

Design 1 DP3: Cardinal Connect

Problem Statement

International students are able to meet most of the other internationals in their grade during ISO, but after those few days, Stanford lacks organized ways to meet older students, both international and domestic. International freshmen seek mentorship and advice, especially during the transition from abroad to American life and culture, but current mentorship programs have flaws.

How Might We...

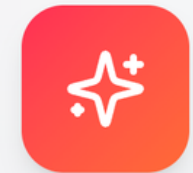
How might we design an opportunity for international freshmen to connect with upperclassmen (both international and domestic) so that they can receive advice and mentorship?



Roshaad Brown



Elliot Lovitt



Cardinal Connect

Algorithmically matched mentoring for Stanford students

Freshmen find mentors. Upperclassmen give back.

[Get Started](#)

For Stanford International Students & Mentors

Research and Needfinding

Process

We interviewed five international students: two freshman girls, one freshman boy, one sophomore girl, and a junior boy. We strived to interview people in person, but conducted one over Zoom. Our in-person ones took place at communal spaces like Coupa, CoHo, etc. We wanted to learn about how they have found community at Stanford thus far, both in the international community and within the larger Stanford community. We wanted to know how they felt about programs like ISO, NSO, SIB mentors, and other Stanford-sponsored events.

Notes

We asked questions like: If you could change one thing about how students find community at Stanford, what would it be? What would have made your transition easier? What advice would you give a new international student? Key quotes included: "If I knew people from the start who were Stanford seniors who'd gone through the process themselves, talking to them would have been so helpful." "There aren't that many events now after ISO/NSO, it could be fun to get all the intl students together from each grade for a special event."

Findings

From our interviews, we found that after ISO, there international students lacked structured ways to meet older students. Additionally, prior to coming to Stanford, our interviewees lacked guidance about practical things like move-in logistics.



Alexandra

Alexandra has a parental connection to Stanford and visited campus before arriving. She intentionally says "yes" to every opportunity to meet as many people as possible. She chose Stanford for a liberal arts education and is involved in SIB mentors. She would have loved a way to connect with current Stanford students before arriving to campus to reduce uncertainty. She also needs Stanford-sponsored international social events beyond NSO to sustain connections with the international community..



Sona

Sona came to Stanford from Delhi without ever setting foot on campus beforehand. She is involved with Stanford Women in Business. She was drawn to the campus life and flexibility of undergraduate study in the U.S. She seeks mentorship from American upperclassmen in addition to advice from older international students. She also wants to have a circle with both domestic and intl students. Finally, she would like informal spaces for social interaction.



Lara

Lara is from London (but has an American passport) and came to Stanford to pursue a liberal arts education. She finds community in FashionX and Greek life. She notices mini-diasporas and feels that Brits lack cohesive infrastructure. She wants to connect with other British and international students who share a cultural background. She also would like to establish deeper cross-grade social ties.



Jimmy

Jimmy is a junior from Pakistan studying Computer Science. He chose Stanford for the world-class CS program and the opportunity to be surrounded by ambitious people. He is involved with Greek life and club rugby. Jimmy needs interactive programming for internationals, not lecture-style, especially during ISO. He also needs ways to sustain relationships beyond freshman year and opportunities that push students outside of their comfort zones.

