



Usability Test Report

On the MSTC Program Website

Course: ENG 508

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Executive Summary

This usability study of the website of Master of Science in Technical Communication was conducted in Raleigh, North Carolina during the dates of October 16–19, 2009. The purpose of the test was to assess the usability of the website, including identification of any obstacles likely to impede user satisfaction or task completion. The problems identified in this study, along with suggested solutions for each problem, are detailed below.

No.	Problems of the MSTC website	Suggested solutions
1	Top navigation and left-side navigation are confusing for users to decide which one to use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove the top links and place the left-side links on top of the page.• Replace “Department of English” with “MS in Technical Communication” on the MSTC website.
2	One link in the left-side navigation leads to a new page with a new left-side navigation that contains 15 new links.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redesign the left-side navigation. Fuse the two navigations into one.• Reduce the length of the navigation by removing unimportant links and using hidden sub-links.
3	Navigation links are too long and too many.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove unimportant links from navigation, or embed them as sub-links.• Order the links according to frequency of use.• Shorten the length of link titles to no more than 5 words.
4	Back button sometimes is the only way to jump to certain previous page, but it becomes invalid when user click two or more same-level links.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a breadcrumb menu before the articles, so that users always know where they are and can go back to the previous page by clicking links in the menu.• Show the left-side navigation on every page, so that users know they can always go to the left-side navigation when needed.
5	Articles are too long and too detailed to easily read and get the core information, and they do not have headings or pictures to help reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add pictures into articles to make the articles interesting as well as to better our program.• User shorter paragraphs and shorter sentences.• Write articles in plain English.• Use tables and lists to clearly present information.• Write procedures in steps and number each step.

6	Information on the same topic is scattered in several articles and buried in unimportant information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sub-links to group articles on the same topic together.
7	Article contents have little relevance with the MSTC program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove unrelated or unnecessary information from the website.
8	Bolded comments on the homepage looks unattractive and are distractive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the comments from the homepage. Consider place them under the “Students” link. • Add pictures of students, professors, facilities and public study spaces on the homepage.

Table 1 Top Findings

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Method

Purpose of this Study

The goal of the study was to assess the overall effectiveness of the MSTC website by gathering qualitative and quantitative data from a group of likely users of the website. Effectiveness of the website was determined by:

- Assessing the success rate of likely users at performing basic common tasks with the MSTC website;
- Comparing the time used by likely users at performing tasks with estimated time of completion;
- And identifying obstacles likely to impede completion of these basic common tasks.

Participant Characteristics

As moderator, I recruited participants who had used the MSTC website or were likely to use a similar website. This group included both current students of the MSTC program and other students in graduate programs at UNC and NCSU. The study tried to match participants to the real user group: current students of the MSTC program, who often use the MSTC website to look for information like course requirements, TA information, capstone project application time and procedures, faculty member information, etc.

The most important criterion for selecting these participants was the degree to which they were likely to use the MSTC website or a similar website. All participants had been familiar with looking for information on a program website. Two participants had been familiar with the MSTC website, and three participants were new to the MSTC website, but had been familiar with a similar program website.

Test Environment

Tests were conducted either in the group discussion rooms of NCSU or UNC libraries or the participants' living places, allowing for maximum privacy and minimum interference.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the participant sat at a conference table and performed the requested tasks on a PC installed with a voice recording app so that his or her voice could be recorded. I sat slightly behind and to the side of the participant, in order to be

visible but interfere as little as possible. To the left of the participant, a large-screen television monitor displayed the screen of the participant's PC. This large-screen monitor aided my observation of the participants' actions.



Figure 1 Test Environment

Test Design

Due to the small size and nonrandom nature of the initial test group, I used a within-subjects design for this test. All five participants were asked to complete each of the six tasks. In order to account for any transfer of learning, I varied the sequence in which the participants performed the tasks as follows:

Participant 1	Tasks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Participant 2	Tasks 2, 3, 4, 1, 5, 6
Participant 3	Tasks 3, 4, 1, 2, 5, 6
Participant 4	Tasks 4, 1, 2, 3, 6, 5
Participant 5	Tasks 4, 2, 1, 3, 6, 5

Table 2 Participants and Tasks

Each session lasted about 45 minutes. Participants filled out a pretest questionnaire where they answered questions about their backgrounds with the MSTC website or a similar program website. Immediately following the look and feel session,

participants were asked to browse the MSTC website in one minute and briefly describe their general feelings about the layout, color, font choices, pictures, and the length of the articles of the website.

