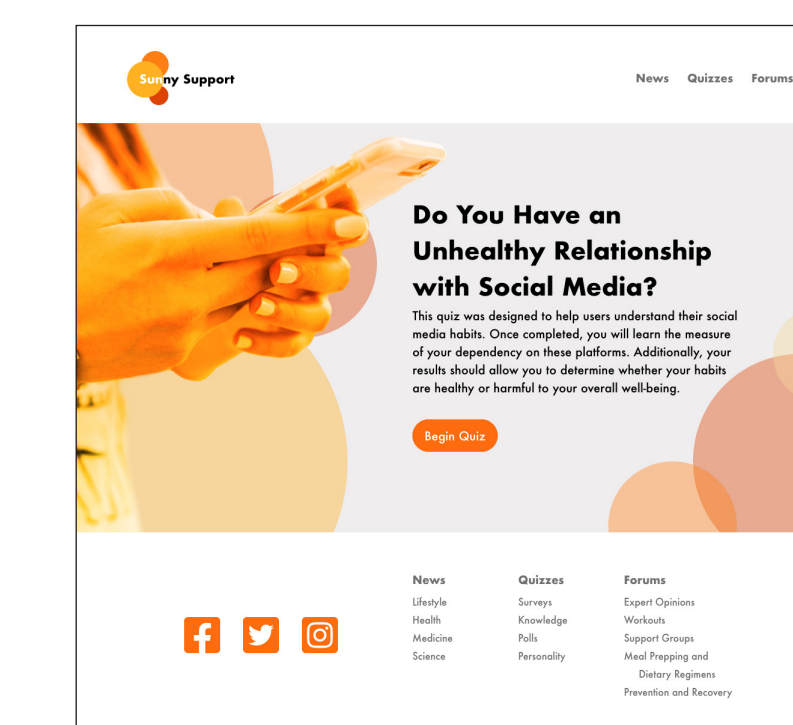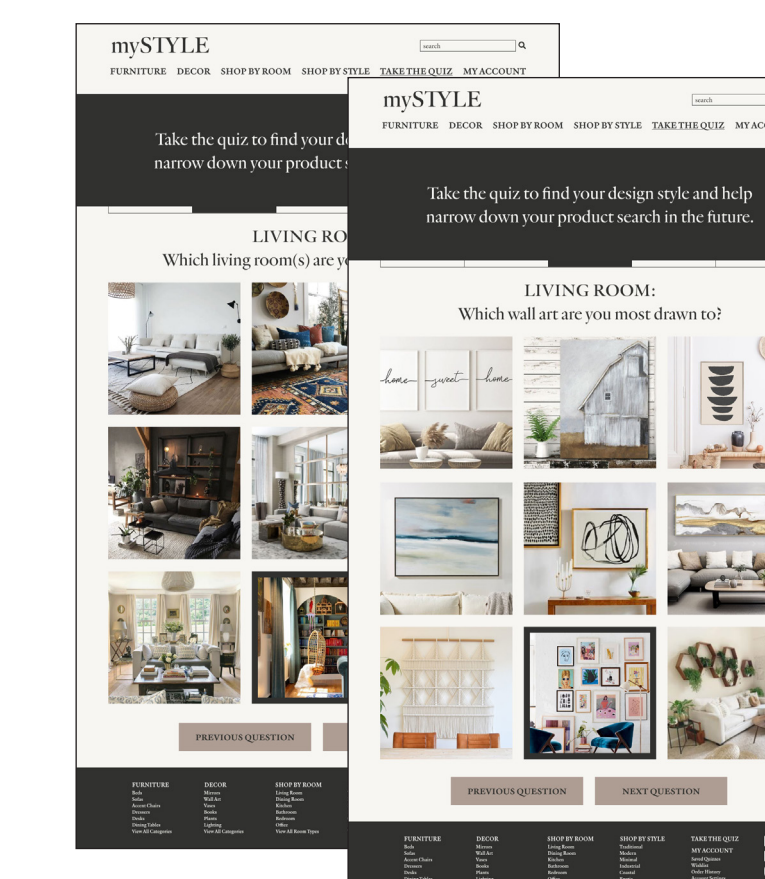

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Jay'ci Chevalier
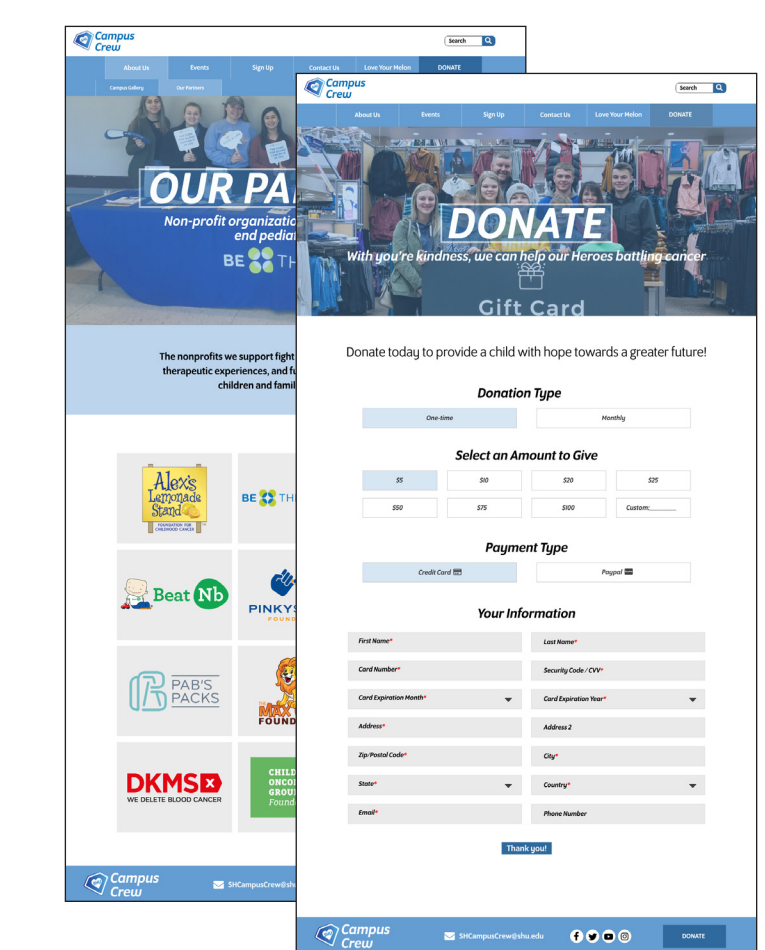
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Sarah Avery

Typography I
Tyler Cevetello
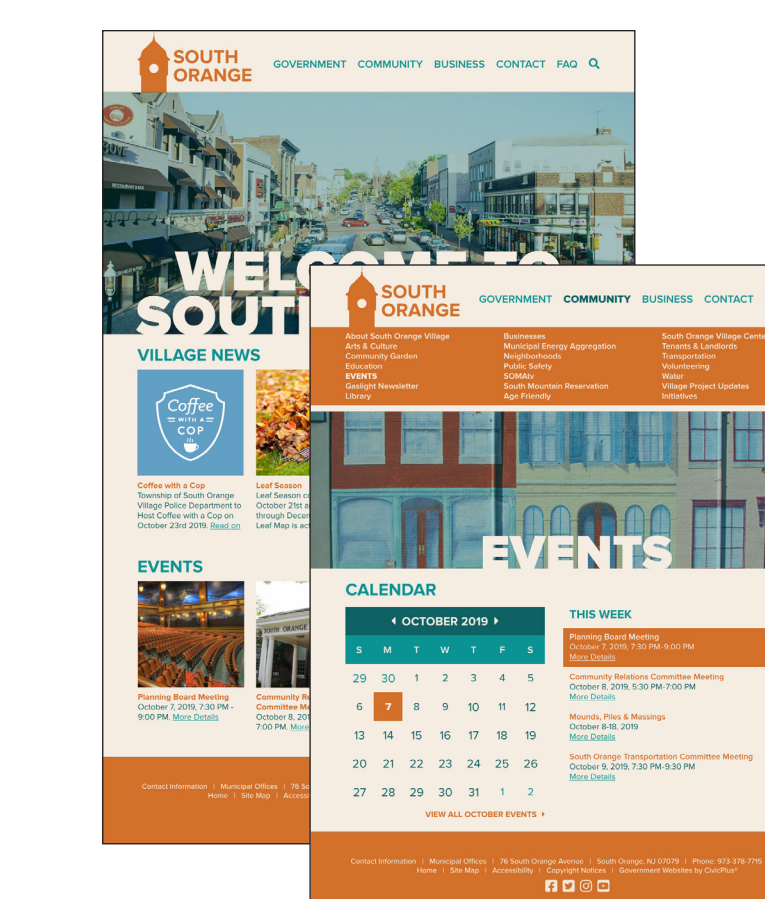
Graphic Design & Advertising II
Amanda Valinoti

Web Design II
Haley Thimmel

Web Design I
Renee Nunez, Isabelle Engel, Jay'ci Chevalier

Social Impact Design
Haley Thimmel

Web Design I
Haley Thimmel

Web Design I
Brittany Hull, Dante Cassano, Alexandra Gale

CONCLUSION

As a result of embedding accessible design throughout various topics and courses, students became knowledgeable about fundamental concepts and began to make design decisions based on accessibility. Accessible terminology became a part of class critiques and students have effectively assisted one another in creating more accessible design solutions.