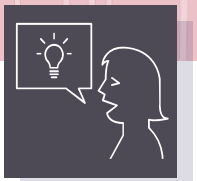


Finding the Core of Connections

Team Tape and Glue Sticks

Emma, Erica, Phoebe, Luluh

Research Question:

How can we facilitate closer and more fruitful connections between international students and 1) other International students along with 2) American born students?

USER GROUP

International Undergraduate Students at Northwestern University who want to feel at home and connected in the States while also staying connected to their roots.

Selecting Interviewees

THROUGH A RANGE OF PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Living situations (dorm, apartment roommates)

Luluh is international

Extracurricular activities (Emma is in clubs that have substantial international populations)

Erica is Korean-American, has a lot of international friends

RESEARCH METHODS

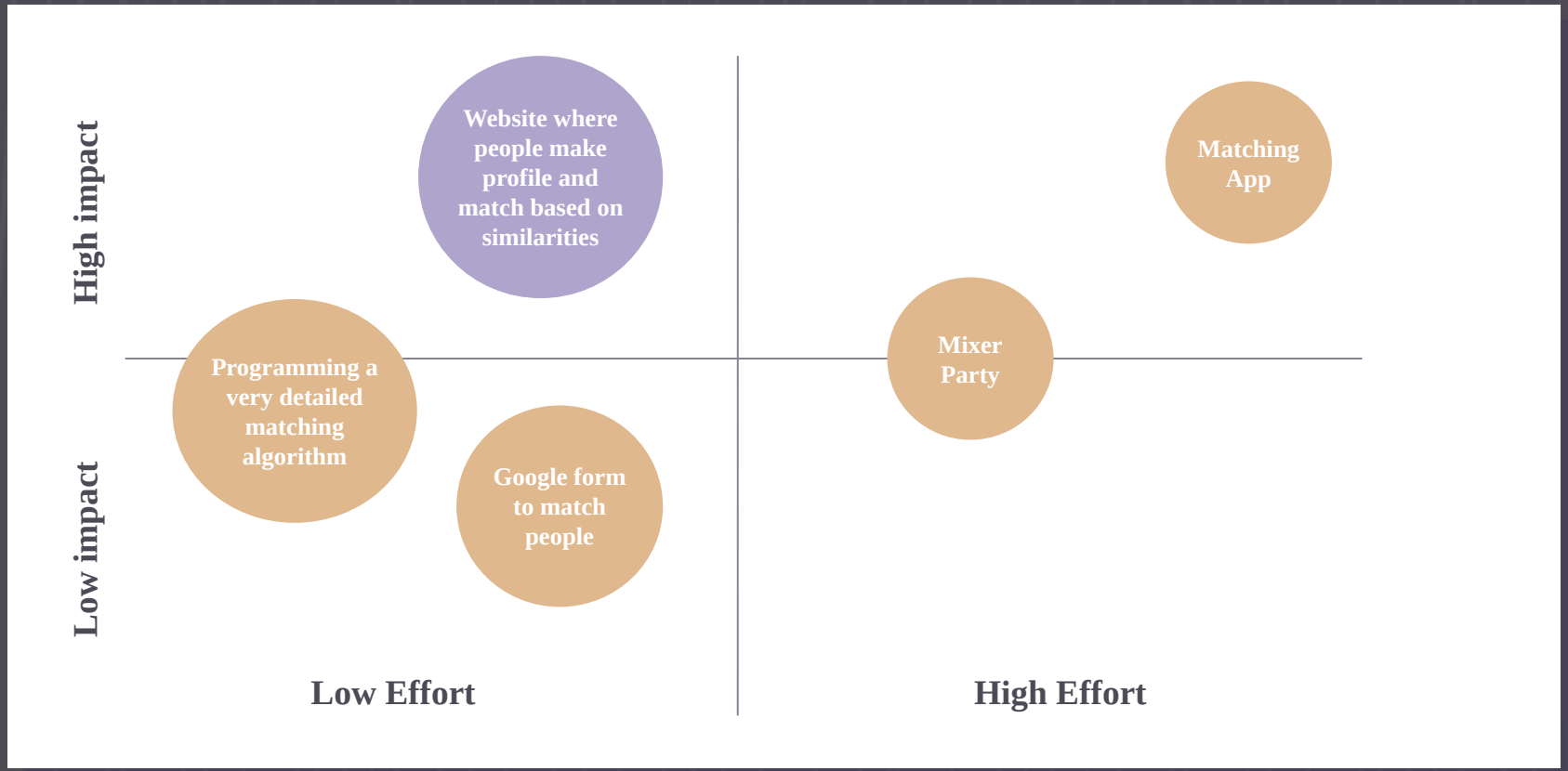
1

“Northwestern overlooks the more common challenges (social/cultural understanding and comfort) that international students face, and rather, provides unhelpful pseudo-bonding and non-specific information.”

