Project 4 Research (Group Assignment)

Group 4 Team Members (onid) / Team Org
- Arthur Liou (lioua) / Leadership
- Becky Chao (chaobe) / Writing
- Peter Nguyen (nguyepe2) / User Communication
- Zijing Huang (huangzij) / Visual Design

Research
1. What are the research questions/goals (initially derived from the "P" in your proposal).
    a. What are our interviewees' experiences with the website?
    b. What are our interviewees' impressions of the website's design?
    c. What improvements can be made?
2. Process: How did you proceed to answer these questions? Be detailed. For example, if you conducted an interview, list all the questions. Where and when did you collect the data? How did you set up to allow triangulation, etc.
    a. Arthur:
        i. My observation was conducted on April 26th, Friday afternoon, at my workplace. Looking at the questions for the assignment, I wrote a response to each part of the question. Some of my questions:
            1. Who is this website designed for?
            2. On a detailed level, will they appreciate the design or would they want improvements?
            3. What improvements can be made?
    b. Becky:
        My interview was on April 23rd, at my interviewee's house. Rereading the instructions for the assignment, I wrote some questions to guide me during the interview and added some other questions as my interviewee showed me her process of navigating the website being evaluated. My questions included:
            1. What is your previous experience with the website?
            2. What is your first impression of the website this time?
            3. How do you think the website's organization could be improved?
            4. What do you think of the options offered?
    c. Peter:
        My interview was conducted on April 26th, in my interviewee's apartment. Some questions that I asked included:
            1. How often do you use the website?
            2. Is there a feature that you would like to see on the website?
            3. How do you think the website's organization could be improved?
    d. Zijing:
        My interview was on April 27th, in my house with my roommates. The questions that I asked included:

1. How often and when you would use the website?
2. What do you think that the website still needs to improve?
3. What bothers you the most from the website?
4. Will you recommend to your friends after the website is "fixed"?

3. An exhaustive inventory of the elements we discussed in class. (If you did a Field Interview, you'll emphasize Item 4 of the "people" part very heavily, and objects and space less heavily. If an Observation, you'll need richer detail than for a Field Interview on all of the items except item 4 of the "people" part):
   a. Student Response: Please see each student's interviews/observations after the end of this question 3.
   ● The people in the space
      1. Who are they, what are they like?
      2. What are they doing?
      3. How are they doing it?
      4. What do their emotions, purposes, reactions seem to be, and (if field interview) what did they say?
      5. What problems do they encounter with their activities?
   ● The objects (technological and otherwise) in the space and with the people
      1. What are the functional elements of the objects?
      2. What are the decorational elements?
      3. Which objects do people look for (perhaps to somehow interact with)?
      4. Which objects do people bring with them that matter to the activities they are trying to do?
   ● The environment: spaces, architecture, lighting etc
      1. What is the layout?
      2. What is the environment like?
      3. How does it influence the activities people engage in?
      4. How does the environment support the objects above?
      5. Attach your detailed observations or interview responses (verbal and non-verbal)
      6. With the detailed observations/responses, point out the places that provide Results/Insights and say what they are ("I"):
      ● What are the answers to your research questions?
      ● What other insights did you get from this that are relevant to your design?

4. Attach your detailed observations or interview responses (verbal and non-verbal)

INTERVIEWS
Becky's Interview:
- People in the space
   - Eva is a graduate student who hasn't used the website since her undergrad years. She is now looking up her professors from previous classes to rate them,

using RateMyProfessors.com on a laptop. Overall the process takes longer than expected and her general attitude towards the site is a mixture of confusion and amusement. The main problem in reviewing the professor is actually finding that person's record on the site, which takes the most amount of time in the whole process.

