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Little Forest

Designing for a therapeutic space in the campus environment

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ABSTRACT

In this body of work, I hope to draw attention to the need for safe and therapeutic environments in colleges and university campuses for students dealing with various mental health issues. According to the American College Health Association, more than 60 percent of college students have experienced “overwhelming anxiety”, and 40 percent have reported “feeling depressed”. As the demand for student counseling centers rises, many students are often waitlisted.¹

This thesis uses the human-centered design approach to research the problem and define various opportunities for students who are suffering from anxiety or depression but who are waitlisted for the student counseling center. Primary and secondary research are used to examine the causes of this problem, its consequences, and also the solutions that have already been deployed in an attempt to address the problem, such as various workshops,

relaxation zones and high-technologies from different universities. The proposal put forth in this thesis takes the form of a supportive therapeutic space that provides in-need students with a restful environment and effective, meditative activities. Positioned within campuses, accessible to students while they wait for counseling services to become available, this solution will introduce students to breathing exercises, meditation, aromatherapy, and weighted blankets – all presented as a thoughtfully designed set.

The solution suggested herein is not imagined to be a “Clinical” treatment, rather it is meant to help low-risk students, who are nevertheless suffering, with various self-driven techniques/activities to reduce anxiety. Not only will fostering physical and social well-being help this particular group weather difficult times, it will reduce the burden currently pressing on counseling centers.



Image by Soorin Chung

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

As the renowned interior designer, Ilse Crawford, mentioned, “Empathy is the cornerstone of design.” Ensuring that a designed object or service meets the need of the intended user is the end-goal of empathic design.² In this process, the designer needs to understand the user’s experience, the user’s emotions, and their feelings around the situation or problem.

Empathy is crucial to the design process as it allows the designer to project herself into the user’s situation and truly understand their experience.³ As a designer, you need to develop thoughtful awareness and sensitivity to another person’s experience – each person’s experience is unique and forms a one-of-a-kind connection between that person and the world.

Before coming into this program, I studied art therapy and

interned as an art therapist at the Department of Psychology in Diamond Headache Clinic at St. Joseph hospital. When working with patients with severe headaches, I’ve noticed that they were highly sensitive to elements in the surrounding environment, such as light, color, smell and sound.

Clinical environments, such as the in-patient units and therapy rooms, reflect this in their design; they are decorated with dim lighting, warm-colored textiles, scent-free objects and sound-proof walls to optimize the patient’s well being.

Moreover, I learned that, when in a therapy session, certain attributes greatly impact a client’s emotional state in a given environment, such as the distance between the therapist and the client, their orientation to one another, the color of the

wall, the choice of furniture, and style of the interior design. I noticed that my clients would open up faster and build rapport with me at certain distances and when we faced one another at certain angles, and that these factors would change over time and vary among different people.

These distinct observations about the impact of physical space on the behavior of my clients led me down the path of exploring ‘therapeutic spaces.’ These previous experiences have motivated me to the field of design; to design for people that I care for. I believe that design has the power to solve various and complex problems and make positive change and impact around the world and this project is my first toward creating that kind of change for those of us who occupy therapeutic spaces.

WHY THIS TOPIC?

This journey actually began with an exploration of “waiting rooms” in therapy/counseling centers. Waiting rooms are places that tend to be neglected as they are seen as secondary, or less important. However, a waiting room should function as a place that supports a transition; A place to collect one’s thoughts, to focus on feelings, and to be mindful of thoughts. It serves that purpose going into a session and is just as important for decompressing after a session. My research, at the beginning, was focused on answering questions such as

How might we best utilize the waiting room to help provide mental readiness before and after therapy sessions?

Although it is an important area to research and develop, waiting rooms in therapy clinics seemed like a vague area. I wanted to focus on

college students as the main user for my thesis. First, I began researching the waiting rooms at the student counseling centers in the campus. My initial thought was that due to stigma around therapy/counseling, it would be difficult for students to seek counseling. Therefore, the waiting rooms would be even more important to consider since it is the first place they encounter and it represents the whole process.

Along with this process, I met a close friend of mine and we happened to have a conversation about school. She mentioned that she was thinking about taking a semester off because of personal and family issues. She also said that she has reached out to the student counseling center at her school, but she needed to wait for a semester in order to get matched with a counselor. My friend was taking a break from everything and got in touch with a therapist

in her neighborhood rather than with services on campus. Coming from an Asian culture, my friend was worried that other friends/people would find out about her situation, piling even more anxiety on top of the stressful issues that she already faced.

After our conversation, I began to learn more about the resources at our universities, and the trends in mental health and wellbeing of university students. Researching the topic made me realize that the wait-list period and my original area of interest, the waiting room, were related. ⁴

Why not think about the waiting room as an expansion of space for students who are waitlisted for counseling?



SECONDARY RESEARCH

1. Mental Health on American Campuses

The stigma associated with seeking professional support for mental and behavioral health has faded and there is a rising demand for student counseling centers across the U.S. colleges and universities, as is evidenced in a survey of millennials conducted by the Matters of mind survey team.⁵

Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors(AUCCCD) reported that during the 2017-2018 academic year, students from more than 160 colleges and universities had to be on waitlists for an average of 3 weeks or more just for initial intake sessions. This is true for various types

of colleges and universities in the U.S. including the world-renowned, prestigious private-schools, large public universities, and small liberal arts schools.

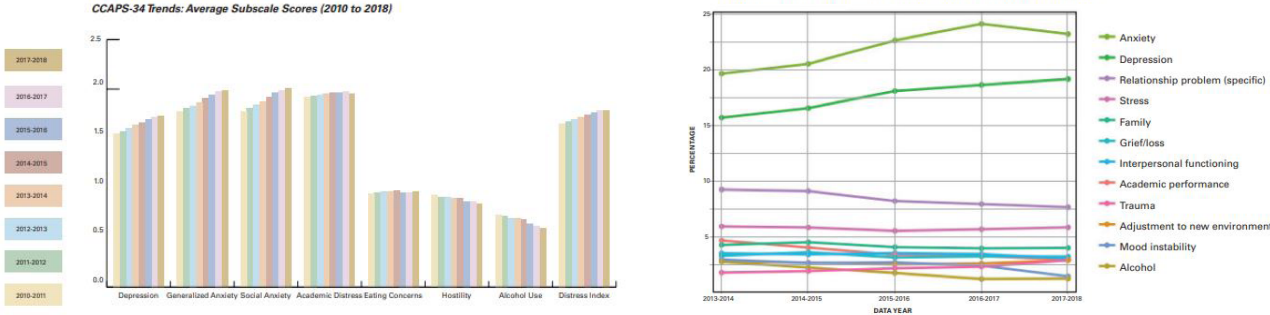
The Center for Collegiate Mental Health(CCMA) stated that between the academic year of Fall 2009 and Spring 2015, the number of students utilizing the student counseling center have increased by an average of 30-40%, while the total enrollment grew by only 5%.⁶The same source points out that the number of licensed counselors, and associated operating budgets, have changed little during the six years.

Few institutions in the U.S. meet the benchmark ratio of one counselor per 1,500 students ,per the International Accreditation of Counseling Services(IACS), which is a serious mismatch.⁷

The top three concerns for students seeking counseling is “anxiety, depression and relationship issues.” According to the 2013 National College Health Assessment, which examined more than 150 colleges and universities throughout the United States and collected data from approximately 125,000 students, more than half of students have experienced overwhelming anxiety

and about one-third of students have struggled with depression.⁸

More recent statistics from the 2018 Center for Collegiate Mental Health Annual Report (CCMA) show that over the past eight academic years, from 2010 to 2018, average rates of anxiety and depression have continued to increase whereas other issues have decreased. The data comes from students who were self-reporting and was gathered by The Center for Collegiate Mental Health from more than 263 college and university counseling or mental health centers.



(Figure 1 and 2: Data retrieved from: 2018 CMHA Annual Report)



“Students may say they are fine when in fact, they may be in a serious condition.”
 says Leah Goodman, a clinical faculty and occupational therapist at the University of Illinois at Chicago

University of Illinois at Chicago

Students with non-urgent mental health issues are left waitlisted on average between 3 and 7 weeks (34.7days) These extended periods without help lead to the development of crucial problems. Even at the short end of the range, 3 weeks is not a short time.

First, when an appointment is set too far in the future, there is a greater likelihood that a student will forget and miss the appointment.

Also, The longer the waiting period, the more time a student has to rethink their decision to get help; they may simply decide that they feel better even if their condition has not improved.

Third, for some students, anxiety, depression and stress can grow more severe during the waiting period.. This delay can contribute to students struggling with academic work which creates a snowballing effect, ultimately

leading to the worsening of symptoms.

Ultimately, students may grow more urgent and may result in them experiencing a crisis. While students are offered help immediately if they are in a crisis, such as having suicidal intentions, less severe issues should not be allowed to snowball into crisis situations.⁹

2.High Demands in Schools

University of Texas at Austin- 14% of students (7,000 out of 51,000) seek mental health help each year. (in an AUCCCD report, the average number of students seeking mental health support at large institutions was between 6-8% of the total student population.)¹¹

At the time, the school had fewer than 30 full-time counselors, which is not enough to treat their students to their fullest.

