**6. RECOGNITION RATHER THAN RECALL**

*"Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate."* ***– Jakob Nielsen***

We expect a handle when we see a door. It is a construct ubiquitous among entrances to rooms that we have come to take for granted. With the help of intuitive interfaces on everyday objects and devices, we are capable of navigating our world without unnecesary effort and unpleasant interruptions. Similarly, our experiences on a website are determined largely by how organized and labeled a website’s contents are. Intuitive elements such as color coding, link placement, consistency can greatly streamline the user experience.

Inconsistency in Visual Layout

Among the links on the central navigation bar, there are only two that don’t lead to stand-alone websites. While this isn’t a problem in itself, some of the off-site pages aesthetically look similar to the home page while others look unexpectedly different. That being said, the discrepancy forces users to switch gears in adjusting to the different websites as they navigate the website. The Georgia State University logo is on the top left for most, if not all the pages of the website. However, sometimes it takes the user back to the “main” homepage, gsu.edu, and other times it leads the user to the home page specific to the standalone website of the user.

Lack of Differentiation in Link Clusters

Given the immense volume of white text links that appear upon hovering over a nag bar link, the bold white headers combined with the spacing are helpful in helping the user focus on the specific pages of their interest. The user might further benefit from color coding among the sections as well.

Lack of Breadcrumbs

The Georgia State University website lacks breadcrumbs. Particularly for a website of this scale, it is paramount that the user has a sense of location. Breadcrumbs allow users to conveniently recognize how deep they are into the hierarchy of the website. The links that they provide also allow them to return to a specific level at any point in time. The lack of breadcrumbs combined with the inconsistencies in visual layout makes navigating this website an offhand gamble in attaining needed information.

NEEDLESS SLIDER ARROWS

Wonderful! Picture sliders are generally effective, attractive ways to drive users into the depths of the site. Clicking the arrows generally changes the picture. Here at GSU, they change the entire page. Upon hovering over the right arrow, the user is taken from the home page to an entirely new page for Admissions and Campus Life. This page isn’t even a part of the Admissions page that the user can access from the nav bar on the top. The slider arrows are misleading and the website would most definitely benefit if they were taken out.

**7. FLEXIBILITY & EFFICIENCY OF USE**

*"Accelerators -- unseen by the novice user -- may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions."* ***– Jakob Nielsen***

The curious parent. The prospective freshman. For a website of this scale, it is a complex task to organize its countless pages in an intuitive manner. Nevertheless, the designers of the website must make their best effort to optimize the browsing experience in a way that is compatible with its users regardless of their demographic.

LACKLUSTER USER MOBILITY

While navigating through the website for the most likely purposes of exploring the various colleges and finding information regarding the admissions process and whatnot, the two navigation bars seem pretty reliable in giving users mobility throughout the site. However, the moment the user is led to a “standalone” website through one of the navigation bar links, there is no visually represented way to return to the main gsu.edu page.

SCROLL UP TO SEARCH

The search bar is present on most of the pages throughout the website on the top right. This is a useful function for people who are looking for something specific. However, it can become an ordeal in itself in sifting through entry upon entry of search results and reading through cryptic link descriptions.

**8. AESTHETIC & MINIMALIST DESIGN**

*"Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility."* ***– Jakob Nielsen***

KISS. Keep it simple, stupid. A phrase representative of minimalism and a mantra of good design, it can be practically applied to any website. Ensuring important information is visible, organized, and free of being cluttered with the inessential is vital in providing an aesthetically pleasing and comfortable user experience.

SWEEPING VISUAL INCONSISTENCIES

Upon clicking one of the navigation bar links on the home page, chances are users will be redirected to a stand-alone home page. No longer are the links gsu.edu/\_\_\_\_, and no longer are the pages laid out the same. There are shifts in the position of the navigation bars, font, background colors, text color, header-body layouts and the like. In essence, there are moments where one may feel as if he or she stumbled upon a different website entirely. The lack of breadcrumbs only contributes to a vulnerability for the user to feel overwhelmed and loss in seconds. Intentional or not, all of these aspects lead to a disjointed, disruptive experience for the user.

ARBITRARY COLOR

The GSU website overall makes a particular effort in staying true to its red, white, and blue color scheme. Yet upon hovering over an image, the most disorienting shades of color - muted blue, turquoise, purple - cover the image. This adds to an already cluttered general layout, with a flurry of images and text coming at the user on many of the pages intended to wow the user.

DISORIENTING HOME PAGE

The animated woman, placed smack dab in the center as the focus of the home page, sticks out like a rodeo clown in a Zen Monastery in the midst of the flat, simple design. It is disorienting, distracting, and somewhat disturbing. It serves no tangible purpose for the average prospective freshman and parent, yet so much of the page’s estate is dedicated to this distraction.

**9. ERROR RECOVERY**

*"Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution."* ***– Jakob Nielsen***

Dead ends are the bane of any webpage user. 404’s can feel like a slap in the face and search queries can be frustrating when they don’t turn up what the user wants. For a website of this scale, it is hard to keep the entirety of the hundreds, if not thousands of pages to watertight from such problems. However, there are many small tools and links a website can implement for users to recover from the event of an error.

GOOGLE BASED SEARCH

The Google-based search is effective in function. Typos are corrected with suggestions, and naturally Googling is a trusted search engine in itself. However, it can be disruptive in the user experience as it displaces the user from the more agreeable layout of the website to a rather bleak Google search results page filled with blue underlined links and cryptic descriptions.

**10. HELP & DOCUMENTATION**

*"Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large."* ***– Jakob Nielsen***

Help and documentation are definitely of great benefit to a massive website such as that of Georgia State University, given its breadth and depth of the information it has to offer.

FAQ?

Frankly, there is no apparent FAQ or help section. There does happen to be a sort of basic site map in the footer, but that is the extent of it. This does not bode well for a page of this scale.