Coursework commentaries 2015–16

CO3348 Interaction design

Coursework assignments 1 and 2

General remarks

Two coursework assignments were set to enable students to become more informed about a specific topic area in the study of Interaction design and human computer interaction, and to allow them to explore some of the extensive information available online in this field. This was to be undertaken by critiquing some existing research material and carrying out some personal investigation. An opportunity to engage in some design prototyping was given in coursework assignment 2.

The coursework assignments for this year were related to each other and depended on students undertaking some individual investigation and then carrying out some initial design to produce a first paper prototype for an interface related to that investigation. The focus of both assignments was the concept of 'pervasive e-health' and 'life-logging' using new interactive mobile technologies for self-monitoring of individual health indicators.

The overall presentation, structure, coherence and clarity were assessed for both assignments. Presentation contributed 5 per cent to the final mark of coursework assignment 1. For coursework assignment 2, a self-assessment critique was included, again worth 5 per cent of the final mark. The remaining marks in coursework assignment 1 were given for showing a good understanding of the topic under investigation and for providing an appropriate and informed commentary and analysis. The remaining marks in coursework assignment 2 were given for a realistic set of personas and task scenarios, for producing a suitable and competent design and prototype mock-up, and for a well-explained design justification.

The marks were distributed as below:

- coursework assignment 1: 95 per cent, report; and 5 per cent, presentation
- coursework assignment 2: 30 per cent, personas and scenarios; 50 per cent, design mock-up; 15 per cent, design justification; and 5 per cent, critique.

In terms of overall performance, the majority of submitted work was of very high quality and there were very few incidences of plagiarism. The submitted work consisted, for the most part, of well-presented and well-written material of a high standard, which looked professional and contained significant and appropriate detail. The use of graphical material and students' own illustrations was good and made a positive impact.

The self-assessment/personal critique of a student's own work successfully helped students reflect on what they had investigated and in identifying what had been learned. Only a few students did not carry out this last part of the assignment; it should be stressed that this part of the work is indeed marked and contributes to the final achievable mark, and that this exercise can be beneficial in helping you recognise omissions in your work and in developing a useful skill in self-critiquing.

High marks were achieved for both assignments. The overall pass rate was excellent; the average score for coursework assignment 2 was a little higher than for coursework assignment 1.

The great majority of work was well-presented, which was credited, whereas poorly presented work was marked down. The graphics, screenshots and illustrations were mostly very well used and made an impact on the readability and presentation quality. The submitted work continues to become more focused and relevant to the area of study.

Nevertheless, some specific points should be mentioned.

- The work must be structured in the requested format; an Introduction and Summary/Conclusions are both required, and the work must be presented in a coherent and recognised format. For an essay or a report, it is not necessary to include an Executive Summary, an Abstract or a set of Appendices, but sections that introduce the topic under discussion and a concluding discussion are mandatory. Note also that an essay or a report does not contain 'chapters' or an 'objective'.

- It is not sufficient to simply provide a set of bullet points or a list in response to the task set. Simply providing a set of quotes with no linking text is also insufficient – you must offer analysis, arguments, opinions and conclusions of your own.

- Formal language should be used and all work should be checked carefully for spelling, coherence and consistency before submission. Some submitted work had not been checked and a number of submissions were written using informal and inappropriate language.

- All in-text citations and references need to be very carefully checked to ensure that there are no omissions, and that all author names are correctly spelled and in correct order, as identified in the referencing style guidelines provided. If URLs are cited, they too must be in the correct format and link to an official site, with the last date of access noted.

- Unsuitable references should not be accessed or cited: articles prior to the year 2000 are unlikely to be of much relevance to the set assignments; papers from conferences generally do not have sufficient detail for the subject under consideration and, in all situations, doctoral theses, student course outlines or Powerpoint presentations should not be used as source material, or as references. In particular, text from Wikipedia, Google books, Twitter, online dictionaries or glossaries, wikis and blogs, or tutor course notes on a closed Moodle should not be cited or quoted. It is also not appropriate to give Google search strings or to cite simply 'Lecturer notes' as references.

- Diagrams should be explained and linked to the text. All figures and drawings need a descriptive legend associated with them and placed below, plus a citation when source material was used.

