# Optimizing Options

*Using Gestalt principles in order to improve existing interfaces.*

Outside of the physical space, design theories are often applied to digital interfaces such as websites and applications to provide the user with a more pleasant experience. One design theory that is often used in this digital space is gestalt. In essence, gestalt consists of visual principles that organize elements within a design to invoke a certain appearance or arrangement. Visual tools such as icons and feedback are also often used to help communicate information to the user in digital spaces.

A quick glance of Carleton Central's existing design seen in the top image, overwhelms the user with the possible options to select. The only form of organization used are headings to group similar items together. While this does narrow the options down, the overall presentation of the options is crammed together in red font that has legibility issues against the site's white background. Icons are also present in the form of file cabinets, but they hold no meaning as these icons bear no relation to the headings they are beside and are also repeated amongst every heading.

The Gestalt principles of proximity, closure and similarity were used to inform the redesign of the interface shown in the bottom image. Proximity is used to organize similar pieces of information throughout, most notably the upper red section consisting of the student login and other various pieces of information. Closure is introduced with the use of drop-down menus to group options within the menu hierarchy together that have been sorted prior using the principle of similarity. Other additions such as the addition of icons beside menu items make it easier to locate and identify the options the user may be looking for. These options will also turn red and become indented when selected in order to communicate visual feedback when the user selects a menu item. The background also blurs slightly when the drop-down menus are active to make it easier to focus and read the menus. With the aid of Gestalt principles, the interface is now more digestible for the user by hiding irrelevant information and improving identification of each menu item at a quick glance.

Carleton University | School of Industrial Design