Then participants were asked to perform specific tasks on the MSTC website. The participants were asked to think out loud as they worked, describing their actions and any positive or negative feelings about the tasks and the website.

Following the tasks, the participants filled out a system usability scale questionnaire describing their experience and participated in a card reaction session. The participants were asked their reasons for their card selections as well as open-ended questions about their feelings of the website.

Tasks

Participants were asked to complete the following tasks. Before the test, a maximum time criterion (MTC) was established as a benchmark regarding successful completion of a task within a reasonable time.

Task No.	Task	MTC
Task 1	Open the MSTC website	2 minutes
Task 2	Locate information for printing	5 minutes
Task 3	Locate information for GPOW	8 minutes
Task 4	Locate information for TA	5 minutes
Task 5	Locate information for degree requirement	5 minutes
Task 6	Locate information for the capstone course	5 minutes

Table 3 Tasks

All tests were timed. Participants were considered to have succeeded at a task when they were able to locate the desired information within the allotted time frames. When a participant was not able to complete a task in 1.2 times of the expected timeframe, the task was ended by the moderator, and the participant started the next task.

Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the following forms:

Quantitative Measures

For quantitative measures, I collected data from the following three sessions:

1. The tasks:

- How many participants were able to successfully complete the following tasks:
 - ✓ Open the MSTC website
 - ✓ Locate information for printing
 - ✓ Locate information for GPOW
 - ✓ Locate information for TA
 - ✓ Locate information for degree requirement
 - ✓ Locate information for the capstone course

Participants were recorded as either having a) completed the task or b) failed to complete the task.
- How many errors were made during each task? Both errors of commission and omission were recorded.
- How much time did participants use to complete each task?

2. The SUS questionnaire:

Data of the ranking for each question were recorded and analyzed in Excel.

3. The reaction card:

Frequency of selected words were counted and analyzed in Excel.

Qualitative Measures

For qualitative measures, I collected data from the following four sessions:

1. Pretest background interview:

Participants' background information was collected and analyzed to provide more knowledge about the target user group.

2. Look and feel session

Participants' comments were digitally recorded during this session. They were analyzed to learn participants' general feelings of the design of the website at first sight.

3. Participants' comments:

Participants' comments were digitally recorded during the test sessions. They were analyzed to learn:

- User's attitude toward the website
- Points of confusion and sources of errors.

4. The post-test interview:

Further qualitative information regarding user attitude, preference, perceived ease of use, and perceived complexity and length of tasks was collected.

Results

Pre-Test Background Interview

Most participants were familiar with the MSTC website or a similar program website. Three participants used such a website regularly (at least once a month), one participant used it occasionally. Participants used the website to look for information on course requirements, capstone project, events schedule, and personnel information. Most of them could not find desired information.

Questions	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Are you familiar with the MSTC website or a similar program website?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
How often do you use such a website?	3-5 times per week	Almost never	Once per month	Once per week	3 times per semester
What kind of information do you look for on the MSTC (or a similar) website?	Course requirements, degree requirement	Not applicable	Course information	Colloquium schedule, staff and student information	Capstone, application information
Can you always find what your desired information on the MSTC (or a similar) website?	No	Not applicable	Yes, but have to check with professor for details.	“Most of the time I can.”	“No, I go through a lot of navigation.”

Table 4 Pre-Test Background Interview

Look and Feel

In the look and feel session, participants were asked to describe their general feelings of the homepage of the MSTC website at first glance. Most participants thought the layout of the homepage is nice with good color contrast. Three participants believed the homepage is too text-heavy. Three participants suggested there should be more pictures in articles. Two participants found the bolded quotations on top of the homepage unnecessary and distracting. Two participants didn't like the left-side navigation bar. Two participants suggested there should be more headings and shorter paragraphs for easy reading.