- • If mock-ups and drawings/sketches are requested, they should be produced. That requirement should not be ignored and marks cannot be awarded for work which is not complete. They must be in a legible format – marks will not be awarded if your screen designs cannot be seen or read easily.

- Presentation is an important part of the submitted work and features such as underlined text, all-italic fonts, or multi-coloured text should not be used. Your work will be read on-screen so please use a font that is appropriate and designed specifically for easy reading from a computer screen.

Comments on specific questions

Coursework assignment 1

The topic was introduced in terms of a recent proliferation of digital games and mobile health (m-health) applications used by many people across all sectors of society to monitor their own health and level of fitness. This usually occurs by means of applications which collect data from such activities as the number of steps walked per day, nutritional intake and sleep patterns. For some people, the aim is to improve individual health through lifestyle changes and monitoring. For others, self-monitoring of chronic health conditions is vital to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and such recording of activities can keep chronic diseases under control. The concept of 'life-logging' has many interesting usability and accessibility issues as people engage with digital technologies such as Fitbit, or use mobile applications to help monitor physical activity and nutrition. The impact of the latest m-health technologies on the management of many chronic conditions (e.g. diabetes or fall prevention) can be significant, as can the use of digital games for cognitive or physical rehabilitation.

For this coursework assignment, students were asked the following.

- To investigate what is meant by 'life-logging' and how m-health applications, as described above, are utilised in practice; and to find out what applications are in use and research the user experience and interaction design aspects, maintaining a critical viewpoint.

- To write a report giving an overview of the technology and the state of the art in this new area of interaction and user experience; and to concentrate on the interactions and interfaces which exist on devices and applications, providing an assessment of their usability.

Good work covered all such aspects as identified above and, moreover, was interesting and thoughtful. The best work was extremely well-presented with an organised structure, and showed evidence of extensive research and wider investigation of the issues in question, including a very well-written analysis. Highly relevant illustrated examples were included along with coherent Conclusion and Discussion sections, with points made from the student's own perspective. Good work had a competent Introduction and Conclusion; was well-structured with a good layout; showed sufficient evidence of investigation; and presented a useful analysis that included examples and suitable visual material. The poorest submitted work was very basic; with a poor structure and layout; showing little evidence of looking much beyond basic references or understanding of the interactions involved. For poor answers, the standard of presentation and language was low; the submitted work was not written in a formal report or essay-style format; there was little discussion with a poor or no Introduction, and short or no Conclusion. Additionally, on occasion, references were not in a recognised format and the language style used was too informal, with the language itself of poor quality.

Coursework assignment 2

Coursework assignment 2 required students to design and mock-up an early prototype of their own choice of an m-health application, based on personas and a set of tasks derived from the investigation in assignment 1. This coursework assignment was intended to provide experience in early design practice and the focus of the work should have been on the interaction mechanisms and interface to the technology rather than a fully functional application.

The work involved the following steps, and guidance was provided in the form of readings and activities suggested in chapter 2 of the subject guide.

- Developing a profile of three types of expected users and creating a realistic persona for each.

- Developing a realistic scenario for each persona using the application to carry out some activity.

- Designing the look-and-feel of an interface and an interaction sequence, based upon good practice guidelines and which reflected the needs of the users, identified by the chosen personas.

- Providing an initial rough sketch of the proposed interface.

- Providing a sketch or mock-up of a design showing sets of screen flows, user actions and interface elements.

- Making clear the design assumptions made and explaining in detail the decisions made, with justifications for doing so.

- Providing a critique of the design.

Since no one correct answer exists for this type of coursework, it must be stressed that the marking took into account the quality of the design solution, its feasibility and the justifications of design decisions. Good work delivered exactly what was asked for and provided good quality screen mock-ups in a coherent presentation. Most work was excellent and of a high presentational standard, with detailed design work and realistic scenarios and personas. Some thought was shown in the rationale behind the designs based on the personas and simple task scenarios described, and as part of the design justification section. The critique section was completed in most cases and high marks were awarded for the majority of assignments submitted. Generally, students did best in the design mock-up and justification sections, but less well in describing personas. A few students neglected to specify personas, or task scenarios were not created, and therefore marks were lost. Additionally, some students neglected to write the requested critique. There were some problems with the English language and stylistic presentation. In general, in poor work, sections were missing, the instructions were not followed carefully or the work was otherwise incomplete, insufficient or highly derivative.