INFS 625: Information Architecture
Fall 2024

<u>Project Option 1: iSchool Analysis and Redesign (Mock-project)</u>
Due: Dec. 6th at 11:59 pm (Electronically on the portal in .pdf format)
Proportion of Grade: 35% (Group)

For this assignment, you are asked to work in groups of four (4) students to compare and analyze the information environments of Information Schools (or iSchools). iSchools were selected for this assignment because you, and the individuals you have access to, are in this domain. As such, you are in a better position to understand the important information that must be in these information environments, as well as the needs of their users.

Your task is to evaluate the digital information environments (websites/mobile, apps, etc.) of iSchools organization member schools (or other Information Science schools) and then select one iSchool to focus your information environment analysis and redesign on. iSchool member schools can be found here.

Your deliverable should be a strategic IA report addressing the five parts below. Please note that there are page limitations for each of the five parts. Exceeding these page counts will result in a grade deduction to that part.

Part 1: Lessons learned from competitive analysis / benchmarking
(6 pages max, see details)

Summarize the results of your benchmark (competitive) analysis of iSchool information environments and the lessons or best practices you have learned. Your competitive analysis (benchmarking) write-up should include a discussion and summary of each of the following:

- Generalized topologies used
- Intended audiences/users and their common information needs and user tasks
- Common organization systems used
- Common navigation systems used
- Common labeling systems used
- Common elements of search interfaces and search results pages
- Common indexing and filtering practices

Below I have included some important questions to think about as you conduct your benchmark analysis. In your report, please do not explicitly restate these questions followed by answers, like an exam or quiz. Be creative in how you address these questions.

1. Is there a similar underlying typology that helps users more easily understand and navigate the school's information environments? If so, what is this generalized typology? If not, explain why you feel one does not exist?
2. Are there common organization structures used by iSchools? Does the first-level (typically the homepage) organization structure used by the iSchool you selected match the common structure found in your benchmark analysis? Is there a match in subsequent levels (e.g., 2nd, 3rd, nth)? Think about whether you feel these organization structures effectively help your users find information and complete important tasks. If yes, how so? If not, which structures would you have selected and why, based on your benchmark analysis? You may suggest different structures at any level.
3. Are there common organizational schemes used by iSchools? Do these match the iSchool you selected? Do these organization schemes effectively help your users find information or complete important tasks? If yes, how so? If not, is there a scheme you would suggest they use, and why, based on your benchmark analysis?
4. Are there common labels used for headings and navigation system choices? Is it common to see iSchools use contextual links, indexes, and icon labels? If so, what are the common labels used and how are they used? Does your iSchool conform to this labeling? Should it? Does your iSchool use "*consistent*" (p. 155) labeling systems and do these labeling systems help your users find information and complete important tasks? If so, explain why. If not, suggest changes based on your benchmark analysis.
5. Are there common navigation systems used among iSchools? Based on your benchmark analysis, do the navigation systems of the iSchool you selected effectively help users find information and complete important tasks? If yes, how so? If not, how would you change them and why (based on your benchmark analysis)? You may suggest different navigation systems at any level.
6. Is there a common way that iSchools index their content (i.e., by audience, by topic, chronologically, or by author)? Is there a common way that search results are displayed? Do your iSchool's search systems effectively help users find information. If yes, how so? If not, how would you change them and why, based on your benchmark analysis?

The written page limit for Part 1 is four (4) pages. You may also include up to an additional two (2) pages of figures, diagrams, screenshots, mock-ups, or marked-up pages.

Part 2: Sample content inventory, auditing, and modeling
(3 pages max, see details)

Conduct an informal content inventory and audit of your iSchool's website by browsing all of the webpages. Break down a section of the site (or combine a sample of existing content) into content chunks that you feel are useful for inclusion in your recommended information environment. Identify any groupings or patterns within the content (or relationships between the content). As part of your answer, discuss if the labels around the content (or the labels used for the actual content) use language that is consistent and not ambiguous to the domain, the context, or for the intended user.

Next, based on your benchmark analysis, suggest any new content categories, which you feel should be included, as well as any content gaps that need to be filled. Include at least one (1) content model illustrating these suggestions. You are also welcomed to suggest changes for any inconsistent or ambiguous content labelling.

The written page limit for Part 2 is one (1) page. You must also include at least one (1) content model but may include more. Content models may not exceed two (2) pages. You may also include your Microsoft Excel file, as a separate attachment.

Part 3: Critical recommendations and redesign
(8 pages total, see details)

Focus on the most critical redesign recommendations identified through your benchmark analysis, your content audit/inventory, and your search analysis. Include conceptual/site maps, design wireframes/templates, and/or sample pages to showcase your redesign recommendations. Make sure to produce corresponding documentation and base your design decisions on your benchmark analysis. All design decisions must be explained and substantiated by citing our course readings or other IA/UX readings. You may also show evidence that you are verifying your designs with heuristic evaluations and other UX testing (e.g., document problems you identify using usability/IA testing or highlight a design decision using usability/IA heuristics).

For each page (or section) you mock-up (design or redesign) please make sure to explain why you are making changes to the IA design, and any special considerations that should be made, using scope notes or associated comments. Your mock-ups can be designed using any fidelity from low to high (e.g., paper sketches, digital wireframes, hyperlinked presentations, working websites). When you create the new design, take into consideration the audience for the site, users' information seeking behavior, accessibility, organization, labeling, navigation, search, and other related IA elements. When discussing the changes, focus on how the individual page should work and how your redesign would make it easier for the user to fulfill their designated information purposes. Make sure to be concise.