Participant	Comments
Participant 1	Too many words, no pictures. Didn't like the bold font of the quotations on the homepage (distractive). Did not like that the introduction of the program starts with quotations from previous students ("No website puts customers' comments on top of the homepage"). Left-side navigation is not obvious. The homepage has no focus, no design unity.
Participant 2	This website offers information of the program. "I may be interested in degree requirements, tuition, financial aid, student information..." The white background color is ok. Font is good.
Participant 3	Too many words. No headings. No summary. No emphasis. Only details. Wanted to see some pictures/logos that represent the program (to give people an idea of what the program is about).
Participant 4	Not clear about the acronyms such as CHASS and MSTC. Thought the website is for the Department of English. Top navigation is nice. Did not like the left-side navigation ("messy"). No pictures ("weird", this is the home page of a department).
Participant 5	Layout is fine. Didn't like the bolded comments; "also those are unimportant information for me", looks like pamphlet information, "I will skip it". Would rather to see shorter paragraphs and shorter lists. The overall outlook is fine.

Table 5 Comments

Participant Timing and Task Completion Rates

The overall task completion rate is low. No participant could complete all the tasks. Participants were most successful at finding the MSTC website through Google, and no participant succeeded at locating the information of printers. The average completion rate of all the tasks is as low as 53.3%.

Participant	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6
1	✓	-	-	-	-	✓
2	✓	-	-	-	-	-
3	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-
4	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓
5	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Success	5	0	3	2	3	3
Completion Rates	100%	0%	60%	40%	60%	60%

Table 6 Completion Rate

Table 7 shows the timing results for each task and each user as compared to the maximum time criteria, highest time, lowest time and mean time. Mean time is calculated with only successful completion time. Also, highest time and lowest time are selected from participants' successful completion time.

Table 7. Task Timing Results (Min:Sec)

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6
MTC	2 min	5 min	8 min	5 min	5 min	5 min
User 1	0:19	✗ 7:30	✗ 3:49	– 6:57	– 6:39	9:01
User 2	0:25	✗ 6:22	✗ 4:45	✗ 3:03	✗ 4:50	✗ 3:13
User 3	0:39	✗ 6:20	5:46	4:20	3:24	✗ 3:30
User 4	0:07	✗ 5:20	1:15	✗ 3:10	0:30	2:40
User 5	0:10	✗ 4:02	3:10	1:04	3:30	3:02
Highest Time	0:39	–	5:46	4:20	3:30	9:01
Lowest Time	0:07	–	1:15	1:04	0:30	2:40
Mean Time	0:20	–	3:24	1:42	3:28	4:53

* “–” means moderator stopped this task due to time limit

“✗” means the participant abandoned the task

The mean time of each task looks close to the MTC, because they are calculated with only successful completion time. Participants who were able to complete most tasks were students who were familiar with the MSTC website. Participants who were new to the MSTC website had high abandon rates of tasks and were not able to complete most tasks. If the time spent on the abandoned tasks was also considered, the mean time of completing each task would be much longer.

Task 2 has zero completion rate. No participant could locate the information for printers in the Tompkins and Winston buildings under the “Essential information for new graduate students” link. Most of the participants thought the information should be under the “Student service” link.

Post-Test Questionnaire

I used Dr. John Brooke's System Usability Scale to collect and analyze participants' opinions of the website. Participants' score for each question is put under Scale Position (SP) in the table, and it is converted as SUS Contribution (SC) using Dr. Brooke's

method (see Appendix A). I summed up each column of SC to get an individual SUS score (SUS scores have a range of 0 to 100).

Participants' individual SUS scores range from 35 to 57.5, and the mean is 45. Based on research, a SUS score above 68 would be considered above average and anything below 68 is below average. Obviously, the MSTC website SUS score is far below average, which indicates low usability of the website.

Table 8. System Usability Scale

#	Question	1		2		3		4		5	
		SP	SC	SP	SC	SP	SC	SP	SC	SP	SC
1	I think that I would like to use this website frequently:	5	4	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	1
2	I found the website unnecessarily complex:	4	1	2	3	1	4	4	1	2	3
3	I thought the website was easy to use:	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	1
4	I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use this website:	1	4	5	0	4	1	2	3	3	2
5	I found the various functions in this website were well integrated:	2	1	2	1	3	2	4	3	1	0
6	I thought there was too much inconsistency in this website:	4	1	5	0	4	1	3	2	4	1
7	I would imagine that most people would learn to use this website very quickly:	1	0	4	3	1	0	4	3	4	3
8	I found the website very cumbersome to use:	3	2	4	1	3	2	3	2	4	1
9	I felt very confident using the website:	4	3	1	0	2	1	3	2	3	2
10	I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with this website:	1	4	3	2	5	0	1	4	2	3
Individual SUS Score		55		35		35		57.5		42.5	

