TWC Final Project
WRIT 3001
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Introduction

For my final project in Intro to Technical Writing and Communication, I will be focusing

on the topic of usability and how it is and is not used on the web. Usability can be defined as

how simple, convenient, and intuitive a source is (System Usability Scale). Usability of a website

or blog is often measured in a usability lab or workshop, yet it is also measured using multiple

factors and environments.

This topic is of particular interest to me because I work for the College of Liberal Arts

(CLA) Web Team at the University of Minnesota, and I am put in charge of building many

department sites. My role for the web team is a student developer and, therefore, I get to

focus on building and coding websites for CLA and responding to tickets concerning how we can

improve individual department websites to make them more usable. In my job, I have to focus

quite a bit on usability because it needs to be a high priority in everything we do. Usability is

the "customer service" of web development, and this is how you can accurately represent your

client on the web. In CLA, we have several different departments. However, when someone

visits the website of a particular department within CLA, they should be able to use the site very

easily and interpret the department's mission and goals within the first minute they enter the

site. Usability is about more than creating less clicks, it is about correctly representing on the

web so that users get the perception that they are supposed to.

This is why I want to continue working in web development after I graduate. While I do

have a passion for HTML, CSS, and the backend parts of creating a website, I have an even

greater desire to advocate for clients on the web and to make their sites more user-friendly. Usability is such a key and overlooked issue when it comes to creating web content, and I want to work to make it more of a priority.

Research

In his in-class demonstration, Nick Rosencrans stated that "it is not enough for something to be usable. It must be user-friendly" (Rosencrans, 2018). This is an excellent motto to have in mind when attempting to create user-friendly content on the web. For this project, I utilized extensive resources about usability and I found a commonality in nearly all of them: people. In every single resource or article, I read that discussed usability, people were brought to the center of attention. One study I looked at claimed that "people must be your number one focus when trying to create a user-friendly site. While many assume that coding a website from scratch is a non-social, introverted activity, the reality is that the site those individuals are created will actually impact every single person that ever visits it. Therefore, that web developer has to be thinking about those people as they build" (Lewis, 2006, p. 1273).

Another study that I looked at was centered around people, but in a more economical way. The International Journal of Human Computer Interaction produced a study in 2015 that studied usability by posing the question: "does usability impact how much money I make?" (International Journal of Human Computer Interaction, 2015). The study compared revenue-generating websites scoring above a 68 percent on the System Usability Scale (SUS) to revenue-generating sites that had scored below this national average. In conclusion, the study found that sites scoring above a 68 percent produced 47 percent more revenue than sites scoring less than 68 percent. The study's conclusion was that even if, as a company, you do not care about

your users' experience, you should still care about the usability of your site if you hope to generate income.

Continuing on the topic of usability, I also utilized several resources that we were in WRIT 3001 this semester. The first source I used was Rawlin's and Wilson's "Agency and Interactive Data Displays" article. While this article did not pertain solely to websites, it did contain information regarding how the brain responds to interactive data displays more than it does to those data displays which are static (Rawlin and Wilson, 2014, p. 308). This was an especially helpful resource to use as I was going about my project because it allowed me to think outside the box as far as website elements and features. While some websites may need to display complex information, there could be multiple, interactive ways to go about this. For example, displaying information using a software like Tableau could make your presentation come across as more interactive and engaging, yet still give it that professional appeal.

The second source from class that I utilized was Nielsen's "Introduction to Usability" article. This article discusses what usability is, what it applies to, and how it can be better implemented on the web or in other fields where it is used. This article not only provided me with insight on what usability actually is, but it also gave me a starting point when relating to my artifact (view later on). Understanding the basics of usability and what it means is the best way to actually implement it into any field or template (Nielsen, 2012).

Another resource that I used from class was Wolff's "Interactivity and Invisibility" article. In this article, Wolff summarizes that not all components need to be visible to be usable, and not all invisible components are non-interactive (Wolff, 2013). While this took me a few reads to interpret, I believe that Wolff is saying usability comes in many different forms and back-end,

front-end, technical, and non-technical elements all play a role in how usable a website is. In terms of a website, this concept is very applicable. While many websites involve significant back-end coding, they do produce features that are extremally usable and interactive for users.

For my final source, I utilized Lauer's and Curran's "Professional and Technical Communication in a Web 2.0 World." This article explains how technical communication has differed because of the web and how it will need to continue to change and adapt. One topic that we covered this semester was writing for the web. While this is its own topic, it is also a huge component for usability. According to the SUS, websites that do not contain proper web writing are five times more likely to score below average on a SUS test (Usability.gov, System Usability Scale). That being said, it is very important for webpages to contain the proper formatting, white space, headers, chunking, and summaries because otherwise the usability of the entire website is impacted (Lauer and Curran, 2014).