According to the ratio from IACS, there needs to be at least 34 full-time counselors in order to meet the 1:1500 counselor per student ratio. Given the waiting times below in the chart, even if schools meet the ratio, it is realistically difficult for the counselors to provide sufficient levels of care to the student

population; many remain waitlisted. Waitlisting is especially hard on college students as they are already experiencing a variety of stressors such as leaving home for the first time, settling into a new social environment, peer pressure, and academic burden. Campuses must be prepared to provide these students with the adequate care they need.

School Name	Ratio of students to mental health providers	Wait Time
Cornell University	447:1	Up to 2 weeks
Indiana University	1535:1	Up to 3 weeks
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign	1283:1	Up to 12 days
Brown University	443:1	Up to 2.5 weeks
Elon University	984:1	Up to 1 week
Johns Hopkins University	466:1	Average of 5.19 days
Washington University in St.Louis	625:1	Average of 12.6 days
Davidson College	446:1	Up to 1 week
Elizabethtown College	591:1	Average of 4.1 days

(Table 1: Data retrieved from: 2017 STAT Report)¹⁰

MARKET RESEARCH

1. Current Solutions

Many universities are now rethinking this issue and developing solutions with a shift toward offering short term alternatives for students who cannot get in to see counselors. Not all issues need counseling which is thought of as a more adequate care.

QUICK & ACCESSIBLE CARE¹²

- YOGA, MEDITATION CLASSES
- LET'S TALK
 - students counseling each other on 1:1
- ICARE TEAMS
 - Ithaca
- TIME MANAGEMENT/ANXIETY REDUCING SKILLS
 - The University of South Florida
- THERAPIST ASSISTED ONLINE(TAO) PROGRAM
 - University of South Florida
 - deliver therapy to students with anxiety over computer/smartphone screens 7 weeks, receive texts for reminders with assignment
- PHONE/VIDEO CHAT THERAPY
 - University of Maryland
- 30 DAYS TOO LATE CAMPAIGN
 - University of Maryland
- INCREASING "DROP-IN" HOURS
 - Columbia University
- INTRODUCING TWO-PATHWAY SYSTEM OF CARE
 - Columbia University
- BRIEF ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL TEAM(BART)
 - University of Texas at Austin
 - quick screening and brief consultations
 - "For some students, a single session with a mental health professional is all they need, perhaps to help them problem-solve a situation or talk about a personal concern. Other students may need more intermediate or even extended care."*
 - Chris Brownson, PhD, associate vice president for student affairs and director of UT-Austin's Counseling Center.



2. Relaxation Spaces in the Campus

What can universities do to eliminate/reduce waitlists?

Ben Locke, executive director of Counseling and Psychological Services and director of Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMA) at Penn State says,

“Resources and space. If you want to increase the ability for students to receive mental health treatment, then you’re adding resources and providing spaces for those resources to work.”



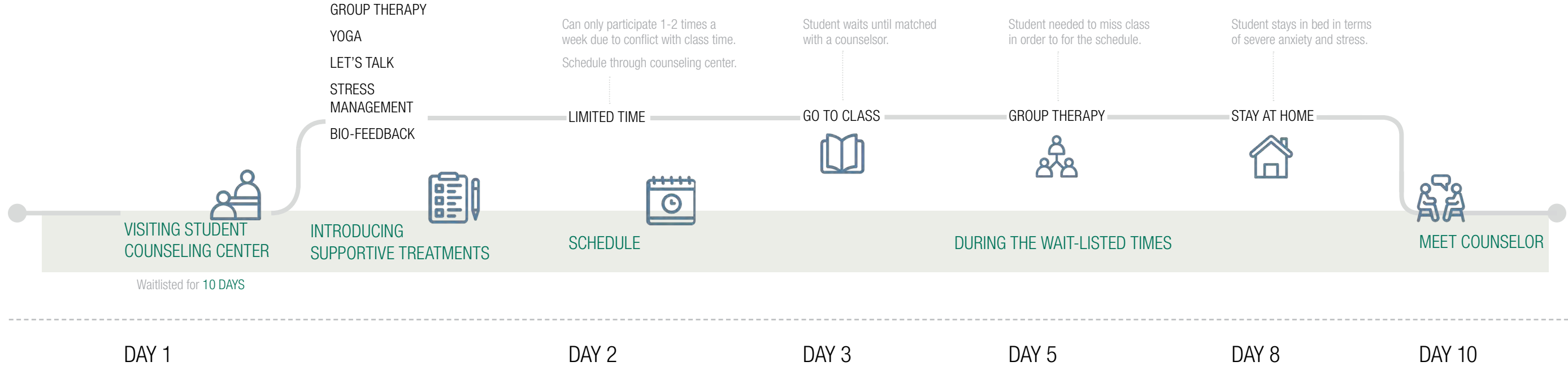
The solutions listed above include various activities and services. However, some schools such as University of South Florida and Carnegie Mellon University introduce physical and spatial solutions as well.

I found these supportive activities and spaces to be especially interesting as they relate to the topic that drew me into this project in the first place, therapeutic spaces.



University of Illinois at Chicago, Image by Soorin Chung

3. Current User Journey of a UIC Student



PRIMARY RESEARCH

1. Interview with Professionals

LEAH GOODMAN, OTD, OTR/L, CYT

Clinical Faculty and Occupational Therapist
at the University of Illinois at Chicago

“

A warm and inviting yet separated space, where anyone can come and relax in between classes is a great idea! Space filled with multi-sensorial experiences may be helpful for students experiencing anxiety.

HANA YOO, PH.D

Assistant Professor of
Marriage and Family Therapy
at Wheaton College

“

Young adults, many who will be away from home and their primary support systems for the first time, need to know how to identify signs and symptoms in themselves and their peers and how to access resources. It is a time dealing with a lot of stressors arousing in college.

JOSEPH HERMES, PSY.D

Director and Staff Psychologist
at the University of Illinois at Chicago
Student Counseling Center

“

A person's mental, emotional, and physical health all need to be balanced and they all have an impact on academic functioning of a student. I can't urge this enough.

DAEWON (DAVE) KIM, PH.D

4th year Counseling Psychology PhD Student
at Loyola University
Counselor at School of the Art Institute of Chicago

“

Our semester started last week and we already have waitlists. I feel awful when students cancel their counseling sessions in their waitlisted times. Everyone has different reasons, and sometimes there is even no show, however I hope students can be treated at the right time.

2. Interview with Students

Names are under a pseudonym



PHILLIP

Univeristy of Chicago

“ I use the wellness programs that the school provides a lot of times. However, there are times when I feel like I want to be alone and do the activities, not with the people that I have met the first time. But, at the same time, I don't want to be alone.



DEBBIE

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

“ I had to have a time-out in the semester and leave school at that time... I felt like I couldn't breathe, and no one was there to help me. I have been diagnosed with anxiety and depression for several years.



MARY

University of Illinois at Chicago

“ I wanted to escape from the campus where no one can see me. I would go and find spaces where sun would come in and sleep there instead of going home.

From primary and secondary research, I found that many colleges and universities are trying their best to provide the best quality of care for their students. Interviews with professionals and hearing about experiences from students gave me some insights to further my process in this topic.

First, students need a dedicated space that can enhance physical and social well-being when dealing with anxiety and stress; currently, there is no adequate space for these students. (See current journey map, “During the wait-listed times”)

Second, students need a form of self-care during the waitlisted times. This can also alleviate the burden on the counseling center and help students find what will work best for them.

Third, alternative services that schools provide are beneficial; however, they need to be more accessible to student’s time.



University of Illinois at Chicago

INSIGHT

1. Design Statement

How might we design a supportive therapeutic space that promotes a sense of well-being for students struggling with anxiety/ depression/ relationship issues as they are on waitlist period for counseling services?

2. Area of Opportunity

During the “waitlisted times” what other things can be helpful?

ALTERNATIVES & SUPPORTING HELP

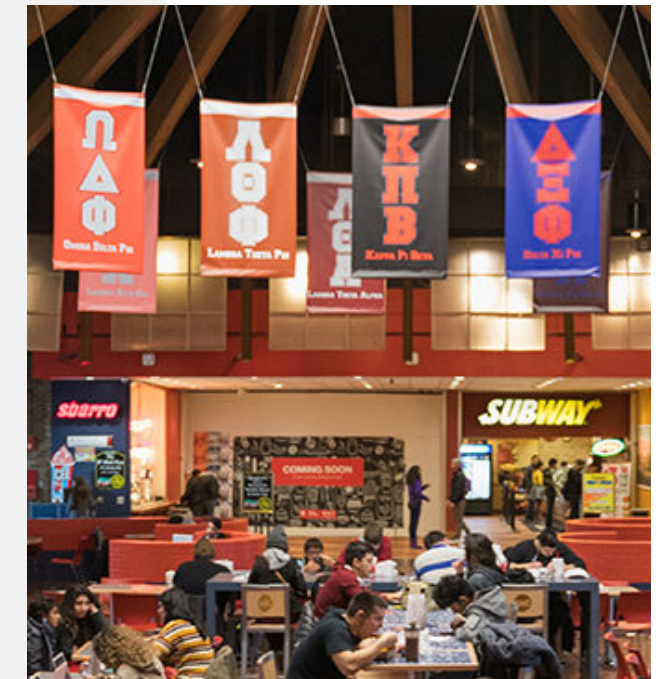
Sending students away from a counseling inquiry into the waitlisted period has the potential to harm students, but it is also an opportunity for counseling centers to introduce students to other forms of help. This is an opportunity to think about alternative/supportive treatments that can be helpful to students.



