Learning Agenda Outcomes Assessment

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Academic Concentration: User Experience Design

Organization: Ontario Public Service

Coop Position: Co-op UX Designer

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A. **Organizational Context**

The Ontario Public Service (OPS) is the public service arm of the Government of Ontario, employing over 60,000 individuals to deliver policies, programs, and services across sectors like healthcare, education, and public safety. Guided by the *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006*, its mission is to provide exceptional public services, support government priorities, and maintain political neutrality to ensure effective governance and public trust. While OPS lacks direct competitors, it works alongside other government levels and public service providers in Canada.

I work in the CAC QA department under the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), which focuses on quality assurance for government software development. Our team ensures accessibility, usability, and reliability by generating test cases and conducting tests using tools like NVDA and Gherkin. This work supports OPS's commitment to delivering high-quality, inclusive digital services for Ontarians.

B. **Summary of Placement**

I was hired through an IT2 program and initially interviewed for a developer role, which aligns with the job description provided in the appendix. However, upon being selected, my position shifted to a co-op UX Designer within the CAC QA department under the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) of the Ontario Public Service (OPS). I reported directly to the QA Manager. This position began as a four-month internship and was later extended to eight months. While the official job description reflects the developer role I initially interviewed for, my actual responsibilities as a co-op UX Designer focused on quality assurance, accessibility, and user experience. Below is an overview of my key contributions:

1. **AODA Compliance Improvements**

   o   Proposed and implemented accessibility enhancements for three systems, focusing on improving color contrast, font sizes, and hierarchy to align with AODA standards.

   o   Updated these changes on the Azure platform, significantly improving accessibility and usability for Ontarians.

2. **UI/UX Testing Reports**

   o   Conducted extensive UI/UX testing and generated detailed reports for two systems. These insights drove interface optimization and enhanced user satisfaction.

3. **System Feature Redesign**

    o   Partnered with developers to redesign multiple system features, improving visual appeal, operational efficiency, and compliance with AODA standards.

4. **AODA-Related AI Research**

    o   Developed an automation tool using AutoIt and Python to streamline NVDA (a screen reader) operations.

    o   The tool enabled log-based issue detection and generative analysis for NVDA, advancing the QA process's efficiency and accuracy.

The original job description in the appendix reflects the responsibilities of the developer role I initially applied for, including content management, website updates, and electronic communications. However, as a co-op UX Designer, I utilized and expanded on these core skills:

- **Communication and Interpersonal Skills:** Worked collaboratively with a multidisciplinary team, documented findings, and effectively communicated design solutions to team members and stakeholders.

- **Technical Skills and Knowledge:** Leveraged programming knowledge in Python and Azure to support accessibility and quality assurance efforts, complementing my familiarity with web development and content management.

- **Analytical and Organizational Skills:** Analyzed user data, prioritized tasks, and independently devised solutions for accessibility and system improvements, all while meeting tight deadlines.

C. Personal Impact

Goal 1: Practical Application of Accessibility Concepts

Objective 1.1: "Understanding Accessibility Standards

I partially achieved the goal, though the approach shifted due to work requirements.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I reviewed the AODA Passport's Web Development section, completed courses on learnON, and aligned with the AODA testing lead. While I planned to perform extensive testing, I shifted to exploring how AI can

integrate with AODA, which enhanced my understanding of AODA principles and their application in AI.

- **Unplanned Change:** The shift from hands-on testing to AI research broadened my work, requiring analysis of AODA rules and their implementation within AI contexts.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** Accessibility testing is more complex and time-intensive than expected, involving multiple tools. This inefficiency sparked my interest in exploring software solutions to streamline the process, opening potential research opportunities.

Objective 1.2: "Applying Accessibility Standards to Projects"

I achieved this goal by identifying accessibility gaps in current projects and implementing changes to ensure AODA compliance.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I collaborated with developers to redesign three features to better align with AODA standards. This involved addressing accessibility issues in the initial designs and implementing necessary changes to ensure compliance.

- **Unplanned Change:** The planned tasks proceeded as expected.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I frequently encountered color designs that didn't meet AODA requirements. Unlike my academic experience, where color schemes are finalized early to ensure compliance, in practice, I often referenced the OPS color library and past palettes during modifications. This "on-the-fly" approach highlighted the need for adaptability in real-world projects and reinforced the importance of understanding design guidelines and operational contexts to address challenges effectively.

Objective 1.3: "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Accessibility"

I partially achieved this goal by conducting three AODA tests, though they were not comprehensive.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I identified UI-related accessibility issues but did not conduct in-depth screen reader testing due to limited understanding of the tool, which restricted a full evaluation of AODA standards.

- **Unplanned Change:** Additional AODA and AI research tasks, along with urgent UI/UX testing priorities, left limited time for a thorough accessibility audit.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** While there were no major surprises, I recognized the need to deepen my understanding of screen reader functionality to improve future accessibility testing.