Artifact and Style Sheet

I had multiple artifacts for this project. My first artifact was the Yale University home page (https://www.yale.edu/). From this home page, Yale's website appears to be very well organized, put together, and usable. The home page, while not traditionally, does follow and F-shaped pattern and a z-shaped pattern as we discussed in class, and there is a clear and organized eye map that is planned out in advance for the user to follow (see figure 1 below). Because of the home page's shape, layout, and format I think that it is very usable. Content does not appear to be congested, and the site makes very good use of white space. There are also no large blocks of text or confusion in organization. As far as brand and consistency goes,

there also appears to be a good use of the site's logo and branding and the site's style guide

(https://yaleidentity.yale.edu/).

Figure 1: Eye Map

In addition to the home page, I also used Yale University's School of Art home page as

an artifact (http://art.yale.edu/). This home page is far different from Yale's home page as it is

currently an open wiki available for anyone to edit (see figure 2 below). This page does not follow an eye pattern, the university's style guide, or any branding, positioning, or usability rules whatsoever. My goal, in using this as an artifact, was to revamp this site's home page so that it would align with Yale University's style guide, usability compliances, and overall Yale branding and consistencies. By following these rules as well as the style guide, I was able to recreate the home page of the School of Art page into a page that is more user-friendly. My final revamp of the project was a one page hardcoded HTML file, CSS file, JavaScript file, and Bootstrap file and it can be found at http://yaleschoolofart.x10host.com/ (also see figure 3 below). In addition to following the style guide and Yale consistencies, I also improved the website's overall usability by condensing the side navigation.

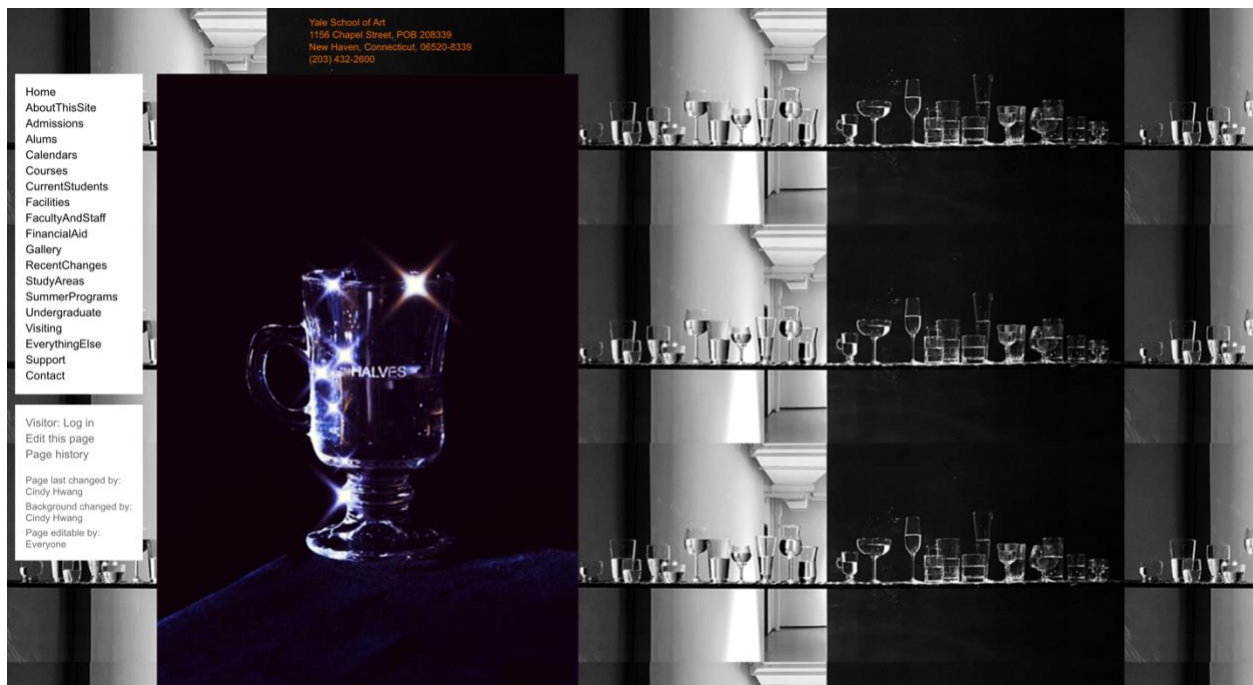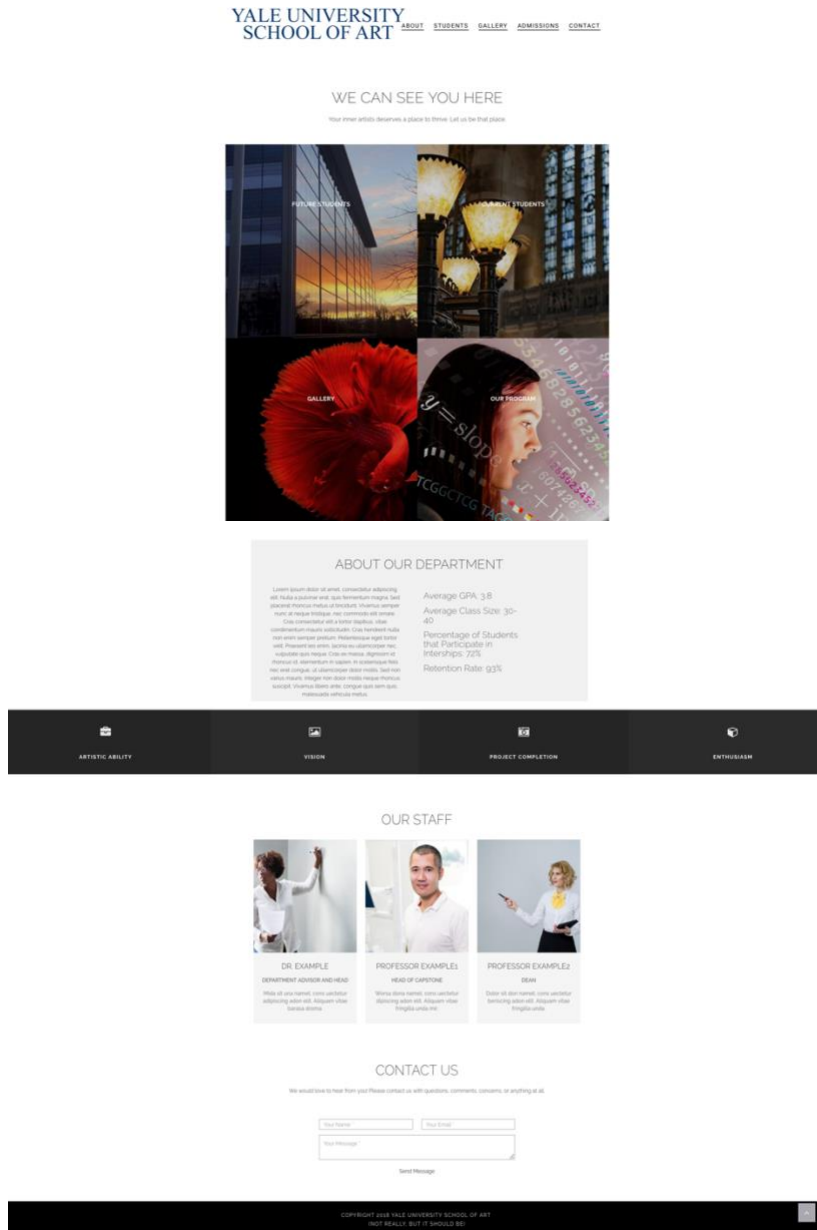Figure 2: Current Yale University School of Art Home Page