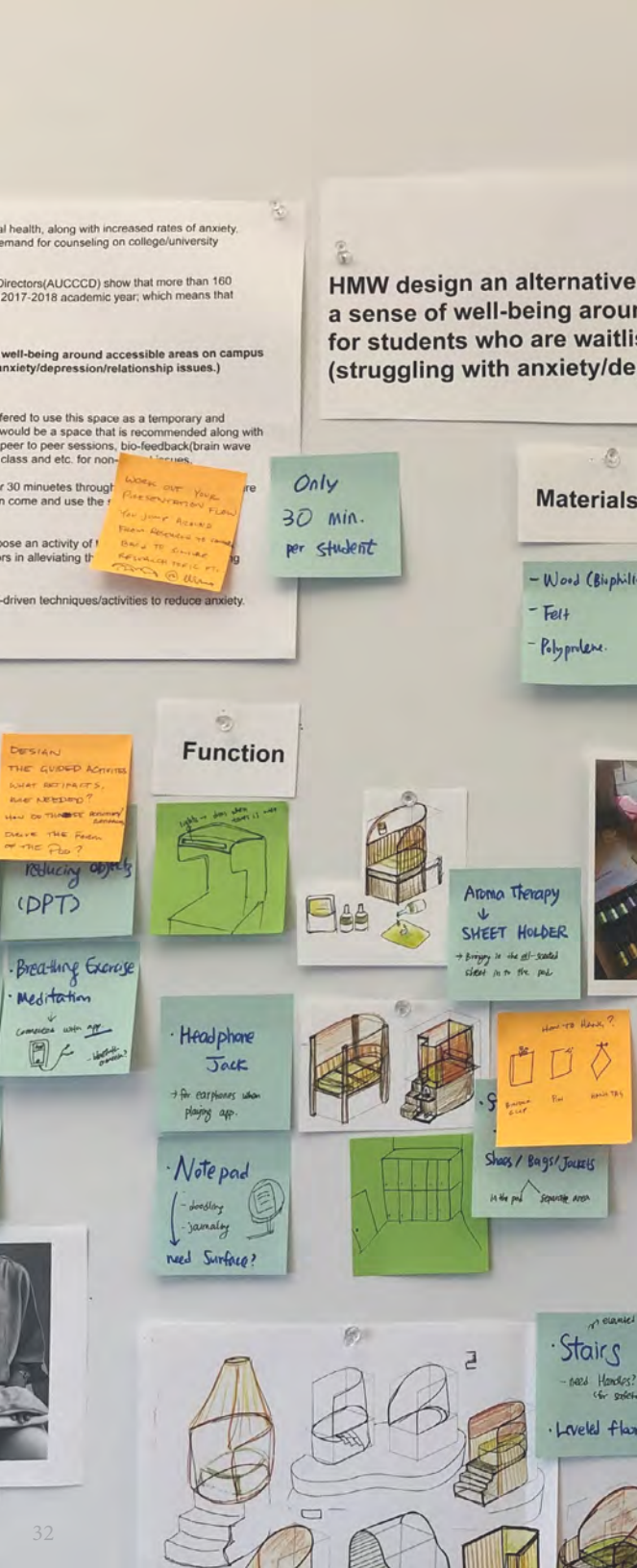
University of Chicago, Group Art Therapy Room
Image taken by Soorin Chung

ACCESSIBILITY

I have learned that current services provided from school can have conflicts with class time since group therapies are only held in certain times and this treatment needs the counselor as well. I wanted to think about a more accessible space/service that students can easily come and go without dealing with scheduling conflicts. Accessibility is an opportunity for frequent level of care. A space being opened to students whenever they need the care is important, in order for the students to not feel “abandoned.”



University of Illinois at Chicago, Student Center East



3. Design Criteria

As I mulled over the insights from my research, I began to imagine a space that would be recommended along with other services that schools provide currently such as group therapy walk-ins, peer to peer sessions, biofeedback (brain wave activity associated with meditation), mindfulness groups, stress management class and etc. for non-urgent issues.

I imagined a place where students want to come, trying not to think about school work, money, relationship issues or other stressful

things and to focus on one's self, gain self-confidence and recharge their energy.

I formulated design criteria to highlight the most important attributes that my solution would need to contain to meet the goal of designing a supportive space containing therapeutic qualities for students who are waitlisted.

DESIGN CRITERIRA

ACCESS	SPACE	ACTIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reception area with a staff to welcome and guide students. Arrangements easily made that suit students' schedules. Use for 30 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Located in a physically accessible area throughout the campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aromatherapy : Breathing Exercise(5-15 minutes) : Meditation(15 minutes each) : Quiet time/ Gratitude Journaling(5-15 minutes):
PRIVACY	MATERIAL	SIZE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A space where the users can feel like they are hiding, feel protected or comforted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm and natural materials that maximize positive mood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big enough space for one person to use. At least (40x60x70)inch.
FUNCTION/FEATURES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aromatherapy sheet holder Stairs that lead to elevated platforms along with handrail for safety Walls or borders for the best quality of privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headphone jack for earphones when using the app Different levels of lighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storage place for personal items such as shoes, bags, jackets Storage for weighted blankets

IDEATION

1. Inspiration Images



HUSH felt color therapy pod, by Freyja Sewell



Calm Booth, by Room



DOCKLANDS Phone booth



Peek and Boo, Ross Design

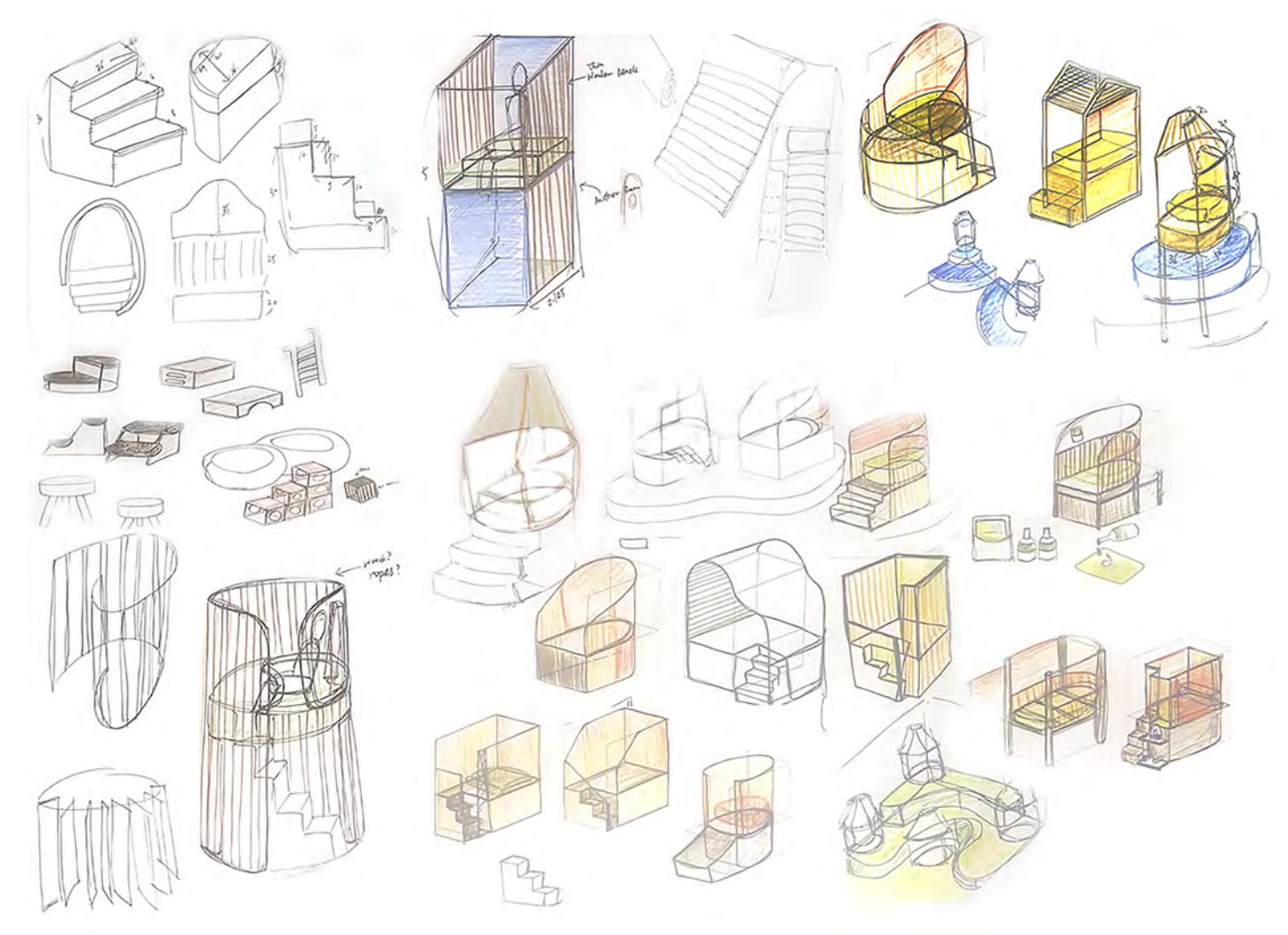


Tree House Collection, by Dymitr Malcew's



Google

2. Early Explorations



3. Design Inspiration

"I want to be at a space alone but I want to be with others."



