Coursework 2:
Build a Website for Students Who Are New to the University of Edinburgh

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Tools and Templates Used

Our website relies on using a HTML5 and CSS3 bootstrap template called Freelancer as the main foundation for our user interface. In addition Bootstrap, other tools we utilised were jQuery to create the site animations for transitioning between pages as well as HTML5 and CSS to provide the basic structure and styling needed to design our website. The tools we used served our needs in making a simple to use, quick, and flexible website that is easily viewable for both mobile and desktop users.

Topics Covered and Message Conveyed

The two main topics we covered in our website are the accommodation process and student life as an informatics student. We decided to break accommodation into subcategories that detail the application process, residential life, and private accommodation, while student life breaks down what resources the Edinburgh University Student Association provides as well as general Informatics culture entails. We tried to convey a general, resourceful website for new Informatics students that provides users a wide breadth of information that helps establish a solid foundation and plan to approach beginning university life, while also not being overwhelming with too much depth of information that would otherwise create confusion. Knowing how to plan and apply for accommodation and what to expect in terms of student life for social and academic purposes best fits the goal we had in mind. We covered basic rules of deciding how and where to live as a student and simultaneously let the student be informed of the resources and opportunities immediately available as of moving in. This better prepares students on how to approach the array of information that isn't covered in this website via the resources they are exposed to in the website.

Usability of the Website

The usability of the website was efficient and rather easy to use for an Informatics student. Our site immediately lays out the topics we covered in its navigation bar with every subcategory relating to either accommodation or student encapsulated into a separate webpage. Each subcategory was intuitive and clearly labelled according to our HCI user that we used to perform a Think Aloud evaluation on, and having the expanded view of the subcategory pop up made the site less cumbersome to traverse rather than using a lot of separate links. We presented them the task to find out information regarding how to find out accommodation information, as well as mapping out a route from one building to the other using the map provided markers. The user found the task to be simple and quickly performed the task as a result. Think Aloud provided us an opportunity to witness how a user would navigate through our website and how they would react to the interaction methods we used in some of our website's portions such as through manipulating the map and instructing the user information. Some of the improvements we made after the usability report came with defining what the categories names should be so that users can clearly understand what to expect from clicking one of the subcategories. Our evaluation showed the user initially clicked the incorrect subcategories at first to find information, and we adjusted accordingly. Overall, we feel the usability of the website fit the needs of an incoming Informatics student efficiently after the improvements made.

Reflection - What worked, what didn't and how to proceed

By completing this coursework, we as a design team learned the effectiveness of learning via interacting. There can be a lot of knowledge to be gained just by passively reading text laid out on a website, but interactions such as instruction and manipulation can yield to a much more effective understanding of how something works with using much resources. The frequently asked questions felt intuitive to use and organised neatly, covering each topic at the end as if it were summarising what was read. We really enjoyed the interactivity via instructing with our timeline to show the accommodation application timing relative to

each deadline; it gives us perspective to how close or far away deadlines are to showcase how much time we really have. In addition to our timeline, using a Google map that the user can freely manipulate while having the easy knowledge of where every popular Informatics building leaves us optimistic; users can get a better understanding of the relative space between each building as well as have a comprehensive view of where everything is by comparing it to closer areas that they may be more familiar with. In terms of shortcomings in this coursework, we felt that there is a lack of interactivity for the other segments of the website. Perhaps it was due to a lack of definition in some of the topics to allow for more interesting modes of interactivity. Rather than some of the plain hyperlink redirecting we used, our website would have benefited from utilising images or animations that lead the user to interactively mimic some of the processes in applying for accommodation or seeing an actual calendar for events.

Knowing our positives and negatives, we would have been better served to utilise animations and ideas to build sorts of mini games that act as conversing interactivity or manipulating activity such as quizzing students for accommodation details so that they may proceed to learn more about accommodation application process. This would benefit new students unaware of the entire process, as it would force students to process what they've learned, yielding to a better user understanding of the information presented. We would keep some of the already interactive elements we used such as the timeline and google maps as well as the frequently asked questions. We also felt that using bootstrap was an efficient idea, considering it was lightweight and easy to use for developing while also being easy to customise for including new libraries and tools we benefited from in making this website.

Mark Allocation

We would like to allocate marks evenly for this coursework.

Usability Evaluation (Think Aloud) - HCI Student

To evaluate the usability of our website, we chose a think aloud to witness any key moments the user is interrupted in thought when trying to perform the task and to observe the general flow of the user's attempt

to traverse and navigate through the website. We asked the user to do two tasks concerning each topic, accommodation and student life, and see how much knowledge the user retained after using the website.

Task #1 - Find the Application Deadlines, Resident Guide, and Private Accommodation Resources

The goal behind this task was to observe how the user navigates through the accommodation site and can easily recognise and recall information under each topic. During the task, the user landed on the homepage and clicked accommodation on our nav bar. Thereafter, the user proceeded click on the Process tab, and scrolled down to read the information regarding the application process. The user then saw the timeline, and from there was able to clearly tell when the application deadlines were to us. The user then had trouble finding out how to close the popup after clicking on Process, but was able to find the close button at the bottom. The user then landed on the accommodation page, and scrolled down to find the Your Guide in the Residential Life section and Resources under private accommodation and was able to clearly find the available guides. The way the user understood the layout was pivotal to parsing the information into segments of University accommodation, resident info, and private accommodation help. This would serve the user better in the next task for interpreting the similar layout.

Task #2 - Describe where the Informatics Forum in relation to David Hume Tower using our site

We gave a general task as opposed to a specific task after so we can see if the user strongly understood the layout to navigate the student life page without much hint in our directions. The user's flow after the first task went to a halt, as the user did not know how to go to student life from accommodation, but after a brief pause, the user clicked on the School of Informatics to return back to the main navigation page. From there, they travelled to Student Life, and scrolled the page down to see Popular Locations. The user commetted that this was the first place to look at because he knew that the Forum and David Hume Tower are where most Informatics students have classes in. From there, he saw the map with markers. After clicking on the markers, he saw that the markers showed the location name and from there proceeded to click on the rest until he found the two locations. After finding the two locations, he dragged the map around to determine a route, which he was able to verbally do so. The way user performed this task demonstrated that the user is able to learn the layout of the website to parse information that is useful or not useful in terms of the given task. The navigation of the website required some thought when trying to return to the main page to navigate to student life, but the intuitive answer of clicking the logo icon prevailed and gave confidence that if a user has to resort to what they already know about websites in order to use ours, they will be able to rely on that information as well. The maps activity showed that the user was able to intuitively use and interact well enough to understand where each building is.

Analysis

There can be adjustments to how the navigation of the site's topics work, but we were satisfied in the user's ability to learn the website quickly. We can improve the layout of the text as well, but the grouping of the information from our layout it strong and recognisable due to the popularity of the template. It gave the site efficiency and ease of use qualities that we may continue to use. The site also shows information that is needed while not being too verbose at the same time for the user to get confused in.