*SP=Scale Position SC=SUS Contribution

Reaction Card

Participants selected 5 words that represent their feelings for the website from 64 cards, and explained their selections. Only 20% of the selected words are positive (Professional, Useful, Clean, Essential, Helpful). Four of the positive words, professional, useful, essential, and helpful, are selected because participants believed the

website provided necessary information for students that could not be found elsewhere, and students needed to use it frequently.

Participant	Card Selection	Explanations
Participant 1	Busy	Information is busy
	Complex	Information is too detailed
	Familiar	Often need to use
	Flexible	Structure is chaotic
	Professional	Information is accurate and authoritative, no ads
Participant 2	Annoying	Hard to find information
	Inconsistent	Inconsistent webpage design (links, margin, navigation)
	Personal	Need to use often
	Simplistic	Information is easy to understand
	Unattractive	Not attractive
Participant 3	Confusing	Always went to wrong page, back button is not helpful
	Difficult	Same reason as above
	Poor quality	Not well designed
	Stressful	Cannot find desired information
	Useful	Contains useful information
Participant 4	Clean	Layout is clean
	Essential	Need to use often
	Helpful	Contains necessary information for students
	Overwhelming	Text-heavy
	Unattractive	Not competitive
Participant 5	Annoying	Need to go through a lot of navigation
	Confusing	Information is not clear or complete
	Dull	Boring
	Ineffective	Too much time spent on simple tasks
	Time-consuming	Same reason as above

Table 9 Reaction Cards

Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Usability Issues

The usability issues found during this study, along with likely sources of errors, are summarized in Table 11. Issues are ranked 1-4 by severity and frequency as follows:

Severity Ranking		Frequency Ranking	
1	The issue is an irritant but does not usually impede the user from completing his task.	1	0-24% of users will be affected
2	The user will have to exert moderate effort to use the program, but will eventually complete his task.	2	25-49% of users will be affected
3	The issue will severely limit the user's attempt to use the program. The user will have great difficulty in task completion.	3	50-74% of users will be affected
4	The user will not be able to use or will not want to use the program because of the issue.	4	75-100% of users will be affected

Table 10 Severity and Frequency Ranking

Table 11. Summary of Usability Issues

No.	Issue	Number of Users Affected	Severity	Frequency	Source(s) of Error
1	Top navigation and left-side navigation are confusing for users to decide which one to use.	4	3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor location • Similarity in appearance
2	One link in the left-side navigation leads to a new page with a new left-side navigation that contains 15 new links.	5	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor user control • Inconsistent design
3	Navigation links are too long and too many.	5	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy memory load
4	Back button sometimes is the only way to jump to certain previous page, but it becomes invalid when user click two or more same-level links.	5	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor user control
5	Articles are too long and too detailed to easily read and get the core information, and they do not have headings or pictures to help reading.	5	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy memory load • Lack of aesthetic design
6	Information on the same topic is scattered in several articles and buried in unimportant information.	5	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information architecture • Lack of distinction
7	Article contents have little relevance with the MSTC program.	2	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information architecture
8	Bolded comments on the homepage looks unattractive and are distractive.	5	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information architecture • Lack of aesthetic design

Detailed Explanations and Recommendations

1. Two navigations are confusing

On the MSTC website, the top navigation belongs to the Department of English, and only the left-side navigation is for our MSTC program. While in the usability test, when participants were asked to locate certain information, they tended to use the top navigation, and were therefore leaded to pages outside of the MSTC website. The two navigations could be difficult for prospective students.

Besides, for users of the MSTC website, the green-squared part in the following screenshot is less useful than the left-side navigation and the articles below, but this part occupies the best location on the page and confuses users.

The screenshot shows the header of the NC State University Department of English website. It features the NC State logo, a search bar labeled "search CHASS", and a link to "Humanities and Social Sciences". Below the header, the title "Department of English" is displayed in red. A horizontal navigation bar contains links for "About", "Undergraduate", "Graduate", "People", "Alumni and Friends", and "Research and Engagement".