Elevated room, by Patricia Coignard

ELEVATED SURFACE
I came to think about a space where students can be alone while being around others and this can be designed through stairs. I thought about those spaces underneath the staircase or an elevated platform such as an attic. An elevated surface with stairs may give you a feeling of going to a separated and private space as well as being around other people. A quote that one student said seems contradicting, but is very valid. Orienting students in a different way is an opportunity to explore different forms of therapeutic space.



"I find this to be very helpful for me to focus and relax from the stressors."
Mina Lee, University of Chicago

AROMA THERAPY

I observed a friend who enjoys using aroma oils from the wellness center at her school. She likes to pick out a recipe from the menu, and draws essential oils on a tissue paper. She then brings that sheet of tissue paper to her desk. I think this is an opportunity to incorporate aroma into the space as one of the therapeutic effects.

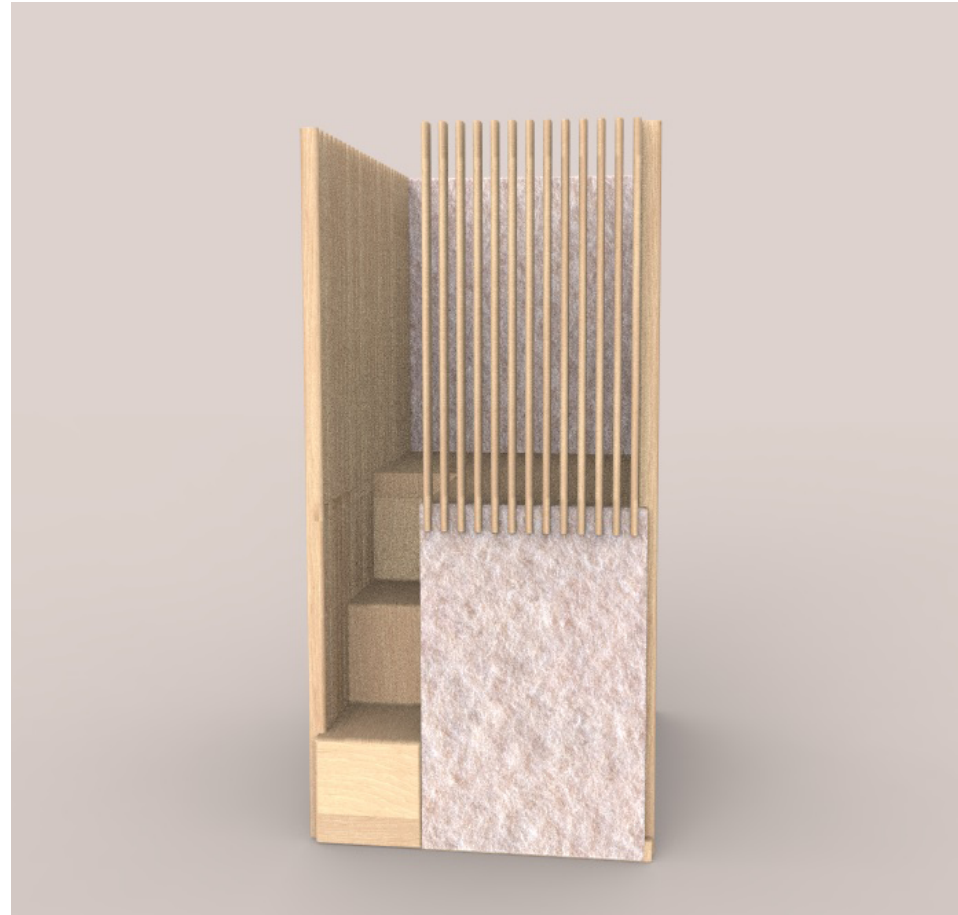
University of Chicago, Image taken by Soorin Chung

RETHINKING OF PODS AS THERAPEUTIC SPACE
Inspired from pod-like chairs, a space like this is an opportunity for "How might we think about this furniture as a small, dedicated space for the user?"



Google Office

4. Preliminary Concepts

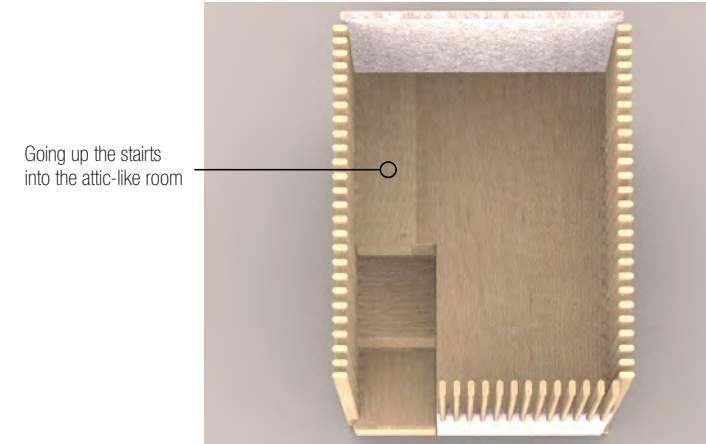


CONCEPT 1

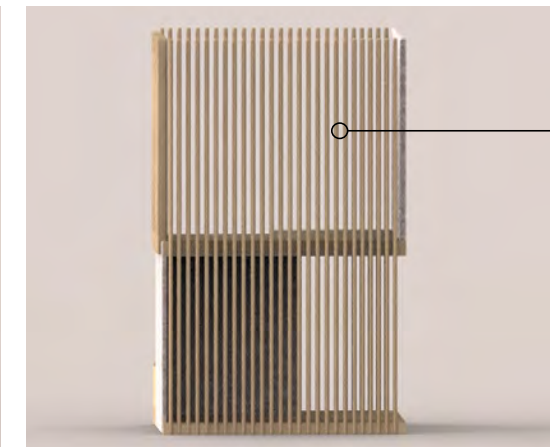
One of my early ideas was to design a space that resembles both the attic and beneath the staircase, locations that I tend to think about when wanting to be alone, in a safe space. I also wanted to emulate the feeling of being at a forest park.

Prototypes

Top view



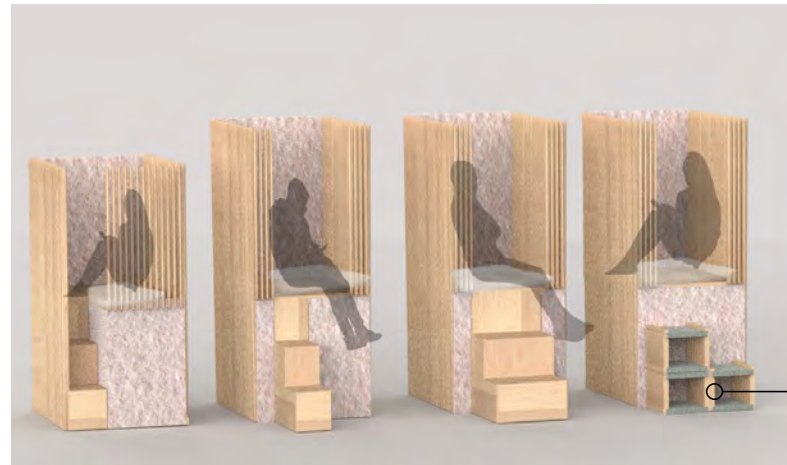
Back view



Side view

Semi private walls

Same place on the back,
Intensions: for accessibility



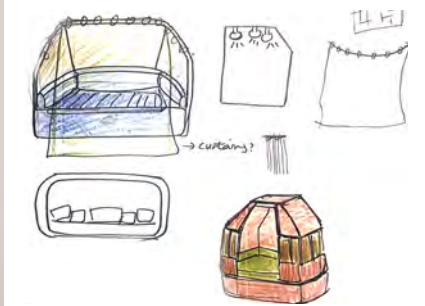
Variations of stair ideas

I imagined a room, one side with wooden walls and the other side with natural scenery. The floor would have real or artificial grass so that users can walk around as if they were outside. Modular step stools would be spread out, around the room.

I moved on with another idea due to some feedback from an occupational therapist that it may be too claustrophobic for some people especially who may be struggling emotionally and increase anxiety.