Synthesis and Ideation

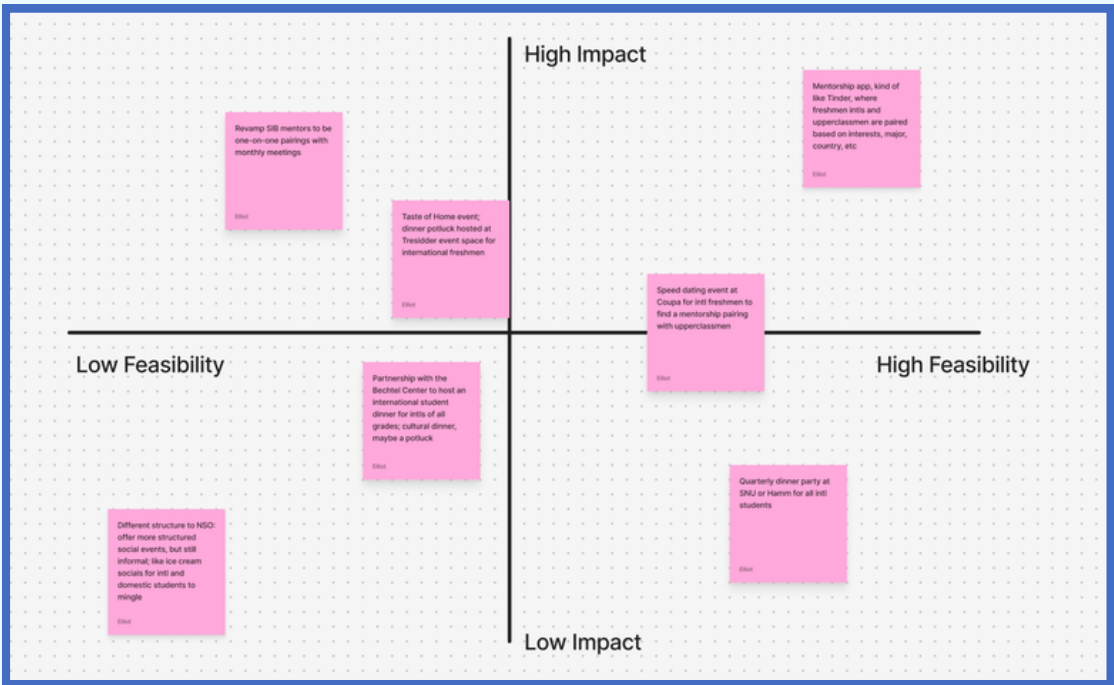
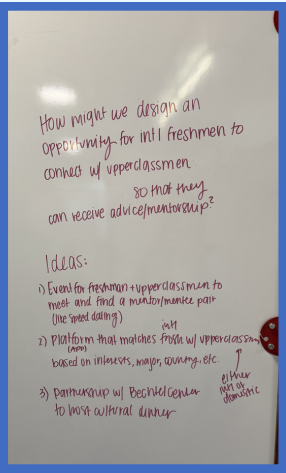
Insights

After our five interviews, we noticed that some of the disconnections in the international community stemmed from a lack of strong and meaningful mentorship programs on campus. SIB mentorship through the Bechtel Center is dysfunctional and doesn't last after the beginning of fall quarter, leading to lackluster relationships bridging freshmen to upperclassmen. Additionally, while ISO was a highlight for most of our interviewees, programming ended after the fact, causing disconnect in the community, especially within country-specific groups.

Ideation

We explored different ways (physical, digital, and experiential) to bring international freshmen to upperclassmen in a long-term, sustainable way. We brainstormed ways to make an experience last longer than a one-time meet-up or event. We also looked for common threads in our interviews and tried to find a solution for both freshmen and non-frosh.

Idea Selection



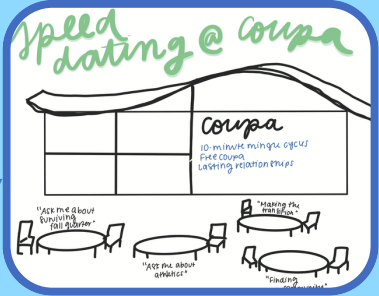
IDEA 1: Cultural Dinner

We would collaborate with the Bechtel International Center to host a cultural dinner for all international undergrad students. This event would use their spaces and resources to build community for undergrads.



IDEA 2: Speed Dating

For this event, we would host a speed-dating mentorship event for international freshmen to meet an upperclass mentor. The goal is to lower the barrier to entry for conversations with upperclassmen with life and school experience/advice.