- The objects
    - The website uses a lot of block buttons with text to emphasize what the designers thought were the most frequently used links. From the beginning, it seems the emphasized block elements confuse my interviewee since they are sometimes not what she's looking for. For example, on the university's rating page, the page that links to the school's list of professors is in a tiny font. She scrolls down to the bottom of the page before returning to the top and notices the link. The decorative elements include the school-related objects background; they aren't too noticeable or distracting in my interviewee's search.
- The environment
    - The interview was conducted at my interviewee's house, at her dining room table, a normal place where she would do homework and perhaps browse RateMyProfessors.com in her spare time. She is comfortable using her own laptop, so we can focus strictly on using the website instead of spending time navigating an unfamiliar computer.
- Comments from interviewee on website:
    - "Very simple but not easy to use."
    - On reviewing professors on site: "This is really different from how we do our evaluations."
    - "I don't know how these lists are sorted."
- Places with results and insights:
    - Looking up a professor with a common name was a struggle. My interviewee's result was over 200 names and it was unclear how the names were listed. It was strange that the department filter was not alphabetical, but by how common the name was in a department type.
    - Adding a professor form could be made easier to use. For example, the form required entry of a university name first, then entry of a department name, before the form could be submitted. However, my interviewee kept clicking submit and hadn't noticed the little error that popped up about how a department name was necessary. It was not clear that population of possible department names was dependant on selecting a university first.
    - Review a professor form required no space in the course number. Perhaps an example could be added because my interviewee didn't guess that that was why the form was refusing her submission.
    - The ratings form had silly options ("I have never filled out a form where the options were 'Yeah' and 'Um, no'.").

- Link from school to school's list of professor was in a tiny font. Since the link was exactly what my user was looking for and hard to spot, I suggest making it more visually obvious.
- Adding a new professor will be "reviewed by staff," but it seems that the user adding the new professor won't be notified upon site acceptance.

Zijing's Interview
- People in the space
    - Shirley is an undergraduate student who previously used the website a few times. She always uses RateMyProfessor to check the rating of the instructor of the classes she's planning to take every term.
- The objects
    - It turns out that she has a lot of complaints about the website regarding the poor UI design and bad searching process. It seems too complicated to search for a particular professor, and it is not user-friendly for the person who has never used this website before. Also there are still a lot of professors that don't even have data stored on the website.
- The environment
    - The interview took place in the room where my roommate would spend most of her time daily doing homework and studying. She uses her macbook to do her assignments and search for professors on the website. Therefore, the complaint comes from the mismatch between the small size of the display and the entire layout of the website.
- Comments from interviewee on website
    - The website should allow the user to upload the grade, the name of professor and rating themselves to the website, then once everything gets verified, it will become a new session where the users can post comments and difficulty of the professor and course that they take. The form of creating a session on the website now is too complicated.
    - The searching process should be simpler and easier for someone who tries to use this website before they make decisions about their classes.
- Places with results and insights
    - The layout and design are not universal for all types of devices, especially the small display. The website looks old, and has lots of advertisements.
    - The searching process should be easier and clearer for listing the name of the professor. It lacks data on some professors.
    - The form of uploading a professor should simpler as well. The current process takes so many steps before other users can post comments and ratings.

Peter's Interview
- People in the space
    - Phillip is an undergraduate student who hasn't used the website since his freshman year in college. He is attempting to find the professors for the classes

that he is currently taking. This process takes awhile, and he seems to be frustrated when using the website.
- The objects
    - The website uses many block buttons in various sizes. The varying sizes of the buttons appear to confuse him as some of the functions of the larger buttons, such as the "Share" button don't matter to him. Whereas a button that he actually cares about, the "View All Professors" button, is much smaller.
- The environment
    - The interview took place at the interviewee's apartment, inside his room, a place where he would normally do his homework or spend his free time. Because he is exploring the website on his own laptop, most of the uncomfortableness experienced should be attributable to the website as opposed to his surroundings.
- Comments from interviewee on website
    - "How do I search for a professor?"
    - "My professor has a generic white name so it's hard to find him"
- Places with results and insights
    - Looking up a professor with a common name was difficult. There was a large list of names that was tedious to wade through.
    - The placement and size of buttons was confusing at times. When he was trying to find a list of professors at his school, he unknowingly passed over the button that would display that information, and had to scroll back up to actually find it. This button could be much larger to make it easier to spot, especially since that functionality is the main point of the website.
    - One feature that he suggested being added was a "head-to-head" feature, that would make it easy to compare two professors who taught the same class.