Aromatherapy sheet holder



Lights inside the pod

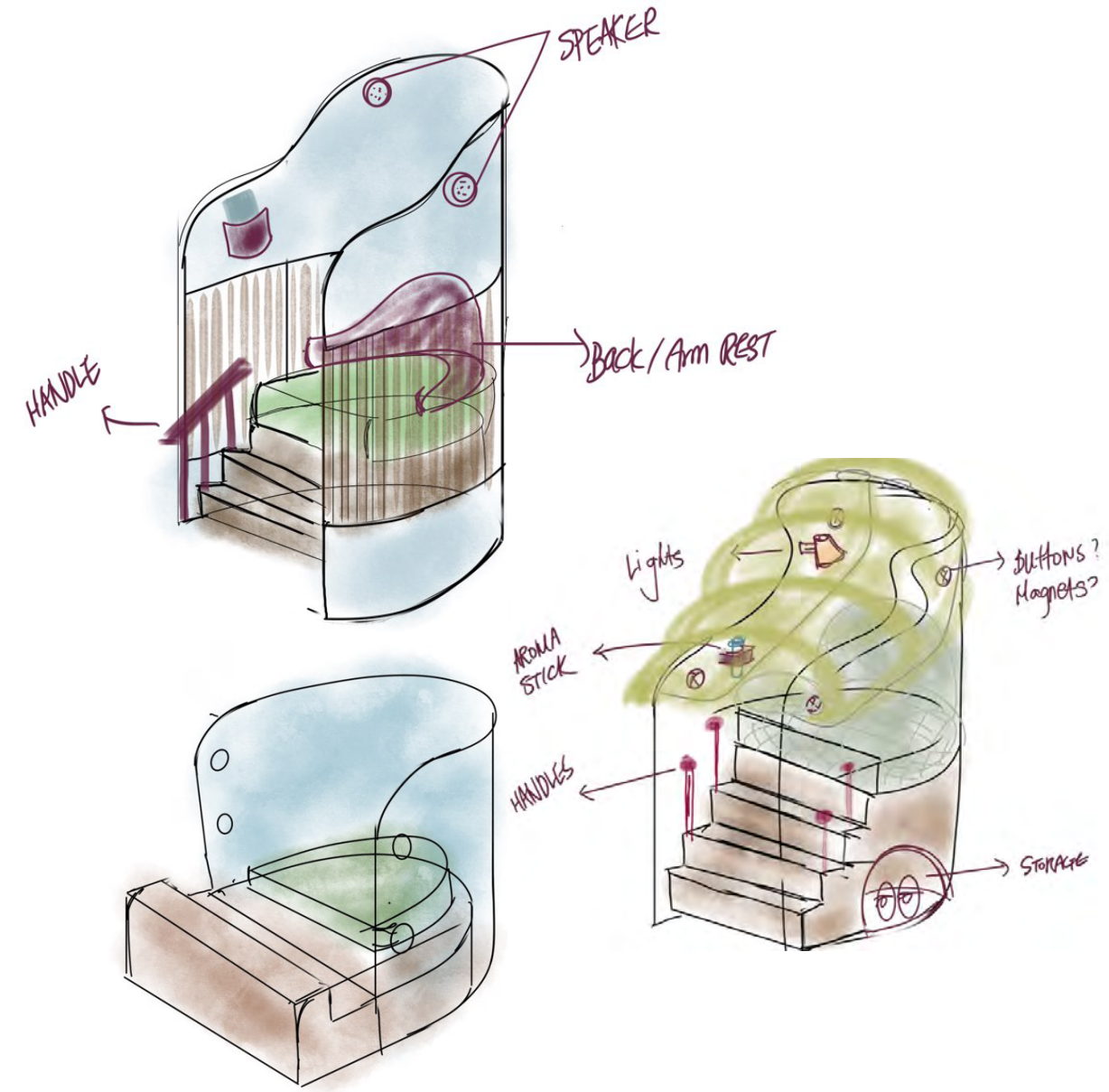
CONCEPT 2

The second concept was inspired by felted tent forms with curtains that can be opened and closed by the occupant. I added lights inside of the tent interior and aromatherapy sheet holders. Although this produced a semi-private space, I felt compelled to continue exploring spaces with elevated surfaces.

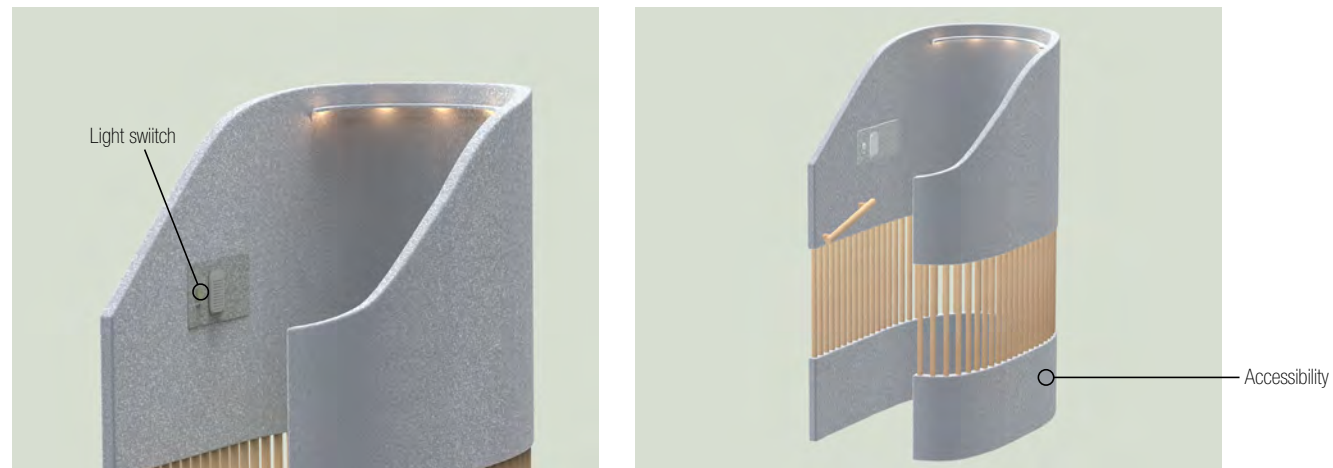
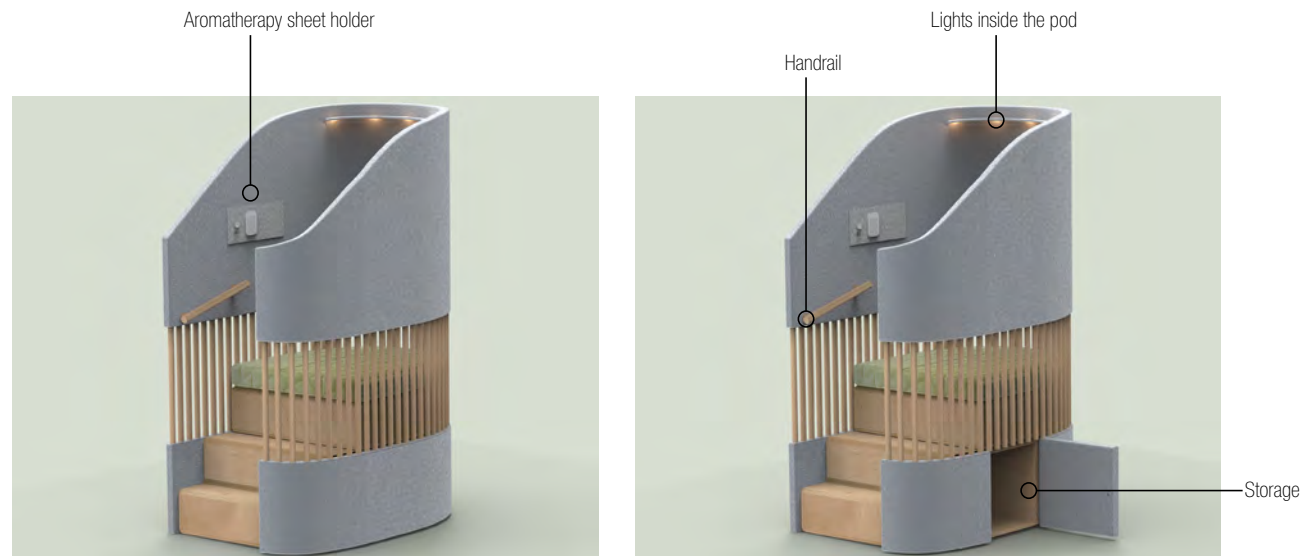


CONCEPT 3

The third concept started out as a variation of concept 1 and 2. I incorporated stairs and manipulated the form, textures, and materials to make the pod feel more welcoming. I was inspired by the design of baby cribs. I also thought about a version without the staircase and platform, to make it accessible for people who may not be able to walk up the stairs. I developed this concept further as the final design.



Testing Size and Rough Prototypes



I tested out different sizes and proportions of the minimum width and height of the upper part of the pod.

(40 x 38 x 40) seemed like the most appropriate size.





FINAL DESIGN

My final design concept is called the “Little Forest”. A study from Japan found that simply being inside, or looking at the forest to be physiologically effective to the human mind and body. Forest-bathing is a Japanese term “shinrin-yoku”, which means to take in the forest atmosphere and nature through our senses.¹³

I have loved forest-bathing since I was a child. Whenever I would walk into the forest, it really affected my mood in a positive way. For stress-relieving purposes, I still like to hike in the woods.

I wanted my design to resemble a forest. I hope that the user can feel like they can come to this space whenever they would like,

and re-charge and re-gain energy to live out that day.

The green upper wall would be made with thick felt to provide privacy with sound-proofing qualities. The student can open and close the entrance door. It includes various levels of lighting, storage space, aromatherapy sheet holder, handrails and weighted blankets that the forest-bather can utilize if needed.

Once being in the Little Forest, the student can either connect their phones via bluetooth or use the tablet provided in the pod to try out different activities such as breathing exercises, meditation or journaling using the “Little Forest application”. Students would be able to login in with their school ID and password.

LIGHT SWITCH & USB PORT



Different levels of lighting would allow students to choose according to the activity.

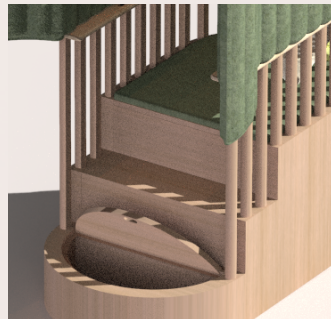
Ex) When stepping into the pod, white fluorescent light can be turned on. Then, it can be changed into warm lighting when breathing exercise starts.)

