

AI PRODUCT · CASE STORY

Is this degree worth it?

Why an education app should answer the six-figure question before it tracks a single deadline.

4 min Click or press → to continue

Imagine buying a house from the photos alone.

You'd want the inspection, the neighborhood, and what it's worth in ten years.

Most people choose a degree from the photos: the name, the brochure, a gut feeling.

Most education tools help you apply.

Very few help you decide whether to.

Meet Nadia. She's ten years into her career and thinking about a part-time master's, or maybe an AI certificate.

She has forty tabs open. Every program promises "career outcomes."



Nadia

Which of these would actually move my career?

Rule 1

Help her decide before you help her track.

A TRACKER SAYS

**36 programs you could
apply to**

Ranked by your odds of getting in.

A DECISION ENGINE SAYS

8 that advance your goal

Ranked by what they'd do for you.

Tracking deadlines is the last step, not the first.

Rule 2

Match on what she wants, not what she qualifies for.

Early version

#1 match

First-year undergraduate admission

She meets every requirement, because it's built for 18-year-olds.

Qualifying isn't the same as wanting. The app first works out what she's after (a part-time master's, a certificate), then ranks only those.

Rule 3

Match on meaning, not keywords.

UX

=

Human-computer interaction

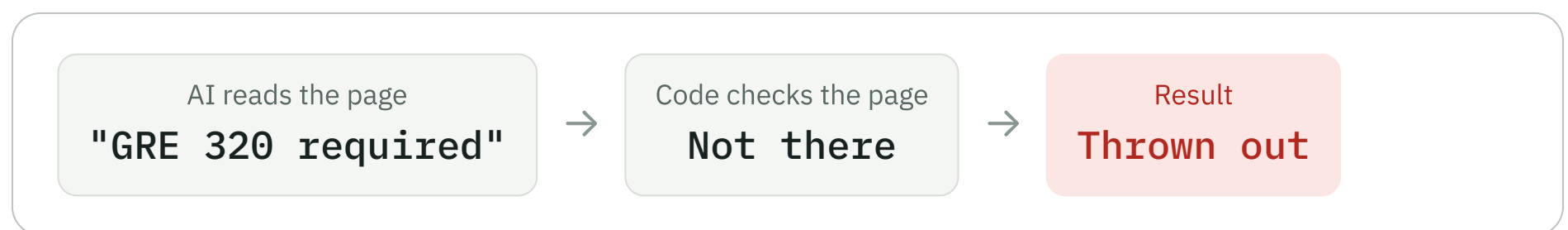
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Interaction design

Different words, one idea. A keyword search sees three things. A person sees one.

Rule 4

The AI proposes. Code confirms.



A fact only gets shown if it's really on the source page, and then it's shown with that source.

● PRINCIPLE

Don't let the AI be the last word

Language models can state made-up facts confidently. Put a check between what the AI says and what the person sees.¹

Rule 5

Confidence is earned, not typed in.

Tuition

source: program website

High · official site, checked recently, word for word

Low · not found on its cited page

How sure the app is depends on the evidence: who published it, how recent it is, and whether it's really on the page.

● PRINCIPLE

Show how sure you are, honestly

People rely on a system appropriately when its confidence matches how reliable it really is.²

Rule 6

Projections, not promises.

What this program could do for Nadia

~ projection

- ✓ **Opens doors** to research and teaching roles
- ✓ **Adds skills** she doesn't have yet
- ! **Won't change her pay much** at her current level

Every projection is a range with its sources. And it's honest about what a degree **won't** do.

● PRINCIPLE

Say how well it can help

Make clear what the system can do, and how well.¹ A range with a "won't" is more useful than a confident single number.

Rule 7

Say when you haven't done the homework.

RESEARCHED

Full projection

Sourced, with a range.

NOT RESEARCHED YET

Structural read

Labeled as such. Never dressed up as analysis.

No date it can verify? It says "to source." It never fills the gap with a guess.

Rule 8

The core answers don't use AI at all.

Fit and value scores

Plain code

+

Open questions

AI chat

The scores have to be right every time, so they're calculated, not generated. AI is added on top for the open-ended questions.

Rule 9

Keep her data hers, and name the one exception.

- ✓ Her profile, résumé and plans stay on her device.
- ✓ Never sold. Never shared.
- ! When she asks the AI a question, that question leaves her device. The app says so.

● PRINCIPLE

Honest beats reassuring

"Nothing ever leaves your device" would be simpler, and untrue. Tell people exactly what happens to their data.³



Nadia

I closed forty tabs. Two programs really move my career, and I can see why.

BEHIND THE STORY

Nadia's search was mine.

I kept applying to program after program and doing all the research by hand. I wanted something that matched my profile to the program that fits my career goals. So I built **Pathwise**.

Now it's how I explore programs. **"I'm done with search engines for browsing education stuff; my app serves my purpose better."**

CHEAT SHEET

AI that helps people make big decisions

- 1 Decide before you track.
- 2 Match intent, not eligibility. **Meaning**, not keywords.
- 3 The AI proposes, code confirms, and every fact keeps its source.
- 4 Earn confidence from evidence.
- 5 Ranges, not promises, including what it won't do.
- 6 Label what you haven't researched.
- 7 Name exactly where data goes.

TRY IT

Explore Pathwise.

The live demo walks through a real professional's program search, start to finish.

Explore Pathwise: pathwise.anujaharsha.com

You finished case story 03: "Is this degree worth it?" Pathwise is a real product by Anuja Nimmagadda, built by directing Claude Code. Nadia and the examples in this story are fictional.