

Post-mortem

Although this project concluded with a prototype, it has been the most diverse process experience I have had at ASU. Week one felt like an incubation period for the project, which let me think over its general idea without worrying about a deliverable. Breaking the system down into requirements and use cases helped me wrap my head around the essence of a web application for Best Community Service. The combination of doing a project scope and work breakdown allowed me to take stock of the project and my understanding of its components and aims. Exploring risks made me question my design and seek out shortcomings. Finally, revising my set of use cases and laying out a draft of the screens let my design failures come out with a quick iteration that made course correction more manageable for my final product. The sequence above omits several tasks, but I don't mean to imply that they did not go well. Rather, they felt more like secondary considerations. For one thing, most of the concepts were totally new to me. Additionally, my focus was on trying to consider all aspects of a complete design while staying on target to only deliver a prototype.

With this split focus, I struggled to simultaneously consider a complete design and plan to create a prototype of only a small portion of that design. I imagine that this is the case in the industry at times, too. I think of large projects and how a given developer might spend their entire effort on a single subsystem. They would of course have to make sure that their work fits into the larger product. Moving on, an aspect that I did not use to its fullest potential was the initiation tips portion of the project assignment document. I spent a good amount of time investigating the high-level requirements and attempted to fill in gaps through assumptions, which came naturally because it fit with the first deliverable. I could have done better at creating personas as part of my initiation steps. I really only thought of the project through my own perspective. I found the likely users and thought about how they would use the system given the initial project description, but I can see that attempting to think of and as the people who might use the application would have generated more insightful additional activities. This led to moments of realization that I had misunderstood or underdeveloped an aspect of the product throughout the project. For example, even as late as my first draft of a final list of use cases for assignment seven, I had four use cases related to creating a new event to add to the web app. When I realized that they fell under the same action, they fit into one use case without effort. I had similar overlap or oversight issues in my risk register for assignment six, which varied greatly from draft to final submission. This assignment was when I really stretched out from the initial project description. Having to think about

what could go wrong forced me to think about edge cases and unexpected uses and needs. Considering regulatory risks would have allowed me to extract extra requirements from the project description. Between social events hosted on site and external services for at-risk individuals, having personas that use the product to meet these needs could have immediately opened up awareness of health and safety risks.

Following a more sophisticated software development process let me feel the consequences throughout the various phases, when I fell short in a given component. I feel that this has added a critical layer of understanding of the importance of planning and design. I have long-accepted their importance, but it is like the difference between knowing you should put on a coat because it is supposed to get cold later and standing in the cold having neglected to wear the coat. Looking again at my experience creating a risk register and breakdown structure, my shortcomings in earlier aspects let this portion of the project take on an extra dimension. I think this speaks both to the power of these processes and to the structure of the course and project. I feel more prepared to work in an environment where budgets and schedules play a key role in the success of a project, having explored and implemented them for myself. Finally, I am very grateful to have had web development integrated into the learning outcomes of this project. The level of sophistication being dependent on our skill at the outset of the course let it extend the project rather than dominate its other goals. At ASU I have experienced the value of always increasing my ability to set up and work in new environments, as well as use new technologies and tools. This was a powerful example of that for me. A very near future project that this course makes me feel more prepared to take on is the software project in SER 423 next semester. I expect to be using Xcode for the first time, and I feel a little less intimidated picking up a new language with each one I learn. More generally, I look forward to creating some of these artifacts as part of portfolio projects as I search for a job after graduation. I focus on game development and share my work in open communities. I believe these documents will be very valuable in these circles, as many members are self-taught and have had little to no exposure to organized software development processes.