Goal 2: Practical Application of Bootstrap, Figma, and Balsamiq

Objective 2.1: "Mastering Bootstrap for Front-End Development"

I did not fully achieve this goal, as I had limited opportunities to work with front-end code. However, I gained proficiency in using Bootstrap icons.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** While I initially planned to work on front-end code as a developer, my role primarily involved providing quick layout suggestions for developers to implement and test. This approach allowed me to focus on practical usability but limited my direct coding experience. I did, however, become familiar with using Bootstrap icons effectively in projects.

- **Unplanned Change:** Contrary to my expectation of directly modifying front-end code, my role shifted to designing layouts and collaborating with developers for quick iterations. This change emphasized rapid feedback and usability testing over hands-on coding.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I was surprised by how quickly front-end developers can implement changes. In some cases, a one-hour meeting was enough to finalize and resolve a feature. This highlighted the importance of adaptability and efficiency in this role, as I need to better align with this fast-paced workflow in future projects.

Objective 2.2: "Enhancing UI/UX Design Skills Using Figma"

I achieved this goal by identifying design issues in an old project and creating a mid-fi prototype in Figma based on agreed modifications.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I redesigned an outdated and inefficient interface as requested by a project lead. Using Figma, I completed a mid-fi prototype addressing the identified issues and proposed improvements.

- **Unplanned Change:** In addition to design work, I conducted numerous usability tests, which provided unexpected opportunities to refine my skills in user testing.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I found discrepancies between theoretical usability scales (like serenity scale) and real-world practices. Factors such as developer availability

and team feedback often influenced the urgency of changes more than the formal scales suggested. Adapting to these "soft" factors was a key learning experience.

Objective 2.3: "Creating Wireframes Using Balsamiq"

I partially achieved this goal due to limited access to Balsamiq but successfully completed one design task.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I created one wireframe using Balsamiq before the free trial expired. The design was well-received by the manager, and I collaborated with developers in two follow-up iterations to refine it.

- **Unplanned Change:** I initially planned to complete two designs but was unable to do so due to the limited free trial period and lack of paid access.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** Through this experience, I discovered additional features in Balsamiq, such as grouping and templates, which greatly enhanced its usability. This corrected my initial bias that Balsamiq was less effective than Figma, making the process unexpectedly rewarding.

Goal 3: Establishing a Healthy Work-Study Balance

Objective 3.1: "Establishing a Balanced Work and Study Schedule"

I achieved this goal by effectively managing my time for internship tasks and coursework, completing all assignments on time.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** To meet deadlines, I set internal due dates three days earlier than the actual ones and planned my week every Monday. I allocated evenings for specific tasks and ensured weekend time for reflective journaling to confirm all tasks were completed.

- **Unplanned Change:** There were no unexpected changes; everything proceeded smoothly as planned.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I realized that rest is not optional but essential. Without adequate rest in the evenings, my mood and productivity significantly declined the next day. This reinforced the importance of balancing work with necessary downtime.

Objective 3.2: "Maintaining Productivity and Preventing Burnout"

I achieved this goal by setting and completing weekly short-term goals, balancing productivity with self-care.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** Each week, I completed all assigned tasks, reviewed notes, and practiced exercises, ensuring steady progress in both work and study.

- **Unplanned Change:** External factors, such as weather and limited rest, occasionally impacted my plans. However, I minimized disruptions and maintained a structured routine.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I improved my ability to set boundaries, realizing that pushing myself—like in fitness—needs to be balanced with care to avoid burnout. Journaling became an essential tool for tracking my mental state and ensuring sustainable growth.

Goal 4: Practical Application of Azure and Agile Sprint Experience

Objective 4.1: "Understanding PSSD Project Code and Information in Azure"

I successfully achieved this goal by learning the code structure, deployment process, and technical details of the PSSD project.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I completed the deployment of the PSSD project and also tested and uploaded two additional systems to Azure. My work was recognized and appreciated by the manager.

- **Unplanned Change:** There were no unexpected changes; everything proceeded as planned.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** This was my first experience with desktop automation, and I was pleasantly surprised by its efficiency. I also found Azure much more user-friendly than expected. These tools proved to be highly practical, and I regret not exploring them earlier.

Objective 4.2: "Experiencing the Agile Development Cycle"

I did not fully achieve this goal, as the development cycle was too long for me to engage in a significant portion during the internship.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I participated in bi-weekly stand-up meetings and delivered results within the required timelines, contributing to a small part of the cycle.

- **Unplanned Change:** There were no unexpected changes; the workflow proceeded as planned.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I did not encounter any surprises during this objective.

Goal 5: Enhance Natural and Effective Networking Skills

Objective 5.1: "Building Confidence in Social Conversations"

I successfully achieved this goal by initiating conversations with colleagues and establishing connections with at least five new contacts.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** To better understand UI/UX operations at TBS, I reached out to the team responsible for the Forte system and learned about its design principles. I also connected with the AODA testing lead to explore its practical application. Additionally, I actively engaged with colleagues through an OPS group chat and built good relationships with fellow co-op students.