2

“Northwestern thinks that a single shared cultural background is enough to constitute a good mentor-mentee pairing, but it is evidently inadequate because same major does not necessarily imply similar interests, personalities, or experiences”

How might we improve the current infrastructure for international students that NU has to foster genuine and helpful connections between mentors and mentees?


High impact
Low impact
Website where people make profile and match based on similarities
Matching App
Programming a very detailed matching algorithm
Mixer Party
Google form to match people
Low Effort
High Effort

Our Assumptions

"Having a lot in common" is always a predictor of strong feelings of affinity and connection between two people.

Having a mentor makes the transition to the US easier.

People feel comfortable sharing personal information on a website with strangers.

International students feel like mentor/ mentee resources are inadequate.

People will reach out and meet others in person.

People have a hard time finding mentors naturally.

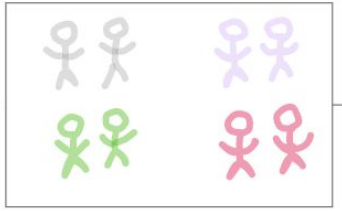
Users are willing to exert effort in order to find a mentee.

Everyone has access to technology that allows them to reach out to potential mentors online.

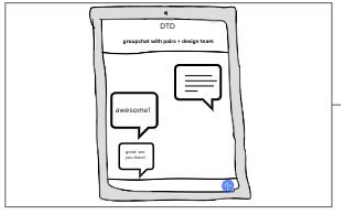
Connecting with institution-admin istered mentors is hard.

Enough upperclassmen would be a part of this community so that all freshmen get matched with a mentor.

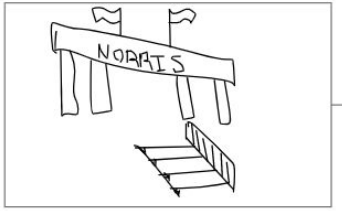
STORYBOARD



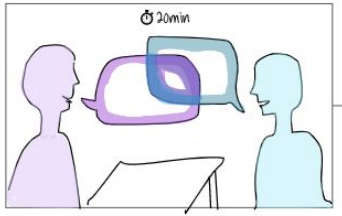
Each person in our group (4 total) will pair the two most similar people we know/ that are available to us. We will invite each pair to Norbucks to meet up for 20 minutes.



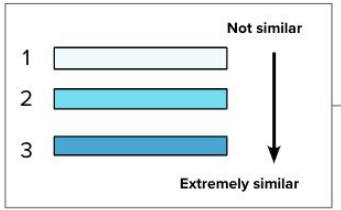
Ask them to spend 20 minutes getting to know one another as best as they can.



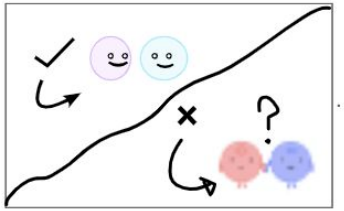
We will instruct each of these four pairs to work with us to find a good time for the two participants and two of our design teammates to meet at Norbucks, where they will converse and we (designers) will conduct a subsequent interview about the conversation.



Pairs will then sit to have a 20 minute conversation in Norbucks, following the prompt: "learn as much about each other as you can in 20 minutes."



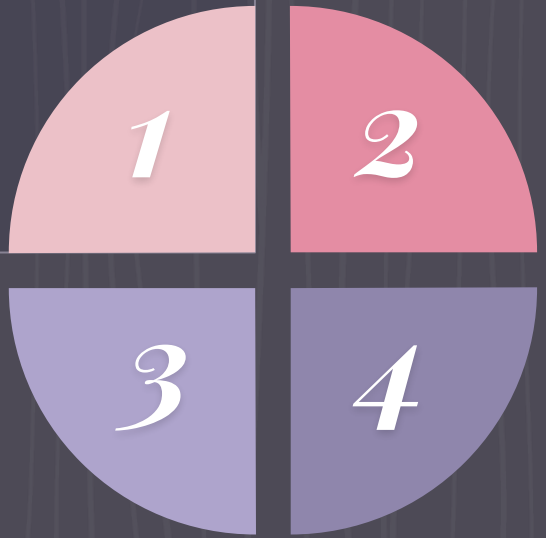
We will continue on to conduct interviews with each pair after their meeting. These interviews will be conducted with each person in the pair separately to make sure that there is no bias. We will ask each interviewee to rank their answers to questions like these on a scale from one to ten: how similar do you feel that you are based on your conversation? (1 being not similar at all, 10 being extremely similar). How likely is it that you would meet with this person again (1 being not likely at all, 10 being very likely).



