## **ISO Planner:**

## **A Usability Report**

CS344

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Executive Summary

The Office of International and Intercultural Life coordinates its week long International Student Orientation (ISO) over email. In an effort to streamline their scheduling efforts, our team designed wireframes for “ISO Planner:'' a web-based scheduling system. To ensure that our design met the requirements for the system, we tested our wireframes on both of our stakeholder groups, OIIL and “Other Office.” We primarily tested to see whether OIIL was able to effectively create events, view other office availability, and manipulate the calendar to establish a final schedule which would be shared to all parties concerned. We also tested whether “Other Office'' was able to create events, indicate top priority timing, and share availability to OIIL. Our testing included observing the stakeholder’s interactions with the system and follow up questions to ascertain whether the system was intuitive and easy to use. Our results outline that both stakeholders could successfully and quickly finish all tasks assigned to them. However, they also reveal that certain design elements could be improved to ensure a completely seamless experience.

Test Design

Our test design mainly focused on answering the following questions: was an OIIL user able to create events, view the availability of other offices and reconcile conflict to create a final schedule? Were non-OIIL users able to effectively communicate their availability and recieve feedback that their submission had gone through? Which parts of the design were confusing/frustrating/unintuitive or didn’t match what the user had imagined or expected? And finally, what should be included in the final design that initial designs hadn’t addressed? These questions reflected the main goals of the test, which were to evaluate how accurately our design accomplished the problem we set out to solve, and to figure out what elements were getting in the way of a positive user experience.

In order to answer these questions, we developed scripts outlining key tasks to accomplish within our prototype and asked users to think aloud while listening to the script and completing the tasks outlined in our main questions. For OIIL these tasks included creating an event, viewing a calendar of other offices’ availability, resolving conflict and finalizing a calendar; and for a non-OIIL user these tasks included creating an event and submitting their availability. We also asked users survey questions following their walk-through of the design. The survey questions were pre-planned and mimicked our questions heading into user testing but asking the questions verbally gave room for users to expand upon their answers and clarify what they meant. We decided to use these evaluation methods in order to expose exactly where the user experienced breakdowns in the design, and to develop ideas for design improvements as efficiently as possible given that we had only one round of user testing in our prototype development. Also, given the very small sample size of users (2 users), qualitative question responses and conversations about the experience of trying out the design felt more useful than quantitative responses such as rating scales.

Our test participants included a head administrator of OIIL who followed the path of the interface that would be involved in OIIL’s side of ISO coordination, and a student familiar with the work of OIIL tested the interface that would be involved with other offices and their creation of events. The OIIL administrator works closely with ISO planning and has experienced the inconvenience in trying to schedule programming primarily using email. The student is a senior who has participated with ISO and is familiar with similar technologies such as Google Calendar and when2meet.

Main Results

Both our test user for OIIL and our test user for other offices were able to complete the tasks outlined. They were able to efficiently navigate the system and finish each task in less than thirty five seconds. However, certain misused design principles caused some confusion.

It was apparent that the system’s strengths lay within its visual representation of color coded time slots on a calendar. Both stakeholders were able to quickly select and identify time slots on the calendar and successfully accomplish their task whether it was indicating top priority time or confirming an event on the calendar. Specifically, the color coding of different events in the form of “activity,” “workshop” and “presentation'' helped OIIL quickly understand the nature of the different events on the calendar without feeling the need to click on the event to obtain more information. In addition, the ability to receive time availability from other offices all at once using one platform was also thoroughly appreciated by OIIL as it greatly reduced the time previously spent on sending emails back and forth between different offices. Finally, both users, especially the Director of OIIL, enjoyed the amount of feedback and reassurance that the “confirm” pop-up windows provided once tasks were completed.

**Director of OIIL**: *I love that the pop up windows that says “confirm” sort of acts as a safety net, because I click on so many things on a webpage and sometimes I would mistakenly click on something and there was no way of going back.*

Aside from the system’s strengths, there were certain design choices that needed attention. For instance, we noticed that there were features left unnoticed because of the lack of visual contrast and unintentional proximity of black colored text elements. Although prioritized time slots were emphasized with black borders with a reminder at the top of the calendar, one user did not initially acknowledge this feature because the instructions describing the black border blended in with other text on the screen. When queried about it the Director of OIIL said:

**Director of OIIL:** *Now that you’ve pointed it out, I see the black borders around some of the events. But as I was trying to perform the task you’ve asked me to do, everything just flew by and I didn’t really notice that feature.*”

Another possible reason why this mishap occurred was that the other time slots in the calendar had thinner black borders, hence the prioritized time slots were unable to catch the eye and blended in with other events.

Similarly, the user encountered another breakdown when they were asked to navigate to the event calendar after they had created an event. The user was brought to the confirmation page after creating their event, where the buttons “create another event” and “logout” were shown at the center of the wireframe. The user was supposed to click on the home button, placed on the top right corner of the page, where it would redirect them to the OIIL homepage which then would enable them to view the calendar. As the confirmation page did not include the “view calendar” button at the center, the user had to guess other possible routes that would allow her to perform such action. Despite her success on navigating her way through the home page in the end, this interaction shed light on the issue that the navigation path was not as intuitive for the user, and that it would be more accessible if all functions were displayed for the user on every confirmation page instead.

The usability test also emphasized that designers are not in fact their users. While we were designing our prototype, we were aware of what functions we wanted to add and where we wanted to place on the wireframe. However, we did not take into consideration that users who have not seen or used our design previously would not immediately know where these elements are placed. While thinking about the look and placement of those elements, in particular, we neglected the fact that our elements should be clearly visible and have strong color contrast, so that one who has never encountered our tool will be able to navigate through the planner as smooth as possible.

Conclusion

Our test sought to assess how well the design met user requirements and whether it afforded the requested tasks, mainly the creation of events both by OIIL and other offices on campus and for OIIL specifically, the ability to manipulate and finalize a program calendar for ISO week. While both design testers were generally able to accomplish the tasks without breakdowns, certain misused design elements led to confusion, which highlighted the design elements that needed improvement. Specifically our next iteration will better differentiate top-priority time slots from other time slots and will emphasize the ways in which those priorities are indicated. We will also keep navigation elements consistent, especially in the case of navigation buttons that appear following the completion of tasks such as calendar finalization or event submission. The next step in design will also intentionally address the issues that arise as designers become familiar with their own prototypes. However, ultimately the main goal of the design was accomplished, in that users reported that this tool would be far more effective than their current system of email such that it would drastically streamline the process of organizing ISO.