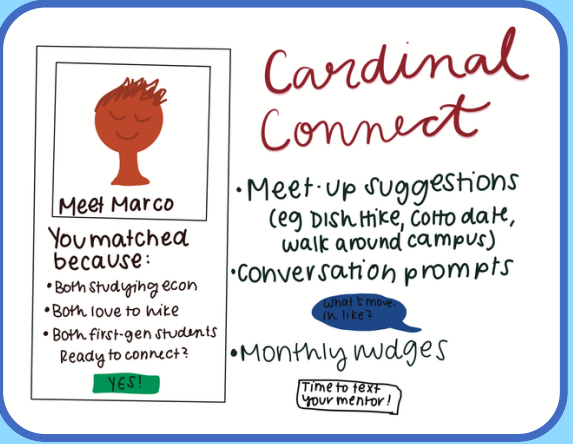


SELECTED IDEA: Cardinal Connect

For this idea, we would create an app that functions like a dating app so that **international freshmen can match with an upperclass mentor** based on shared interests, country of origin, major, etc. This app has an algorithm to match mentor-mentee pairs to promote judgment-free matching and inclusion as opposed to swipe style.

We would launch the app over the summer and promote it heavily online on social media and to email lists. Practically, freshmen input their country, intended major, interests, any sports involvement, or desired career paths. Upperclassmen (international and domestic) input the same. Then, an **algorithm matches students based on compatibility**. Once matched, they receive conversation prompts, suggested **meet-up ideas or events to attend, and monthly nudges**.

This idea addresses our HMW of designing an opportunity for intl. freshmen to connect with upperclassmen for advice and mentorship and provides nudges and **opportunities for sustained relationships** throughout the school year and over the summer.



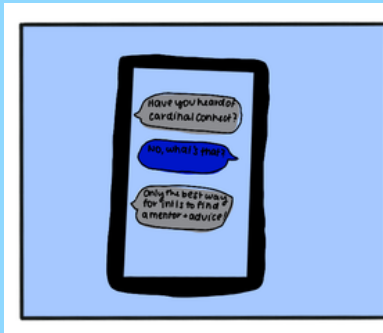
We want to mitigate the harm caused by freshmen feeling excluded because they go unmatched on the app. To mitigate this harm, we can limit swipe-based judgment by adding guided matching (e.g., recommended for you) or offering structured matching, such as an **auto-match based on an algorithm**.

Flow of Idea

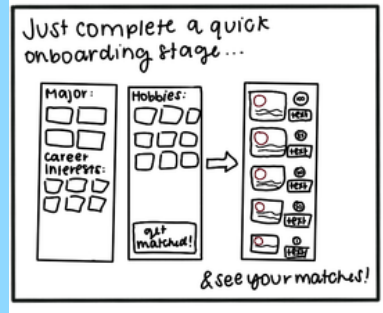
Prototype Development



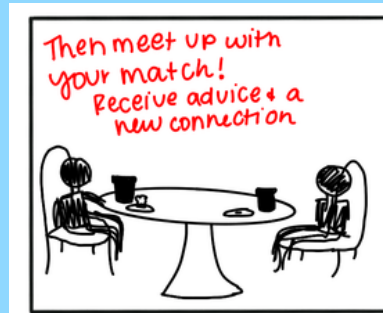
International students feel lost in the approaching Stanford process and seek advice.



Cardinal Connect is marketed and introduced over the summer.

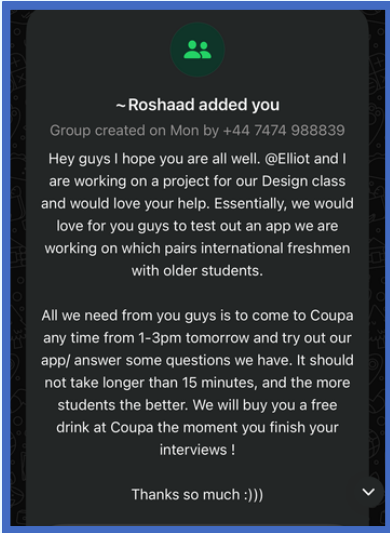


Users onboard, inputting their major, career interests, hobbies, etc. They are shown potential matches with percent compatible.