ACTIVITIES USING LITTLE FOREST APP



A tablet will be placed on the side of the pod to access and utilize the app for various activities.

STORAGE



Weighted blankets would be stored inside this space. Users can also put in personal belongings before going into the pod.

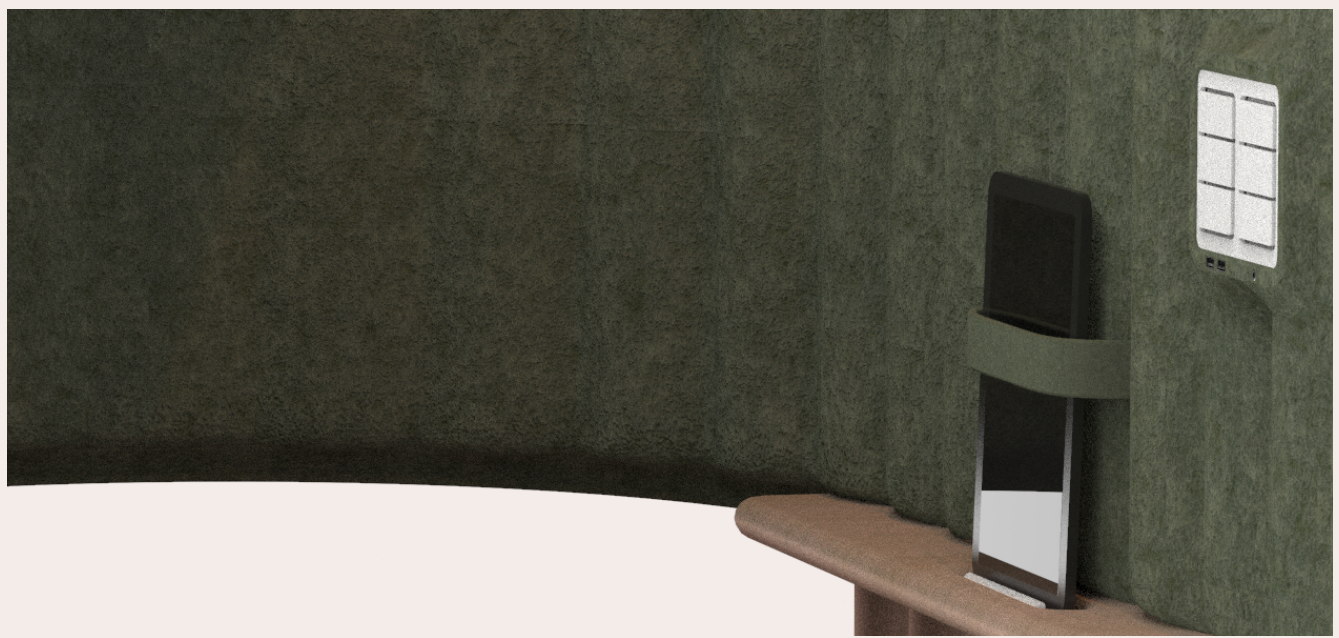
AROMA THERAPY SHEET HOLDER



Aromatherapy sheet holder will be placed on the right door of the pod.

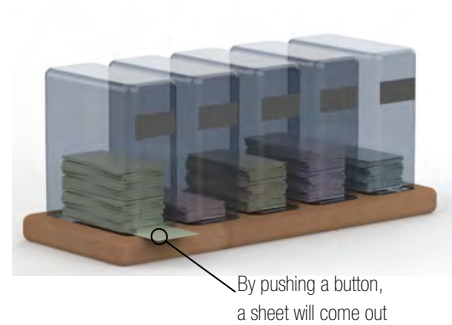






COMING INTO THE POD

AROMA THERAPY STATION



Before coming into the pod, students will be able to grab a sheet of aroma blends to bring into the pod. Sheets are contained in a box so that people can choose whatever fragrance they want.

There will be 5 "Aroma Blends".
Relax blend, Breathe blend, Sleepy blend, Focus blend, Healing blend

WEIGHTED BLANKETS



Users can use weighted blankets to reduce anxiety. Deep pressure therapy is beneficial for people who experience anxiety. By giving pressure from weights, it calms the nervous system and releases serotonin.

ACTIVITY INSIDE THE POD

Users will be able to experience activities through an app .

BREATHING EXERCISE

Practicing a balanced breathing pattern will help with reducing anxiety. Different levels of guided breathing will be introduced.

QUIET TIMES/ GRATITUE JOURNALING

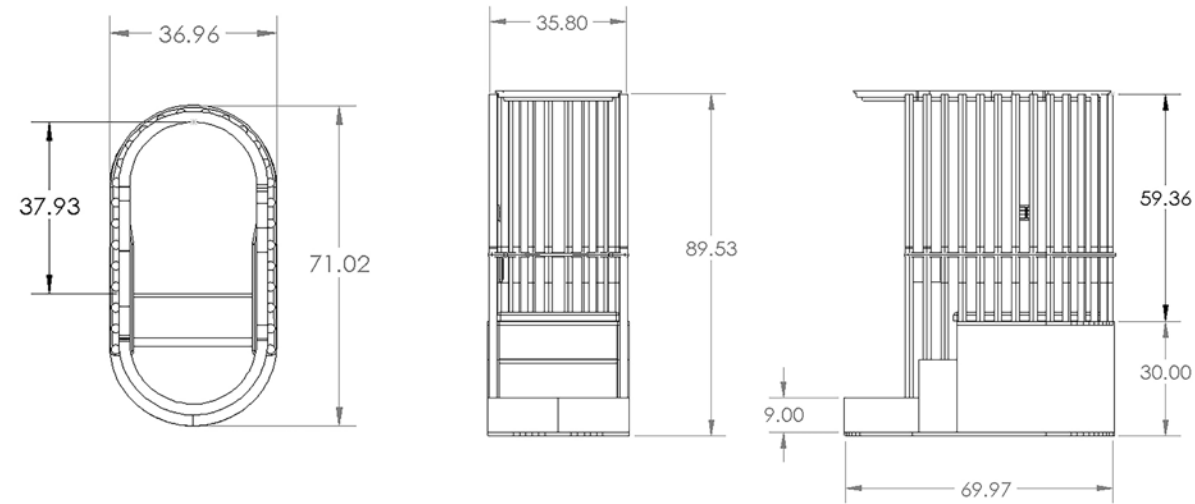
Quiet times and journaling allows an individual to organize their thoughts, feelings and problems to make them more simple to the given situation and helps to build coping skills.

MEDITATION

Meditation or mindfulness techniques encourage people to become more aware of their bodies by focusing on their heartbeats, imaging oneself in a certain situation and reflecting on themselves.

Students will be guided to do self-focused meditation choosing in variations of settings, music and voice.

EXAMPLE OF LITTLE FOREST ROOM



DIMENSIONS

An ideal scenario of this design concept is to have a dedicated room of Little Forests.

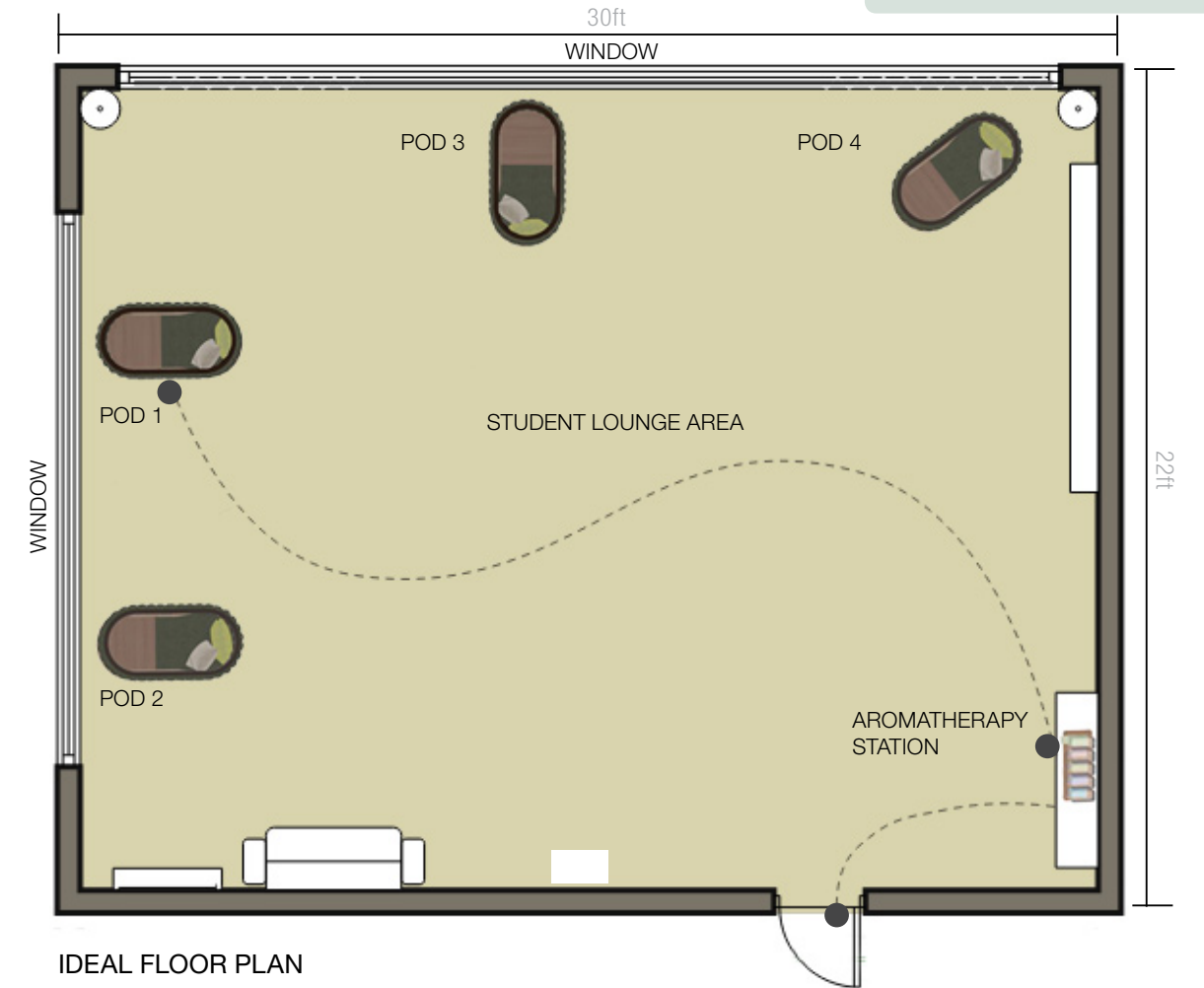
Pods will be located in a accessible space similar to a student center where the building holds various activities such as grabbing food or coffee, meeting friends or having