Ideally, our prototype will confirm our key assumption; it will be true that two high similarity between two people will predict a great relationship. However, if this assumption is disproved by our interviews, we will move forward and disect what, instead, might predict strong relationship...
Going forward as an idea from there, following cliches, we may explore the idea of "opposites attract."

TESTING INSIGHTS

People prefer naturally self-constructed conversations that are able to flow freely instead of those with predetermined parameters.

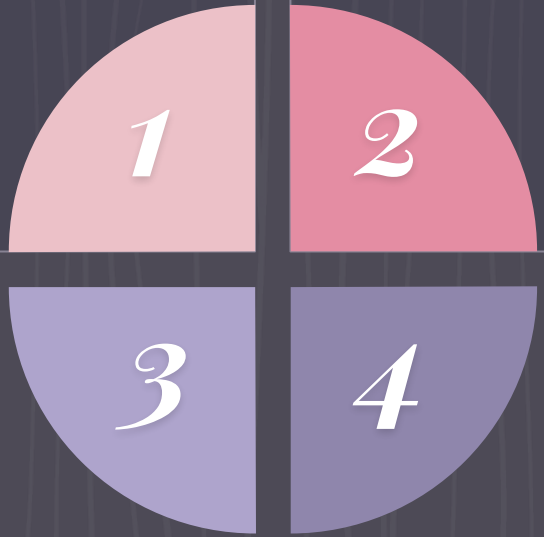


It feels like when you get into a club, where they have generic 'getting to know you' games.

– Tim, '24

TESTING INSIGHTS

People prefer naturally self-constructed conversations that are able to flow freely instead of those with predetermined parameters.



Shared extracurricular activities are more important than shared major in terms of how people are able to feel connected with one another.

Theatre majors are kind of a cult because everyone is invested in what they do outside of the actual school day and that's such a big part of the identity

– Talia, '25

TESTING INSIGHTS

People prefer naturally self-constructed conversations that are able to flow freely instead of those with predetermined parameters.

1

2

Shared extracurricular activities are more important than shared major in terms of how people are able to feel connected with one another.

People feel most connected when they discover a similar personal interest or that they have a similar natural style of talking to others of conversation.

