HCII Website Redesign

Chris Lee

Vision

For this redesign of the HCII website, I wanted to evoke two primary facets of the institute: its professional, top-ranked, rigorous reputation and its friendly, innovative, and fun spirit. On face value, these two characteristics seem almost in conflict, but I felt that any less than capturing this unique essence would not due the HCI program at CMU justice.

I also aimed to make the site more usable. For an institute famed for teaching practical usability principles, the HCII has a current website that is unintuitive to navigate for newcomers and inefficient for regular visitors.

Navigation & Home Page

The primary navigational element for the site is featured in a prominent yellow bar at the top of each page. This element is styled so as to be visible without distracting attention from the page content. The navigation is featured fully on the home page and collapses on other pages, expanding itself when the user hovers over one of the four main navigational categories (Program, People, Research, Jobs).
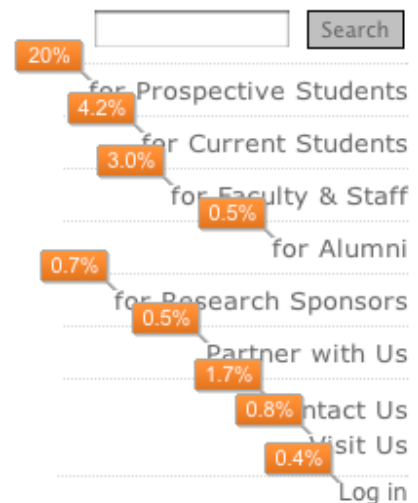
The links placed in this navigational element were carefully chosen to cover the average visitors' primary reasons for visiting the site.
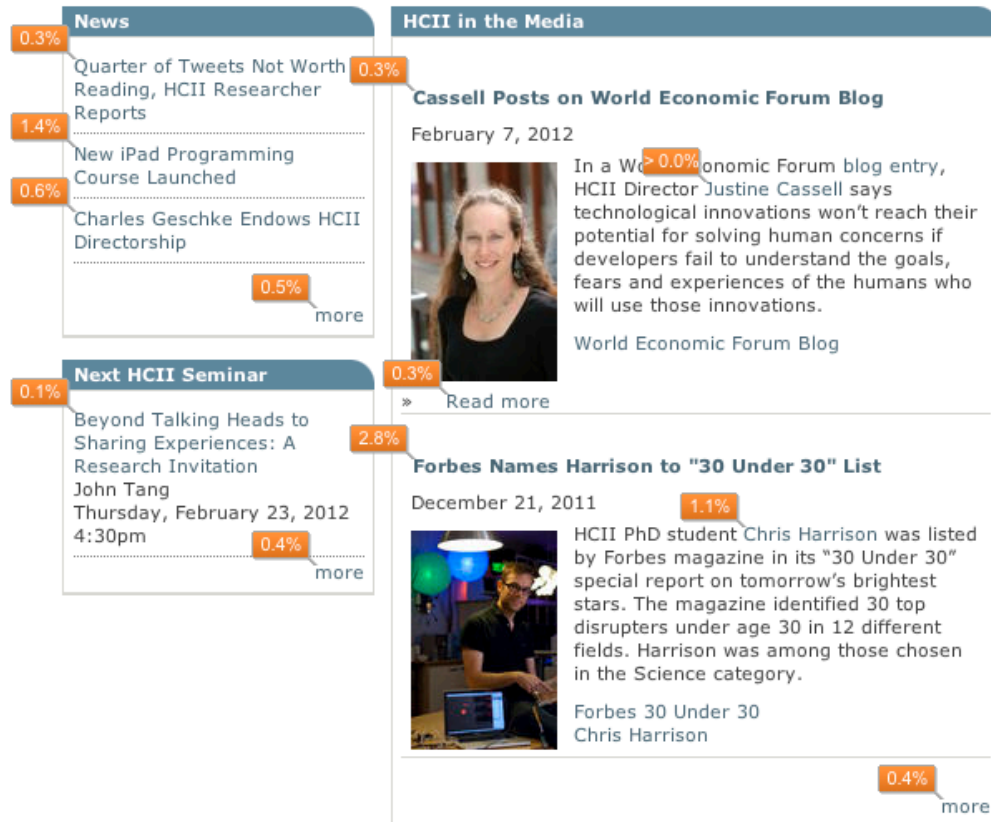
The HCII website receives five main visitor types:

- **Prospective students**, looking for info on the program, its curriculum, and admissions
- **Current students**, looking for info on specific courses and curriculum requirements and research opportunities
- **Faculty & staff**, looking to browse current news, people and research info
- **Alumni**, looking to browse job opportunities
- **Guests**, including members of the global HCI community, not looking for specific information but curious and wanting to casually explore interesting content such as current HCII news and curriculum

The current HCII website serves these distinct visitor groups with explicit "for Prospective Students", etc. sections. Two main observations caused me to go another route with the redesign:

- Though each group seeks different types of information, there is significant overlap. Given that there's also an alternate top navigation bar by topic, the current HCII website has many redundant navigational schemes.
- 20% of visitors look for info for "prospective students". This includes current students such as myself and other HCII students whom I interviewed, who are used to the navigational scheme for finding curriculum requirements and course info this way. The click rates for other categories is significantly lower, which influenced the order of categories in the new navigational scheme.

News

0.3%

Quarter of Tweets Not Worth Reading, HCII Researcher Reports 0.3%

1.4%

New iPad Programming Course Launched

0.6%

Charles Geschke Endows HCII Directorship

0.5%

more

Next HCII Seminar

0.1%

Beyond Talking Heads to Sharing Experiences: A Research Invitation
John Tang
Thursday, February 23, 2012
4:30pm 0.4%

more

HCII in the Media

Cassell Posts on World Economic Forum Blog

February 7, 2012

In a W> 0.0% onomic Forum blog entry, HCII Director Justine Cassell says technological innovations won't reach their potential for solving human concerns if developers fail to understand the goals, fears and experiences of the humans who will use those innovations.

World Economic Forum Blog

0.3%

» Read more

2.8%

Forbes Names Harrison to "30 Under 30" List

December 21, 2011 1.1%

HCII PhD student Chris Harrison was listed by Forbes magazine in its "30 Under 30" special report on tomorrow's brightest stars. The magazine identified 30 top disrupters under age 30 in 12 different fields. Harrison was among those chosen in the Science category.

Forbes 30 Under 30
Chris Harrison

0.4%

more

Another interesting fact to note from Google Analytics is just how few people actually click through the news content links. That said, the news content is likely an important component of the site for the faculty and guest visitor types. However, in the redesign I decided to deemphasize this information.

Instead, the primary element on the home page is the navigation, since clearly most visitors to the site come to it to navigate to those subpages.

Of course, the links contained in this navigational element, being chosen based on visitors' main objectives, don't provide access to the entirety of the content on the current site. However, access to these less frequently used parts of the site still exists through secondary navigational pages which display all links within the category, both those available on the main navigational elements and the other pages within the category.

Information Hierarchy

The site is structured as such:

- **Home page**
  - News
    - Full news & "in media"
  - Events
    - Full calendars (HCII & Undergraduate)
    - Seminar series
  - Log In
- **Program**
  - Overview
  - Curriculum
    - PhD
    - Masters
    - Undergraduate
  - Courses
  - Admissions
    - PhD
    - Masters
    - Undergraduate
  - Secondary pages
    - Facilities
- **People**
  - Faculty
  - PhD Students
  - Masters Students
  - Undergraduate Students
  - Secondary pages
    - Alumni (PhD, MHCI, BHCI)
    - Staff (Administrative and Technical)
    - PhD Forum
    - MHCI Forum
    - BHCI Forum
    - Faculty Portal
    - Staff Forum
- **Research**
  - Overview
  - Projects
  - Publications
  - Secondary pages

- Sponsors
- How to Sponsor
- **Jobs**
  - Professional
  - Research
  - Faculty

Style

I decided to keep the color scheme rather minimal and the typography readable, echoing the usability heuristics taught in the HCII. Most of the site is grayscale, allowing the rare use of reds and yellows to truly emphasize content, especially navigational links. The grayscale colors evoke the HCII's professional side while the reds and yellows evoke its warm, inviting, and creative side.

One unique stylistic element is the use of hand-drawn illustrations in the tileable background of the navigational element. These icons represent the technological, artistic, and people-based facets of HCI. The style of the icons evoke the fun, creative nature of the HCII. This background is subtle so as to not overpower the navigational element itself.

Using off-white and off-black instead of pure white and black allows long paragraphs of text (ex. the program overview page) to be less harsh on the eyes while retaining contrast for readability.