Information for Current Students: Policies, Resources, Forms

Essential Information for New Graduate Students

Essential Information for Teaching Assistants

Information for Current Students

See links at left for policies, procedures, and resources

Two main reasons that caused the problem:

- 1) The left-side navigation is less obvious than the top-side navigation. For new users, when they are unaware that only the left-side navigation leads to the MSTC website, they are more likely to use the main navigation on the top.

The screenshot shows the same website layout as the previous one, but with a blue rectangular box highlighting the left sidebar area. This sidebar contains links for "Information for Current Students: Policies, Resources, Forms", "Essential Information for New Graduate Students", "Essential Information for Teaching Assistants", "Advising", and "Apply to Graduate". The rest of the page structure remains the same, including the main title "Information for Current Students" and the note about links at the left.

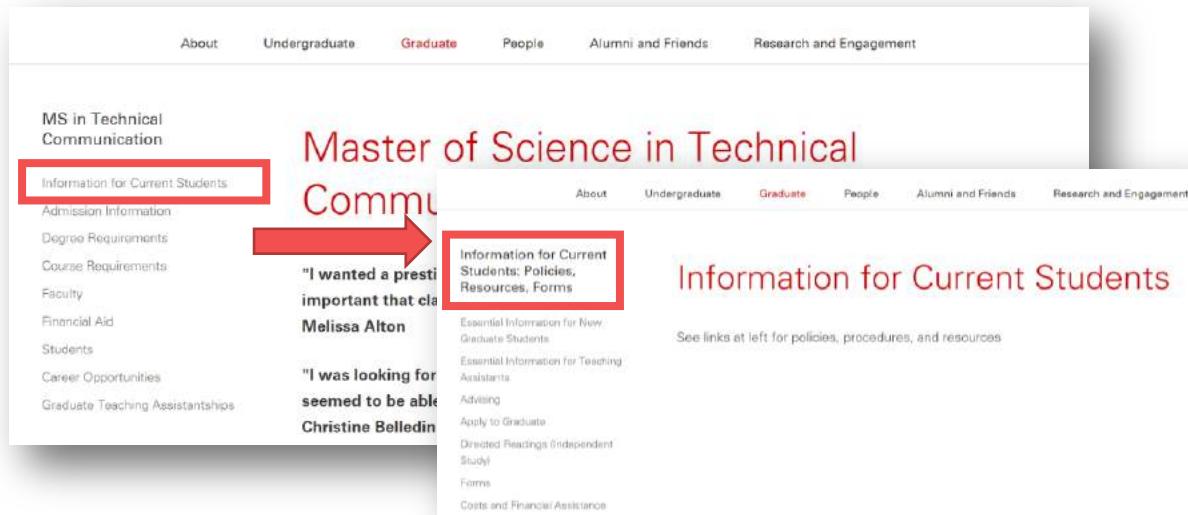
- 2) The title of “Department of English” is so outstanding on every page that all the users new to the MSTC website could not figure out whether they were looking at the MSTC website or the website of English Department.

Suggested solutions:

- Remove the top links and place the left-side links on top of the page.
- Replace “Department of English” with “MS in Technical Communication” on the MSTC website.

2. One link leads to another 15 new links

When users click “Information for current students”, they will be led to a new page with a new left-side navigation that contains 15 new links. The new page and new links are also part of the MSTC website, designed specifically for current MSTC students. In the test, participants could not distinguish the two parts (for current students and for prospective students) of the MSTC website, and found it hard to locate information that is scattered in the two parts of the website.



Suggested solutions:

- Redesign the left-side navigation. Fuse the two navigations into one.
- Reduce the length of the navigation by removing unimportant links and using hidden sub-links.