3

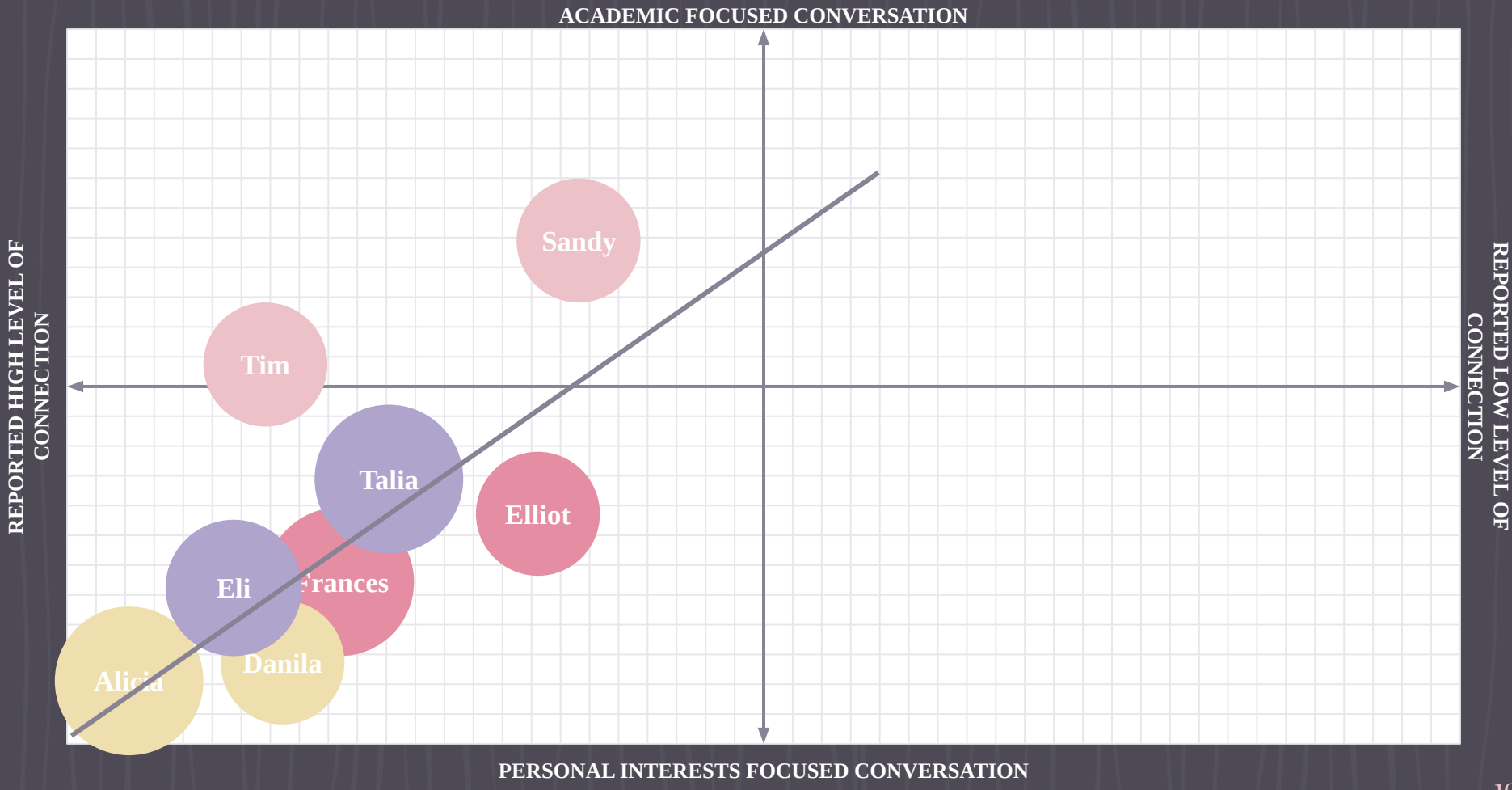
4

I didn’t have to worry about being too loud, I wasn’t the one talking more... I didn’t have to make an effort to match the other person.

– Frances, ‘24

The best parts of the conversation were about musical theatre artists we both really liked. Even when we didn't have the same taste, the fruitful discussion around different people was so cool."

– Eli, '24


ACADEMIC FOCUSED CONVERSATION
REPORTED HIGH LEVEL OF CONNECTION
REPORTED LOW LEVEL OF CONNECTION
PERSONAL INTERESTS FOCUSED CONVERSATION
Sandy
Tim
Talia
Elliot
Eli
Frances
Danila
Alicia

TESTING INSIGHTS

1. People prefer naturally self-constructed conversations that are able to flow freely instead of those with predetermined parameters.

2. Shared extracurricular activities are more important than shared major in terms of how people are able to feel connected with one another.

3. People feel most connected when they discover a similar personal interest or that they have a similar natural style of talking to others of conversation.

4. People with similar career paths seem to be able to share more valuable mentorship-based conversation with one another than those just in the same major

Somebody who has gone through something I have only heard about; they can impart something to me that I wouldn't have been able to get on my own

– Elliot, '25

Just because we're both premed doesn't mean we're going down the same path

– Sandy, '23

IMPERATIVE 1:

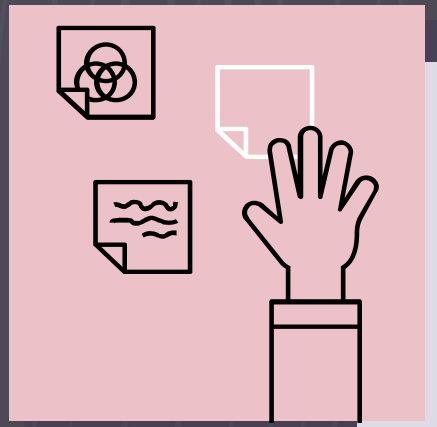
Allow/support people to construct their own conversation rather than feeding them specific guidelines.