student organization meetings and students come and go without exposing their needs of coming in.

After entering the reception area, students would be able to utilize their scheduled pod for 30 minutes. This is a hypothetical room to visualize the experience.

----- = User path

Student enters the room and will pick out an aromatherapy sheet of their preferred fragrance. Then, student would go into the scheduled pod.



IDEAL FLOOR PLAN

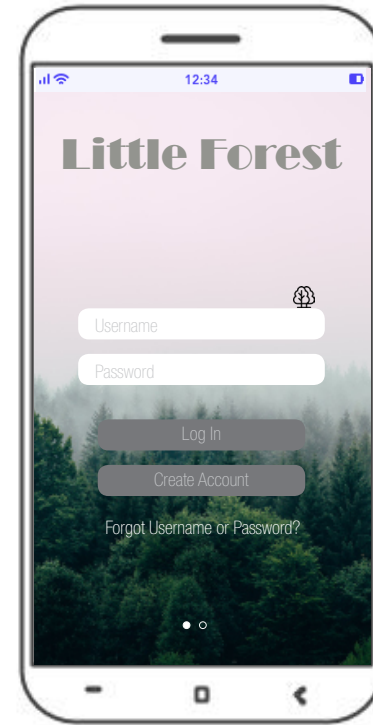


If dedicated room for the pods is not possible, I hope these pods can stand on their own in various areas throughout the campus.



University of Illinois at Chicago, Student Center East & West

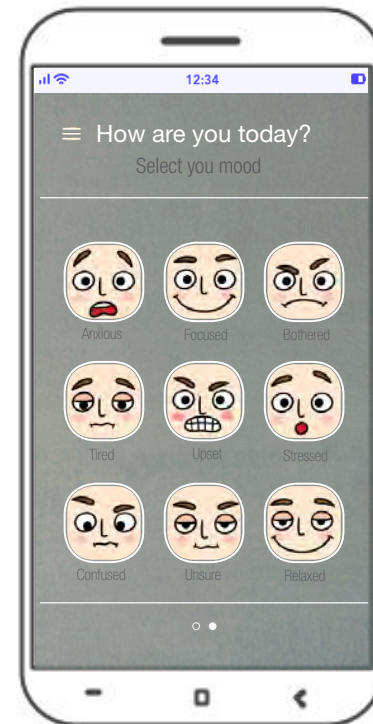
1. LOGIN



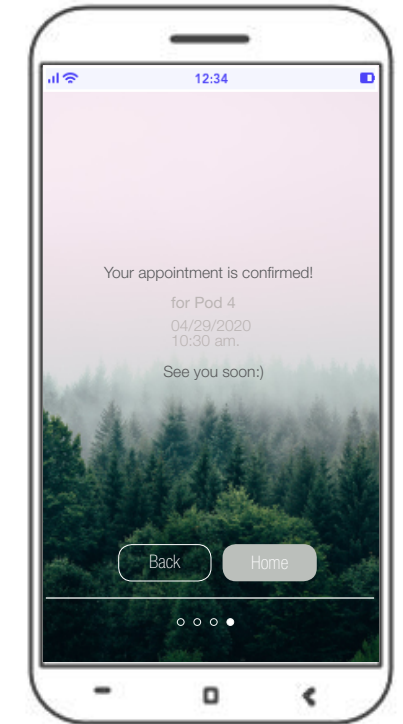
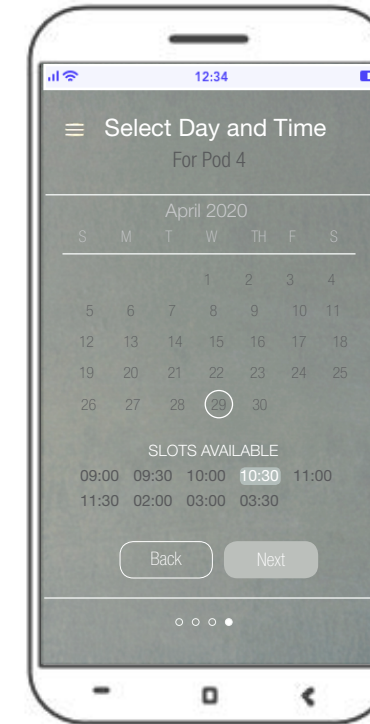
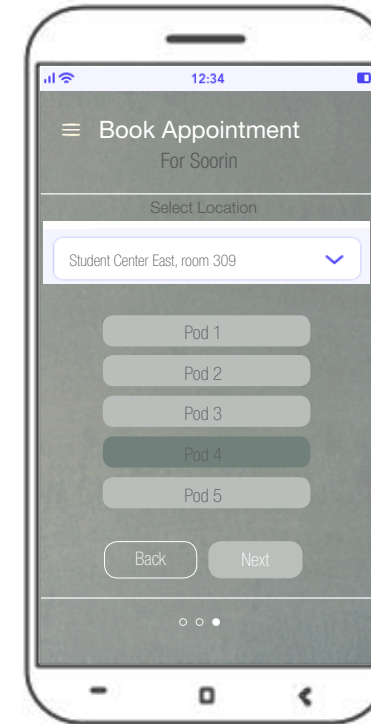
2. MAIN PAGE



3. CHECK-IN



4. SCHEDULING

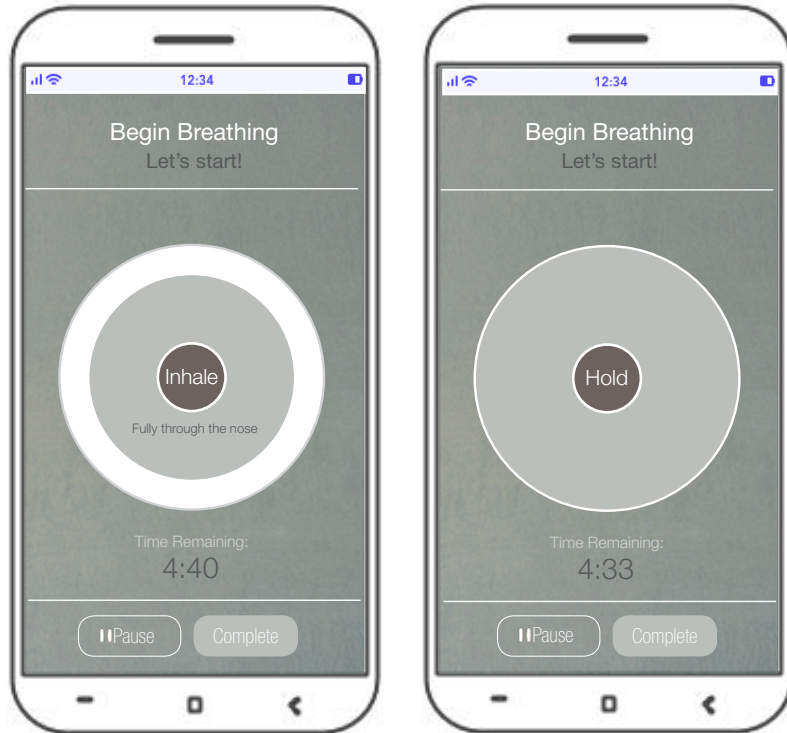
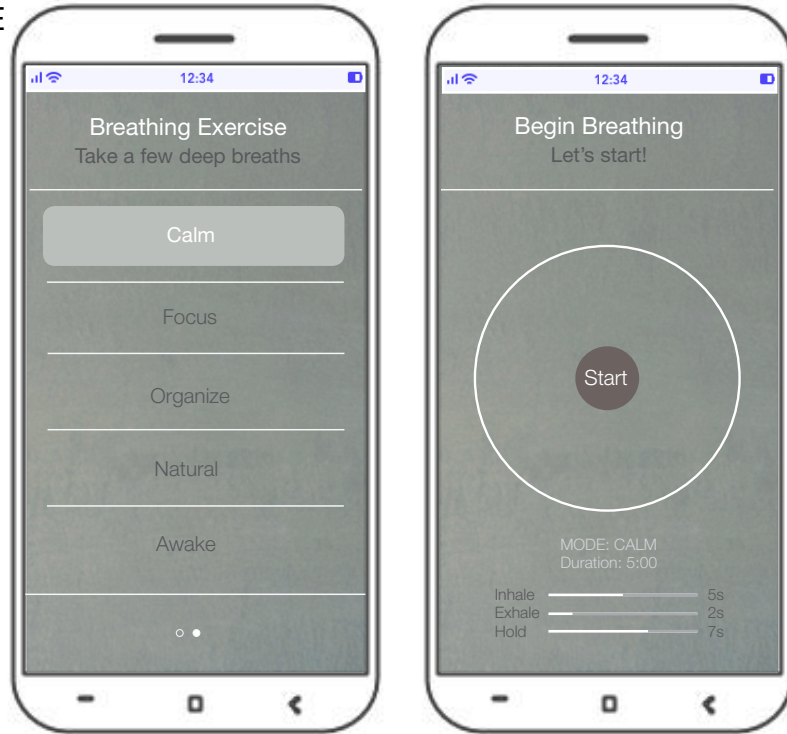