- **Unplanned Change:** My work spanned multiple areas, which naturally led me to connect with professionals across different fields. This greatly enriched my understanding of various backgrounds and supported my tasks.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I was pleasantly surprised by how approachable and supportive everyone was. Colleagues were willing to share internal design habits and rules, making interactions feel safe and open. I realized that I didn't need extensive preparation to have meaningful conversations with them.

Objective 5.2: "Improving Social Skills and Engaging with Industry Contacts"

I did not fully achieve this goal due to limited opportunities during large meetings, but I actively engaged with colleagues in stand-up meetings.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** While I couldn't interact with external industry contacts during large meetings, I regularly participated in stand-ups, engaging with colleagues and reflecting on the information they provided.

- **Unplanned Change:** There were no unexpected changes; everything proceeded as planned.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** I realized that discussing with people across industries is a faster way to gain insights than reading documents. Effective questioning is key, requiring preparation, quick comprehension of answers, and the ability to ask relevant follow-up questions.

Goal 6: Develop the Habit of Writing Daily Logs and Work Notes for Better Knowledge Retention

Objective 6.1: "Establishing a Daily Journaling Habit"

I achieved this goal by consistently maintaining a daily journal to track tasks and reflections.

- **Achievement of the Goal:** I recorded daily school and work tasks in a journal, checked them off upon completion, and wrote summaries and reflections to capture key insights.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:** Forcing myself to reflect daily helped me develop a habit of thoughtful review. Although challenging at first, it became more natural over time, improving my ability to think critically. I realized that such reflections are valuable not only for work but also for personal growth in everyday life.

Objective 6.2: "Maintaining Detailed Work Notes for Key Projects"

I partially achieved this goal by taking notes on key points but struggled to organize them consistently.

- **Achievement of the Goal:**
  I maintained work notes during tasks, capturing essential details. However, the fast-paced workflow often pulled my focus to the next task, leaving limited time to review and organize notes comprehensively.

- **Unplanned Change:**
  No significant changes occurred; the workflow remained steady as planned.

- **Unexpected Discoveries:**
  I realized that keeping detailed and organized notes is more challenging than anticipated, especially in a fast-moving environment. Some days lacked the energy or time for thorough summaries. This experience taught me the importance of scheduling dedicated time for note organization, which I plan to integrate into future practices. I also found that detailed notes, even if imperfectly organized, are invaluable for recalling achievements when preparing resumes or project summaries later on.

D. Evolution and Career Development Reflection

Professional Development Needs:

Before my placement, I believed technical skills like Python and Power BI were essential. However, during my work, I realized the UX curriculum could better prepare students by including courses on front-end development and practical tools like Power BI. These are directly relevant in real-world projects and critical for bridging the gap between design and implementation.

Insights During Placement:

1. Rapid Learning and Problem-Solving:
   The fast-paced environment required quick learning and effective problem-solving. I honed the ability to prepare thoughtful questions and leverage colleague expertise efficiently, improving my collaboration skills.

2. UI/UX and Front-End Development:
   I recognized the importance of front-end coding skills for practical UX design and noted that many UX roles are senior positions. This insight emphasized the need to first gain technical experience, such as front-end development, to advance in the field.

Impact on Career Planning:

This placement reinforced the importance of combining technical skills with strong communication and time management to balance diverse responsibilities. Moving forward, I plan to enhance my front-end coding abilities, master tools like Visual Studio, and improve professional skills to better align with the demands of UX design roles.

E. Appendix

Job description

Web Development Assistant :

Work Description: As a Web Development Assistant, you will be supporting a team in planning, developing, writing and implementing both content and strategies for web sites. You may have the opportunity to work on some or all of the following activities:

• Use content management systems and/or coding to refresh and update web sites.

• Support the development of electronic communications.

• Plan, organize, coordinate, and manage daily assigned work.

Knowledge and Skill Requirements for Web Development Assistant:

Communication and Interpersonal Skills:

• You apply your written communication skills to document findings, prepare a variety of documents (e.g. reports, data records, etc.), and write web content.

• You apply your consultation and verbal/active listening communication skills to understand clients' needs and requirements, and to share your knowledge with staff and/or clients.

• You apply your initiative and interpersonal skills to work collaboratively within a multi-disciplinary team.

Technical Skills and Knowledge:

• You have knowledge and/or experience in internet and web site management, publishing, and content management and development.

• You have knowledge and/or experience using HTML and possibly other software applications, such as Adobe InDesign, Dreamweaver, and Photoshop.

Analytical and Organizational Skills:

• You apply your planning and organizational skills to collect, organize, review, and verify information/data through review of files, reports, and other means.

• You work independently or as part of a team; you plan, organize, and prioritize your work to meet competing deadlines.

Resource

Government of Ontario. (n.d.). *Job information: Internship opportunities for youth*. Ontario Public Service Careers. Retrieved November 24, 2024, from https://www.gojobs.gov.on.ca/PDR.aspx?Language=English&JobID=191702