The written page limit for Part 3 is four (4) pages. You may also include up to an additional four (4) pages of figures, diagrams, screenshots, mock-ups, marked-up pages, or scope notes. Each report must include a minimum of one (1) site map showcasing a navigation system redesign, as well as a minimum of two (2) wireframes showcasing pages displaying your organization and labeling system redesigns.

Part 4: Search system (re)design
(3 pages max, see details)

We must also assume that the amount of content will continue to grow. Therefore, discuss and design how you would suggest the iSchool address scalability using search systems. How should they index content? What should a search interface look like? How would you display search results? Which representational and descriptive content components would you display (per retrieved document)? How would you list or group all search results (all retrieved documents)? When it comes to results, would you adopt a strategy of precision or one of recall?

The written page limit for Part 4 is one (1) page. You must also include at least one (1) wireframe of your new search system (i.e., the search interface or search results page). You may include additional wireframes or other figures. However, all wireframes and other figures may not exceed two (2) pages.

Part 5: Executive summary
(1 page total)

Briefly outline:
1. The purpose and scope of your analysis
2. The process for conducting the design, methods used, and documentation that you have included (e.g., persona, concept maps, wireframes, and navigation stress-test, content audit, etc.).
3. The high level and most immediate recommendations your analysis discovered, and your redesign focused on.

Submission outline and headings

For assembling and submitting your report, you should use the outline and headings detailed below. Page and other section requirements are detailed under each "Part" of the assignment above.

1. Executive summary
2. Typical user information needs and user task
3. Benchmark analysis lessons learned
   a. Generalized typologies
   b. Organization systems
   c. Labeling systems
   d. Navigation systems
   e. Search systems
4. Sample content audit lessons learned and content models
5. Critical recommendations and redesign
   a. Organization systems
   b. Labeling systems
   c. Navigation systems
   d. Search systems
6. Conclusion
7. References
8. Appendix (if needed)

Further considerations

Be creative, yet organized and professional, in how you present your report. You are strongly encouraged to create additional wireframes, sitemaps, and any other mock-ups, diagrams, or figures that would highlight your analysis or redesign suggestions, but please be conscious of the page limit specifications for each part. Also, please make sure all figures and screenshots are legible and no larger than 1-page. You may include a reference list as part of an appendix, which will not count towards your page totals.

A discussion forum will be made available on the portal for you to ask questions. I will do my best to answer your questions in a timely fashion, but you should allow ample time to get answers.

Your report should be single-spaced, use a 12-point font, and include a cover page and table of contents. Please submit your final report through the portal in .PDF format.

Please see *INFS 625 IA Group Project Slides* on our portal for additional details.

Group Project Peer Evaluation
Proportion of Grade: 5% (Individual)
Due: December 6th at 11:59 pm
(Electronically on the portal using the provided Excel form)

In addition to the group report, each student will be individually responsible for submitting a peer evaluation form with grades assigned for each of their group members, on a series of evaluation criteria (see myCourses for the form). The evaluation criteria and rating scales were developed by the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence at Penn State and are summarized below.

Peer evaluation criteria
1. **Comprehension**: Seemed to understand requirements for the assignment
2. **Problem identification & solution**: Participated in identifying and defining problems and working toward solutions
3. **Organization**: Approached tasks (such as time management) in a systematic manner
4. **Acceptance of responsibility**: Shared responsibility for tasks to be accomplished
5. **Initiative/motivation**: Made suggestions, sought feedback, showed interest in team decision making and planning
6. **Creativity**: Looked at ideas from different viewpoints
7. **Task Completion**: Followed through in completing own contributions to team project
8. **Attendance**: Attended planning sessions, was prompt, and participated in decision making
9. **Collaboration**: Worked cooperatively with others
10. **Participation**: Contributed "fair share" to team project
11. **Attitude**: Displayed positive approach and made constructive comments in working toward goals
12. **Independence**: Carried out tasks without overly depending on other team members
13. **Communication**: Expressed thoughts clearly
14. **Responsiveness**: Reacted sensitively to verbal and nonverbal cues of other team members

In Section 1 of the peer evaluation form, each group member can be assigned a grade from 0% to 85% ("A"), using the 14 rating scales provided. In Section 2 of the peer evaluation form, you may add an additional 1% of "bonus" points for each of the 14 criteria, as well as 1% for an additional criterion of your choosing, as long as it is not covered under the existing criteria. You should consider "bonus" points for group members that went above and beyond in a particular evaluation criterion and deserve special recognition for this. Please note that each 1% bonus assigned in Section 2 must be sufficiently explained and justified by providing an explicit example of how the group member went above and beyond for that criterion. Insufficiently justified bonus points (i.e., those without explicit examples) will not be considered.

Although it is rare, on occasion you may find it necessary to assign certain group members failing marks for the evaluation criteria listed above. If the total peer evaluation grade you assign a group member is lower than 50%, you must sufficiently explain and justify each rating scored with a 3 or less, by providing explicit examples of how the group member failed to meet each criterion. Please note that further explanation and justification of low scored criteria (3 or less) is only required when the total peer review grade you assign to a group member is lower than 50%.

Your individual grade will consist of an average of the peer review grades assigned to you by your group members. However, the instructor reserves the right to adjust grades based on insufficiently justified criteria. To assure confidentiality, all peer review forms are to be submitted individually on the portal. Feedback is not published on MyCourses.

It is important to note that you must submit a peer evaluation to earn a peer evaluation mark. Students who do not submit a peer evaluation form will earn a grade of zero (0).