3. Navigation links are too long and too many

The navigation links are too long and too many for browsing. The main reason is the navigation contains too many unimportant links. On the “Information for current

students” page, most students I’ve interviewed use only three to four links: “Course requirement” (on another page), “Degree requirement” (on another page), “GPOW”, and “Apply for graduate”, but we have 15 links on the information for current student page as shown below:

The screenshot shows a website layout for 'STUDENTS'. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for About, Undergraduate, Graduate (which is highlighted in red), People, Alumni and Friends, and Research and Engagement. Below the navigation is a large red header 'STUDENTS'. The main content area has a title 'Your First Semester' in red. Underneath it, there are several sections with headings like 'How to Register for Classes' and 'Mandatory Health Insurance', each containing descriptive text. On the far left, there's a sidebar with a blue border containing a list of 15 links: Essential Information for New Graduate Students, Essential Information for Teaching Assistants, Advising, Apply to Graduate, Directed Readings (Independent Study), Forms, Costs and Financial Assistance, Graduate Plan of Work (GPOW), Graduate Student Associations, Graduate Teaching Assistantships, Inter-Institutional Programs, Policies and Graduate School Regulations, Professional Development Resources, Registration, and University Student Services.

The MSTC program has only a few TAs, but there are two links for TAs. And links such as “Essential Information for New Graduate Students” and “University Student Services” are too general to be useful.

Suggested solutions:

- Remove unimportant links from navigation, or embed them as sub-links.
- Order the links according to frequency of use.
- Shorten the length of link titles to no more than 5 words.

4. Users rely on back button to go back to the previous page

In the following two situations, users can only use back button to go back to the previous page:

- 1) Users open a new page that does not have the left-side navigation due to inconsistent design.

Department of English

About Undergraduate Graduate People Alumni and Friends Research and Engagement

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Applicants for admission to the three programs in English—Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS), and Master of Fine Arts (MFA)—may apply for a departmental Teaching Assistantship. English Department TAs receive full tuition coverage along with health insurance and a modest annual stipend. Although tuition is paid in full, the arrangement does not cover university fees.

- 2) Users click the “Information for current students” link and see a new page with new navigation. Users can only use the back button to go back to the homepage of the MSTC website. However, when users click two or more links in the new navigation, the back button will not be able to lead users back to the homepage, but only navigate them among the links on the new page. Users need to reopen the MSTC website through Google or searching from the graduate programs page.

Suggested solutions:

- Create a breadcrumb menu before the articles, so that users always know where they are and can go back to the previous page by clicking links in the menu.

Page viewed > Page viewed > Page currently being viewed

- Show the left-side navigation on every page, so that users know they can always go to the left-side navigation when needed.

5. Articles are too long and too detailed without headings or pictures

Most articles on the MSTC website are text-heavy. Participants find it's hard to quickly get the most important information by browsing, and think the articles are boring without any multimedia elements. Besides, participants find the articles do not distinct important information and make it obvious for readers.

Suggested solutions:

- Add pictures into articles to make the articles interesting as well as to better our program.
- User shorter paragraphs and shorter sentences.