Figure 3: My Recreate of the Home Page

In order to properly recreate the new version of the homepage, I did need to use the Yale University Style Guide to ensure that I was using the correct fonts and colors. For example, the Yale University Blue for the logo needed to specifically be hex value #00356b (see figure 4 below). This style guide also included a color palette, in which I used the blue and grays. My one comment about the color palette from the style guide is that I could not located the accent colors in very many places on the Yale University website.

Figure 4: Yale University Style Guide Color Palette

PRIMARY COLOR PALETTE

Blues	Grays	Accent Colors
Yale Blue #00356b	#222222	#5f712d
#286dc0	#4a4a4a	#bd5319
#63aaff	#978d85	
	#dddddd	
	#f9f9f9	

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Reflection

Throughout this project, I learned several key facts about usability and how to

implement it onto websites. As I am hoping to go into web development for my future career, I

really will need to focus on usability a lot. This project helped me to get my foot in the door as

far as learning what usability on the web is, how to look at a website and know if it is usable,

see a website that is not consistent amongst its webpages and style guide, and then proceed to

fix it by adding in key components of the style guide, usability, and other factors and

consistencies seen throughout the site, This project also have me the ability to work on

hardcoding yet another site. This is a key thing for me because I will need to be hardcoding

sites in my future career. Getting more and more practice with this will help me to improve my

portfolio, resume, and place in the world and field of web development. I hope to add this

project to my growing portfolio as I continue to work on revamping and rebuilding sites to

become more user-friendly and consistent.

I want to use web development as a form of advocacy for people. While many people

think that web development is non-interactive and an introverted job, I actually really enjoy

working with people and I feel that combing my web development career with specializations

and knowledge in usability is a good way to actually interact with my clients and make sure I am

advocating for them on the web. Usability, as I mentioned before, is the customer service side

of web development and I really hope to use that aspect especially in my future career. While

there are many components that play into determining whether or not a website is user-

friendly, there is also something to be said for how usability can impact those visiting and

hosting the site. Websites that do not promote usability are frustrating and discouraging to

use, and I hope to play a role in eliminating those types of worries from the web development

field.