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Heuristic Evaluation
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I. INTRODUCTION

The KSU Registration Department provides all the resources that students need for scheduling their courses each semester. This heuristic evaluation focuses on the department's website. The target audience, the students, relies heavily on this tool to track their progress and register for courses towards their degree. After a recent survey regarding the site, it was brought to the department's attention that the site needs a redesign to improve the ease of use and to make it fun to use. Let's take a closer look into the data.

USABILITY TESTING

Usability Testing provides the designer, developers and other technical staff with real user feedback of the product. To evaluate the present state of the site, a heuristic evaluation was the chosen method. This approach is fairly inexpensive and quick in response. Several classmates from IAKM 60120 were chosen as the evaluators. The process involved them analyzing the user interface and rating the site based on a set of common practice heuristics.

EVALUATORS

Angela
Felesia
Gabrielle

II. EVALUATION

METHOD

The evaluation criterion was derived from Jakob Nielsen's 10 Heuristics of Usability. It is common practice to use this set of standards throughout the usability field.

Following are the 5 best heuristics that I chose for the evaluation of this site and its issues:

1. Visibility of System Status
2. User Control & Freedom
3. Consistency & Standards
4. Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
5. Help, Documentation, Recovery from Errors

Each category was broken down into several items that were evaluated rated on a scale of 0 to 3:

- 0 = Poor
- 1 = Good
- 2 = Excellent

All scores were calculated to find a median for each item in each category. The medians of the data represented the collective group decision made by the evaluators.

VISIBILITY OF STATUS

Score: 0 Poor

The site is incredibly poor in informing the user where they are located in the site, what information is housed in each section and where you can go from that location in the site. The feedback on knowing where you are currently located on the site at all is exceptionally poor. This can be seen with unanimous vote of 0 from all evaluators. We can conclude that labeling ("labeling poor", "labels inconsistent", "no breadcrumbs or back button") and clutter ("students tools lots of clutter", "unclear", "no clear path") are the main concerns for this redesign.

USER CONTROL & FREEDOM

Score: 1 Good

The user has the option to go home from any page on the site. This seems alright, but it's not as good as it sounds. If the user is browsing and they want to return to the previous page, there is no option to get them there. The user would have to return to the homepage and start again. One evaluator suggested a "new search" as an alternative to returning to the homepage. There should be a search box, breadcrumbs for where you are located and the return to home button (that everyone is familiar with) on all subpages of the site. This prevents the user from getting lost or frustrated. The only other criticism evaluators found as a potential problem is the graphical representation of the links. They should be a bit more obvious and intuitive for navigational purposes.

CONSISTENCY & STANDARDS

Score: 2 Excellent

The high score of 2 actually doesn't align with the comments. 2 reviewers claimed that the site's menus were "inconsistent". Also, there was criticism for how the link labels actually matched their destination page titles or headers. These too were rated "inconsistent" by the evaluators. Beyond these concerns, the site does support all major browsers and it provides clear notification of special technologies or browser versions when required. The consistency and standards heuristic was rated inconsistently with the feedback and it could actually use some work regardless of the high rating. This is a great example: "Overall, the site behaves like one would expect a web site to behave" was rated 1 Good when it is a given that it should have been an easy 2 Excellent.

AESTHETIC & MINIMALIST DESIGN

Score: 1 Good

The aesthetics were fair enough to receive a rating of 1 Good. Now, the "but" comes in. One reviewer found the site "very disjointed from the main KSU site" and that it is overcrowded with links. Another evaluator felt the contrast between font color and

background color was not good – “gold on blue not good”. There is definitely room for improvement on the design during the redesign.

HELP, DOCUMENTATION, RECOVERY FROM ERRORS

Score: 1 Good

This category was quite controversial with the evaluators. The ratings were anything, but consistent. The majority found no site map whereas one reviewer found it at the top right readily available to users. The FAQs being available was rated excellent as it is presented on the top right of the local navigation where everyone can find it. Finding it isn't the problem, but the “ticket system needs to be more simplified” for students seeking help according to one rater. On the contrast, another rater found the help guide to be exceptional. It is a matter of opinions and that is what the evaluation for is to get the real scoop on the user experience. The help, documentation, and recovery from errors category was a mixed opinion and its score was brought down due to the lack of search function as well as the prerequisite errors.

III. SUMMARY

The site wasn't too bad after all, but there is always room for improvement. It should be a continuous process. There were several concerns that stood right out and need to be addressed during the redesign which might help in increasing the site's score. Below is a summary of the registration process' strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- It is always easy to return to home page.
- FAQ readily available.
- Easy to cancel or exit from operations.
- There are no instances of extraneous information.
- The site supports all major browsers.
- There is clear notification if special technologies or browser versions are required.
- No unnecessary technologies are used.

WEAKNESSES

- It is not easy to know the current location within the overall map of the site.
- It is not clear what information is available at the current location.
- It is not always clear what is happening from each action you perform.
- Link labels do not match destination page titles or headers.
- The site structure is not simple and clear without any unnecessary complications.
- Color choices do not allow for easy readability.
- Search function is not readily available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My main concerns for the site are the lack of structure for navigation, lack of search functionality and inconsistency of labeling. These poor standards are a big deal for redesign as they cause the students unnecessary confusion and frustration when simply trying to schedule their courses. The design should come next as far as priority is concerned. The functioning of the site optimizes the users experience at the highest level; whereas design could be viewed as an added bonus. Practical items provide convenience to our hectic modern everyday lives. Making the items aesthetically appealing does not contribute to the item's usefulness, but does contribute a good deal to the overall experience. So, bottom line, these 2 areas need to be improved.

IV. APPENDIX

EVALUATION CRITERIA	REVIEWER 1	REVIEWER 2	REVIEWER 3	MEDIAN
<i>VISIBILITY OF SYSTEM STATUS</i>				1
It is easy to know the current location within the overall map of the site.	0	0	0	0
It is clear what information is available at the current location.	0	1	0	0
The current information matches what you expect to.	1	1	2	1
It is clear where you can go from the current location.	1	1	0	1
It is always clear what is happening from each action you perform.	0	1	1	1
<i>USER CONTROL & FREEDOM</i>				1
It is always easy to return to the Home Page.	1	1	2	1
It is easy to access all major portions of the site from the Home Page.	1	1	1	1
No unnecessary technologies are used.	2	1	2	2
Graphic links are also available as text links.	1	N/A	1	1
<i>CONSISTENCY & STANDARDS</i>				2
Links are used and appear in standard web style.	1	2	1	1
Menus are used and appear in standard web style.	2	1	2	2
The site supports all major browsers.	1	2	2	2
There is clear notification if special technologies or browser versions are required.	1	2	2	2
Link labels match destination page titles or headers.	1	0	1	1

Overall, the site behaves like one would expect a web site to behave.	1	1	1	1
<i>AESTHETIC & MINIMALIST DESIGN</i>				1
The site structure is simple and clear without any unnecessary complications.	1	0	1	1
There are no instances of extraneous information.	2	1	2	2
There are no instances of misplaced information.	1	1	2	1
Color choices allow for easy readability.	1	1	0	1
The site is aesthetically pleasing.	1	0	1	1
<i>Help, Documentation, Recovery from Errors</i>				1
A site map or other navigational assistance is always readily available.	2	1	1	1
If needed, an FAQ is available.	2	1	2	2
No errors occur unnecessarily.	1	1	2	1
If necessary, a search function is readily available.	0	1	0	0
If necessary, error messages are clear and in plain language.	1	1	1	1
It is easy to cancel or exit from operations.	1	1	2	1
It is easy to contact support through email or a web form.	2	2	2	2