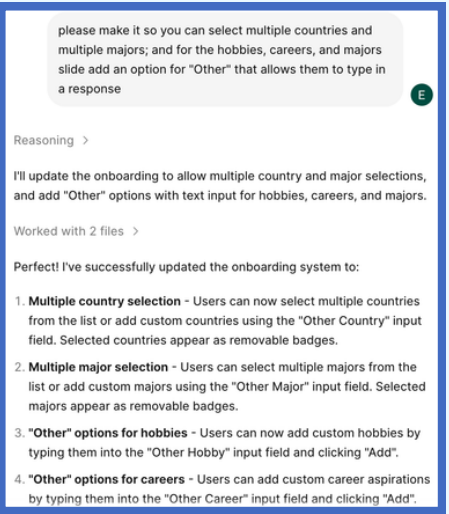
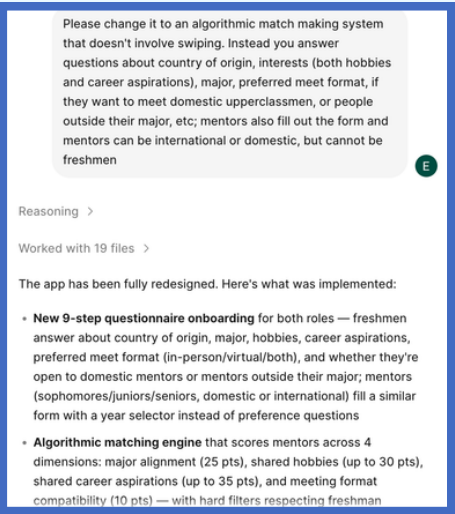
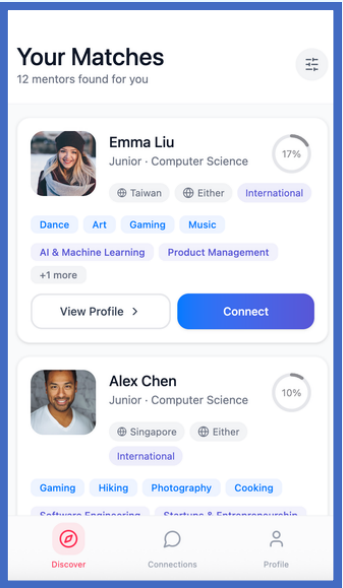
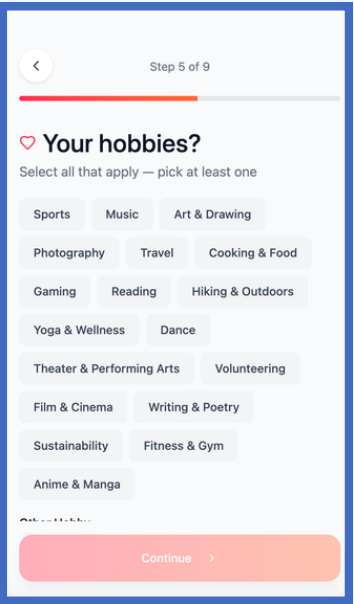
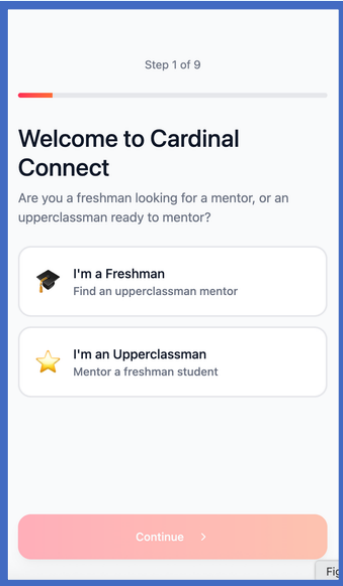
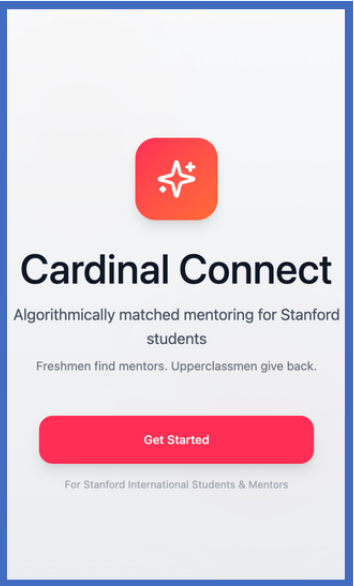
Matches receive suggested meet-ups and conversation starters. A new connection is formed!