<u>OBSERVATIONS</u>
<u>Arthur's Observation</u>
- People in the space
    - *Who / Background*: The target demographic is any and all college students. To narrow this down more, these are student enrolled in the list of colleges and universities on RateMyProfessors. They come from various backgrounds across the United States and internationally. The majority of these students will be English-speaking, born or raised in the United States, 18-22 YO, and attending a college and/or university in the United States.
    - *Doing*: In relation to this project, they are researching current and / or future professors for classes they are taking or may take.
    - *How*: They are doing this through a web browser from a PC or laptop, a tablet, or their phone.
    - *Emotions/Purpose/Reaction:*
        - Purpose: What kind of professor should I expect if I enroll in X class?
        - Emotion: Frustration and disappointment.

- Reaction: "This website has a terrible design, what kind of CSS is this. When was this made? 1980s? It looks like it hasn't been redesigned for 10+ years. Also begs the question – was there even a designer or someone who cared about how the website looks? Blog posts and gadgets and random lists? Great, I don't care, I only care about finding a professor and / or finding a school. What kind of useless feature(s) is this?"
  - Note that this reaction is coming from a UI/UX-minded SWE.
- *What problems do they encounter with their activities?*
  - Overlapping text/popups, terrible CSS, unbearably extra white space
  - No issues functionally, but visually I am being impaired.
- The objects
  - *Functionally*: Everything works as one would expect.
  - *Decorational elements*: Horrendous. (I'm trying to condense all the myriad of negative impressions of the decorational elements of the website into one word.)
  - *Objects that I look for / interact with*: Rate professor, comment, find a school / find a professor, upvote, filter, find specific tags about a professor ("Good Organization", "Lots of Homework")
  - *Objects that I brought to the activity*: Nothing (unless you consider a laptop)
- The environment
  - The observation was conducted at workplace after hours, in the quiet and comfort that an empty office brings. This was done at a desk on a work laptop, where I could browse and review RateMyProfessors.com in detail for 2 hours.
  - *Influence*: I was still in a state of getting work done, in a quiet environment, and so was able to focus all my energy on this observation.
  - *Support*: Similar to the above two points, the environment allowed me to focus my mind onto reviewing the website. Unfortunately, nothing else.
- Additional Observation Comments
  - From a product standpoint, I found the "Blog" part of the website completely unnecessary. Relative to other college-focused blogs and websites, the level of feature competency the Blog portion of RateMyProfessor shows actually distracts the users from the core focus and functionality of the website, to become "the largest online destination for professor ratings"
    - While I found the Top Lists (of Professors) mildly useful, I believe this is still unnecessary to the website's mission and users.

5. With the detailed observations/responses, point out the places that provide Results/Insights and say what they are ("I"):
- What are the answers to your research questions?
  - Response: The users have used the website before, and we find they have frustration with using the website. Some improvements suggested include better usability, cleaner website, better searching.
- What other insights did you get from this that are relevant to your design?

- ○ Response: Our group can focus on improving the website's usability and design through a few items, such as removing white space, removing unnecessary website features, cleaning up the buttons.

Participation Report

Group Member name	Role	Responsibilities and Assigned tasks	Tasks Completeness Grade*0-5
Arthur Liou	Leader	● Observation (#2-4) ● Writing/Formatting/Editing ● #1 (Goals/Questions) ● #5 Draft	5
Becky Chao	Writing	● Interview (#2-4) ● Writing/Formatting/Editing	5
Peter Nguyen	User Communication	● Interview (#2-4) ● Writing/Formatting/Editing	5
Zijing Huang	Visual Design	● Interview (#2-4) ● Writing/Formatting/Editing	5