3. App Utilization Process

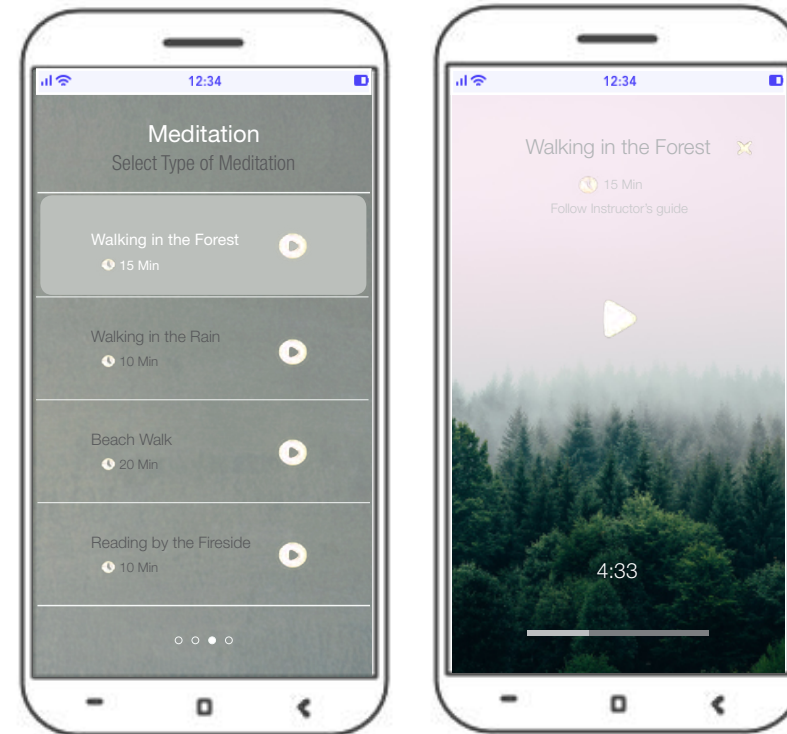
An app will be connected to the pod via bluetooth. A phone app can be easily utilized when scheduling appointments for the spaces and activities. Also, this app can be used to practice various activities in the pod.

This is a representative mock-up interface that visualizes the experience of using the Little Forest app.

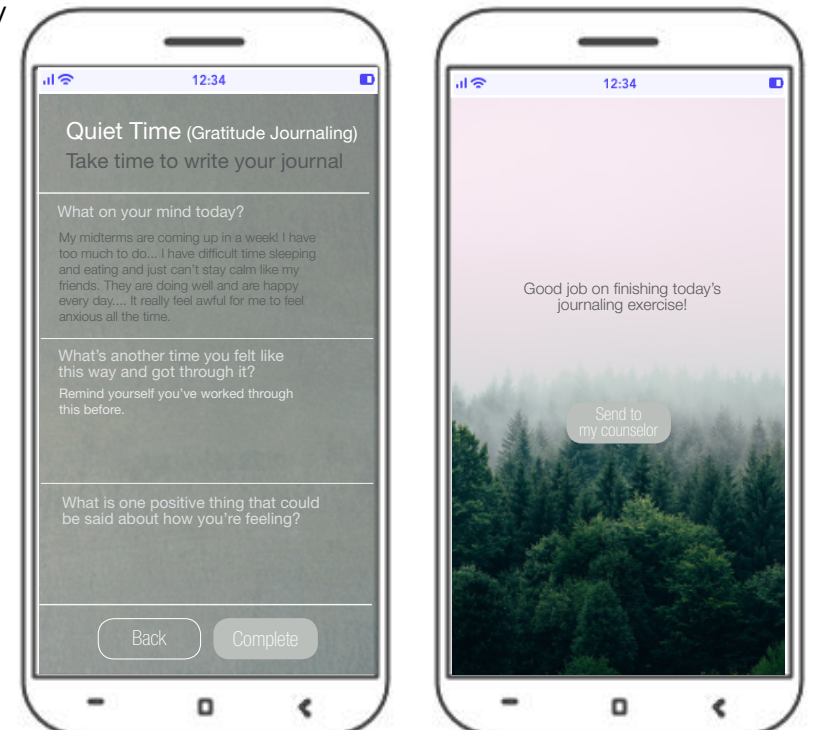
5. BREATHING EXERCISE



6. MEDITATION



7. QUIET TIME/ JOURNALING



4. New User Journey of a UIC Student



CONCLUSION

1. Final Thoughts



Students who have reached out to the student counseling center would be referred to use “Little Forest” as a temporary and supportive service to reduce anxiety and stress during the waitlisted times.

The Little Forest aims to bridge the gap between the time being waitlisted to starting counseling sessions. This comforting space would help students to reduce their stress and anxiety; the app provides different activities to promote relaxation and

mindfulness; multi-sensorial accessories such as aromatherapy and weighted blankets complete the restorative experience.

It is designed for students to actively engage in their own self-care and find help through the difficult times in a safe space. And when the waitlist period comes to an end, the positive and meaningful experiences of “pre-counseling” sessions in the Little Forest would lead to more effective counseling and enhance the overall well-being for students.



Little Forest will provide the peace and relaxation of forest-bathing.

2. Looking Forward

I appreciate having the opportunity and time researching and designing about the topic that I am truly interested in and care for.

Feelings of stress and anxiety are inevitable given the crisis we are experiencing at the moment, and I would like to acknowledge that I honestly have felt sad, enervated,

and unmotivated for a couple months. I also have experienced increased stress, depressed symptoms, and anxiety in trying to finish up the last semester of graduate school.

However, using the same relaxation practices that are part of the Little Forest – breathing exercises,

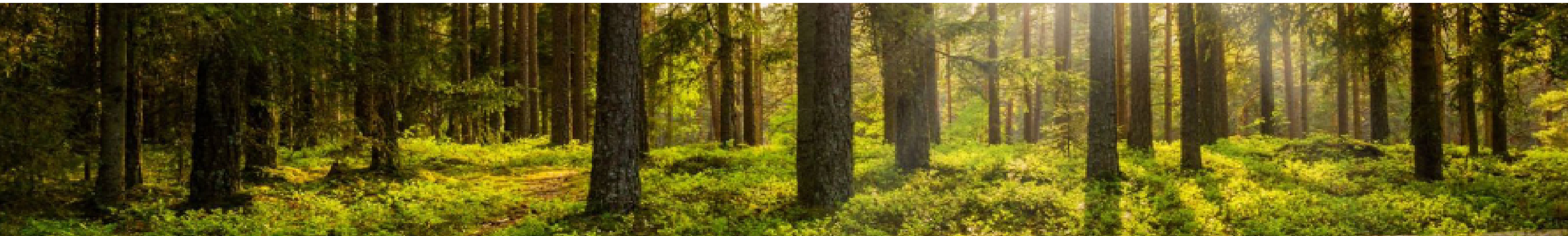
meditative activities and quiet time journaling – I have been able to push through the difficult times and cope with the given situation.

I look forward to making full-scale prototypes and trying to test Little Forest in the real world with various groups of people. I believe this would be critical for collecting feedback for my next iteration and bringing my proposed thesis into the world.

I was grateful to see that there is a growing interest from

the public and extensive, professional research in this field of mental health and well-being.

Also, there are many remarkably designed objects and spaces addressing this topic, created by multi-disciplinary teams of designers for office and educational environments. I hope that Little Forest can contribute to a better future for students; one in which their wellbeing is supported holistically, in body, mind, and spirit.



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University of Illinois at Chicago
 Image taken by Soorin Chung



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<https://www.uic.edu>



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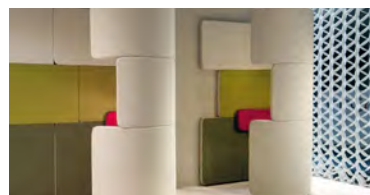
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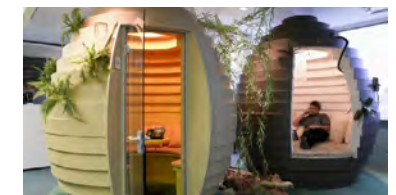
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