We used Figma Make to bring our idea to life. Our initial prompt was: "I want to design an app that works with IOS18 as a basis. This app will allow Stanford International freshmen to match with current upperclassmen based on interests, major and other factors." This produced a Tinder-esque app with swiping. Roshaad created a WhatsApp group to advertise our testing event to international freshmen, and we offered Coupa drinks in return for testing and an exit interview.



Iteration

Through Figma Make, we changed the function of the app from swiping (eg. swipe right if you want to match, swipe left if not) to an algorithm-based matching system after the Mitigation activity. The new form provides a screen of all matches with a percentage indicating compatibility and the option to connect with more than one potential match. After testing, we also added more campus-specific questions on the mentor side, like club and sports involvement. We also added the ability to select more than one country, major, and career interest after receiving that feedback. Our final prototype was the **ninth** version.



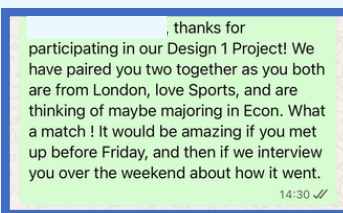
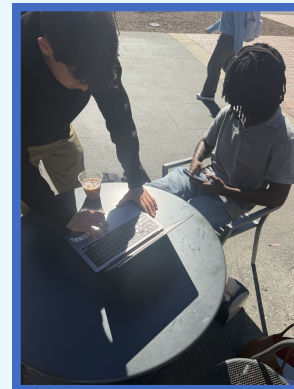
Testing

Testing

We tested at Coupa Cafe on March 3rd from 1-3 pm. We invited freshmen internationals and upperclassmen and offered a free drink in exchange for testing our app and an exit interview. We tested with roughly 10 freshmen and 4 upperclassmen. In our testing session, we had users go through the app flow one-by-one, then asked them a few questions about UI/UX, but we mainly asked about the app's general function and idea. After testing the app and receiving feedback, we played matchmaker and set up a mentor match based on shared country and interests. They met on March 7th and talked about their communities, their shared interests, and advice for Stanford. Overall, testing was extremely successful for hearing opinions and for iterating our prototype.

Feedback

We received feedback through interviews which we recorded after they went through the flow of the app. We asked questions like: "Does this feel like mentorship or networking?" "What would make you use this more than once?" "Would this reduce your early-quarter stress? Why or why not?" We asked them one by one, except for one duo and the upperclassmen, whom we interviewed together. We started with questions about the flow of the app, then moved to more in-depth reflection questions to assess the likelihood of people using the app and how exactly they would use it.



Findings

Across interviews, users consistently expressed that connecting with experienced upperclassmen would reduce uncertainty and stress, especially before arriving at Stanford. Many participants described needing guidance not only socially but also academically and professionally (e.g., internships, navigating majors, campus life). Users also preferred starting interactions digitally and then moving offline. Furthermore, freshmen interviewees said they would be happy to serve as mentors in the future to "pay it back," while sophomore interviewees expressed interest in incentives such as one unit on their transcript or some form of payment. The first part of testing was helpful in informing changes to our prototype and how students would use the app, but the second part of testing (the mentorship match) illustrated the app's function: building community and strengthening relationships. Our match, a freshman and a sophomore, showed how pairing people based on shared country, interests, and majors is successful in producing meaningful connections that foster mentorship and advice. If we were to redo testing, I would have matched multiple people at the same Coupa event and had them meet then and there as opposed to after the fact.

Next Steps

The next steps for this project are turning the app into a fully functioning app and designing a launch campaign for over the summer. It could also be passed off to the Bechtel Center or the Admissions Office. To operationalize, this project would require a couple thousand dollars to run the app/backend and also fund incentivizing events to draw in participants. We can show this project to potentially interested offices to help this project live on.