IMPERATIVE 2:

Create matches based on career interests rather than major, because career interests more closely align with personal interests/experiences and thus lead to more meaningful connections.

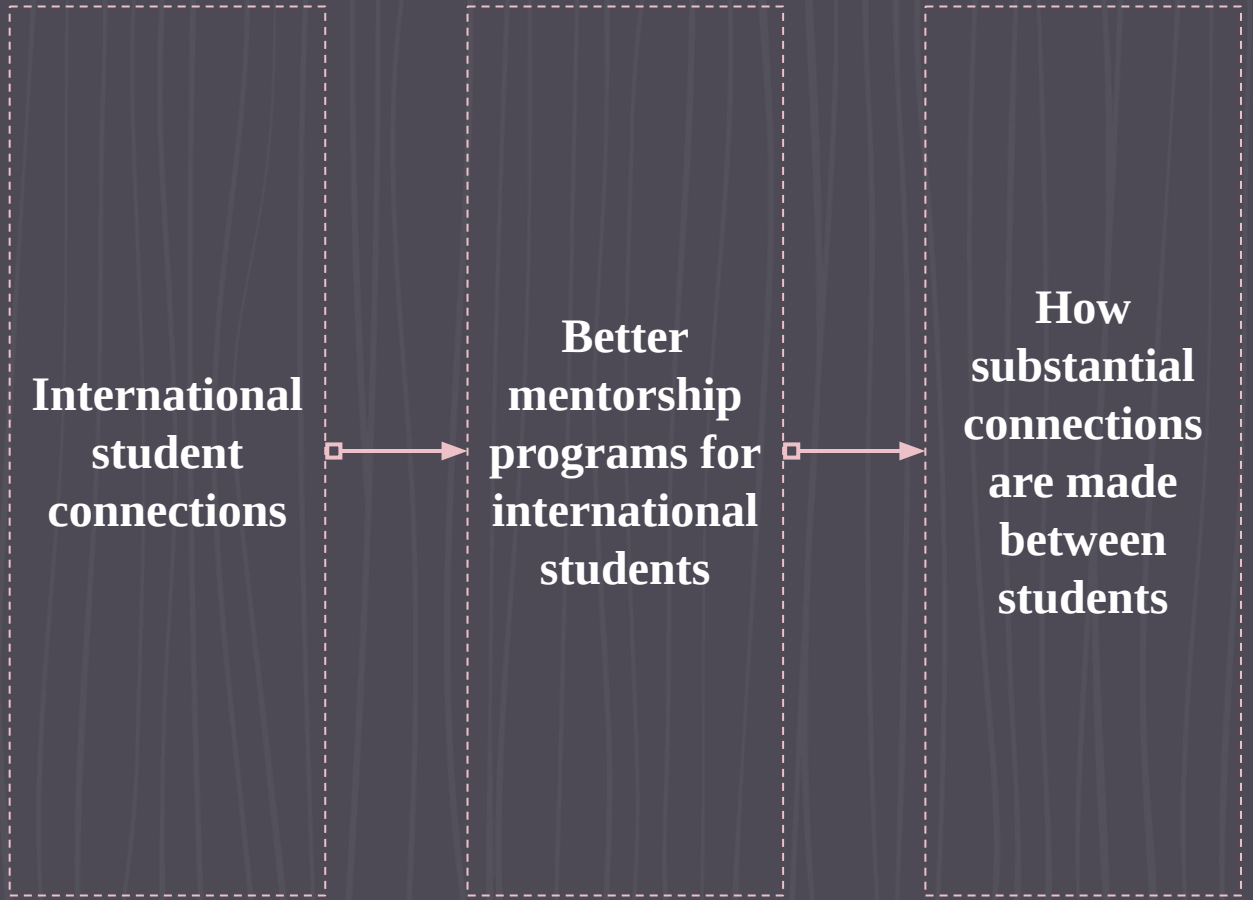
IMPERATIVE 3:

Facilitate matches based on shared extracurricular interests rather than major because shared extracurriculars lead to more commonalities between two people, and these commonalities are what spark genuine connection.



If we had another quarter...

HOW OUR DESIGN PROCESS SHIFTED



Although we began our design process with a specific user group in mind, as we progressed through interviewing, prototyping, and testing, we realized that we had inadvertently taken on a much larger endeavor - figuring out how to facilitate interpersonal connections within all students at Northwestern University.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thank you!

Any questions?