Assignment # 3: Website Evaluation

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### Assignment #3 - Web Site Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The URLs for the web sites evaluated are included</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Website Review Guidelines&quot; are discussed</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design standards are discussed</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information appears to be accurate</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare and Contrast discussion is reasonable</td>
<td>10/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and spelling are correct</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Discussion Forum</td>
<td>10/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74/75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This paper evaluates two different instructional websites. The first website exemplifies a website with good and effective web design principles. In contrast, the second website represents a website that uses poor and ineffective web design principles. This particular review was analyzed using the following two guides: (a) Table 7.3. Educational Website Review Guidelines in *Using Technology in the Classroom* (Bitter and Pierson, 2001, p. 141) and (b) Web Style Guide—2nd Edition—by Lynch and Horton, (2005) (http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html).

Framework for Effective Web Design

*Planning*

Developing an effective interactive multimedia website that reaches all learners is an extensive process that requires planning and consensus between all stakeholders (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Websites are designed by a team of professionals. These professionals are content experts, writers, programmers, graphic artists, and database developers. First and foremost is developing a goals statement for the website. A goals statement contains two to three goals pertaining to the overall website design, development time for the components of the website, and quantitative and qualitative means of evaluating the success of the website. These goals should be posted on the index page of the website (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001).

The key characteristics of the target audience need to be identified. Characteristics of a target include, background, education level, interests, and the users’ needs (Lynch & Horton, 2005). After coming to group consensus on the web design layout, the entire group critiques other websites with the similar design layouts. The idea behind this is to identify potential flaws
in the web design from the perspective of the user. Also, this activity allows for website project team members to explore each others’ concepts of good web design.

The last step in the planning process of website design relates to the organization and inventory of content for the website (Lynch & Horton, 2005). By examining the content needs of the website, the project team can determine what content is readily available and what content needs to be obtained. Moreover, by performing this inventory of content, a project budget and schedule can be developed.

Designing the Interface

The idea behind user-centered design is meet the expectations of all users and does not force them to strain their eyes or distract them from the main purpose of the website (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Also, creating clear and simple navigation between the index web page (i.e., main webpage) and the subsequent child web pages can prevent user frustration while navigating the website. The content of a site should include summary screens on all of the pages within the website. A site map is another means of alleviating user angst that results from being ‘lost’ within the website (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001; Lynch & Horton, 2005). Moreover, the website interface should engage the user’s interest for in-depth exploration of the website (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001).

Content

The content of the website should not contain language bias and stereotypes (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). Moreover, neutral language should be used throughout the website. For example, instead of using pronouns such as him or her, the term, ‘the individual(s)’ should be used in its place. Also, there needs to be external links to applicable websites (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001).
Media Elements

Media elements should be used only to enhance the content of the website (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). More often than not, project team members will be ‘starry eyed’ by a multimedia technology and will insist upon its use even if it does nothing to enhance the content of the website (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Likewise, users will need to be provided hyperlinked access to downloadable plug-ins (e.g., Real Player, Flash Player 8, QuickTime, etc) in order to access the media elements (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). Another issue to consider regarding media elements is the user’s bandwidth. As defined by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, bandwidth is “the capacity for data transfer of an electronic communications system” (Bandwidth, 2008). Thus, the more media elements that are contained within the website, the longer the website will take to load (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Large graphic files often slow the loading time of the website to the point that the user loses patience. To wit, the use of graphics should be minimal because all users appreciate fast load times.

A Good Example of Effective Website Design

Rationale and Introduction

An example of a website that uses effective web design is Learning Objects for Introductory Programming—LIOP—(http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ltri/learningobjects/). The rationale was developed from the following established works (a) Table 7.3. Educational Website Review Guidelines in Using Technology in the Classroom (Bitter and Pierson, 2001, p. 141) and (b) Web Style Guide—2nd Edition—by Lynch and Horton, (2005) (http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html). LOIP contains four different learning objects for various elements of learning how to program in JAVA. There are five different how-to reusable learning objects (RLOs) under the examples link: (a) While loops, (b) IF Statements, (c) Arrays,
and (d) Library of Classes. Each of these RLOs was developed using FLASH. Moreover, each of these RLOs contains interactive learning activities and animations.

**Evaluation**

This website was selected for several reasons. First, the goals and purpose of LOIP website are clearly articulated on the introductory page (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). Second, the developers of the LOIP website used a mixed methods (e.g., quantitative and qualitative) approach for evaluating the success of these RLOs (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). Third, the design interface of the entire website does not contain any media elements that would be otherwise a distraction or an eye strain (Lynch & Horton, 2004). Also, the content of the website and the RLOs within the website uses only neutral language (Bitter, & Pierson, 2001). All web pages provide a brief summary of what is contained on each respective page. In addition, all media elements were contained to minimum. All still images (i.e., graphics) were small in size and few in number. The only required multimedia plug-in is Flash Player 8 for which a hyperlink is provided. With the exception of the learning objects themselves which were developed using Flash, users with 56K dial-up connections are able to access this website with relatively short load time. On a final note, the navigation within the LOIP website as well as the RLOs is simple and easy to use.

An Example of Poor Web Design

**Rationale and Introduction**

An example of a website that uses poor web design is Multimedia Educational Resources for Online Learning and Online Teaching—MERLOT—(http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm). Again the rationale was developed from Table 7.3. Educational Website Review Guidelines in *Using Technology in the Classroom* (Bitter and

**Evaluation**

The RLOs contained within MERLOT are not being examined since time does not permit for critical examination of every RLO. Rather, the MERLOT website design itself is being evaluated. Upon completion of the MERLOT home page being loaded several items are brought to attention. First, the design interface of the home page contains too much information (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Users are more likely overloaded with information. The design interface is too ‘busy’ and is distracting. Moreover, after entering different search terms for RLOs across different disciplines, it was revealed that a great proportion of these links lead to pay-per-use websites, other commercial websites, ‘dead links’—links to nowhere (i.e. http:// 404 errors—website not found) —and in few instances, personal homepages. Also, the stated purpose of the website is misleading because not every RLO in MERLOT’s digital repository is reviewed. Furthermore, the over use of still images will significantly increase the loading time of each web page within this website (Lynch & Horton, 2005). Users accessing the MERLOT website from a slower connection such as dial-up or the laptop air card will lose patience due to the long loading times. Clearly, the developers designed the MERLOT website for the intended user to access the site from a high-speed (high-bandwidth) connection. Similar to the Learning Objects for Introductory Programming website, navigation is simple and easy to distinguish.
References