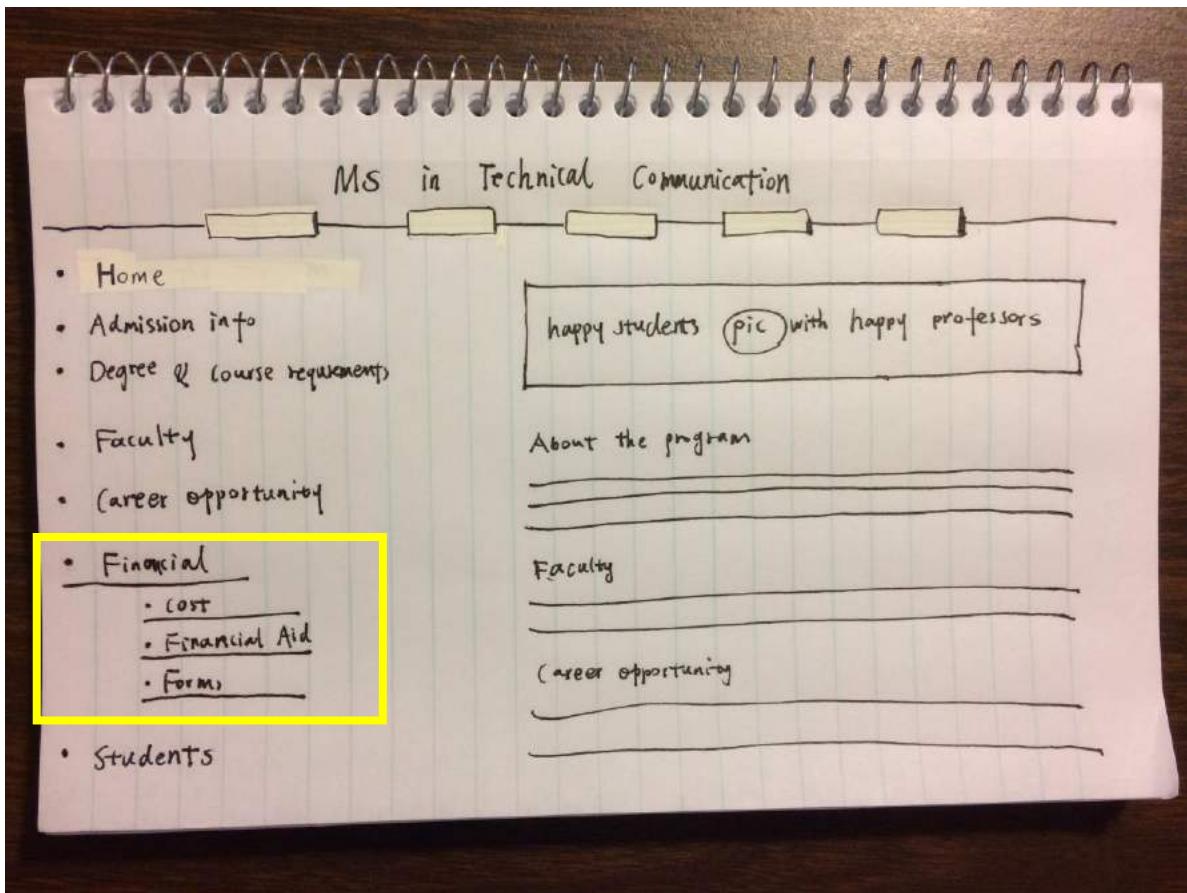
- Write articles in plain English.
- Use tables and lists to clearly present information.
- Write procedures in steps and number each step.

6. Information on the same topic is scattered in several articles

Participants found it annoying that information on the same topic is scattered everywhere. For example, there are three main links for the subject of financial and costs: *Costs and Financial Assistance*, *Graduate Teaching Assistantships*, and *Financial Aid*.

Suggested solutions:

- Use sub-links to group articles on the same topic together.



7. Article contents have little relevance with the MSTC program

The MSTC website contains some contents that are unrelated to the MSTC program. For example, there are hardly any MSTC student register for the “Directed Reading” course (which looks like a course of the MA in English program). But the MSTC website has a link and an article for this course.

Department of English

About Undergraduate Graduate People Alumni and Friends Research and Engagement

Information for Current Students: Policies, Resources, Forms

Essential Information for New Graduate Students

Essential Information for Teaching Assistants

Advising

Apply to Graduate

Directed Readings (Independent Study)

Directed Readings (Independent Study): ENG 636, 810

ENG 636 provides directed study in areas of special interest that are not addressed in the department's regular course offerings. The course is available only to students enrolled in our graduate programs. These courses are individually designed, with reading loads, writing requirements and academic expectations comparable to other graduate courses in the department.

For another example, on the Essential Information for Teaching Assistants page, there is much information for TAs of the Composition or Creative Writing program, which has nothing to do with the MSTC program. Such information takes up the precious space on the website, and may make the brand of MSTC less concrete for users.

Suggested solutions:

- Remove unrelated or unnecessary information from the website.

About

Undergraduate

Graduate

People

Alumni and Friends

Research and Engagement

Students: Policies, Resources, Forms

Essential Information for New Graduate Students

Essential Information for Teaching Assistants

Advising

Apply to Graduate

Directed Readings (Independent Study)

Forms

Costs and Financial Assistance

Graduate Plan of Work (GPOW)

Graduate Student Associations

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Inter-Institutional Programs

Policies and Graduate School Regulations

Essential Information for Teaching Assistants

Your First Semester

Teaching Composition (MA and MFA)

TAs assigned to the Composition program must enroll in ENG 511, Theory and Research in Composition, in their first year to prepare for their assistantship. You may enroll in fall or spring.

TAs assigned to teach creative writing will shadow an MFA faculty member in their first year as they prepare to teach in the second year. TAs assisting faculty in Film or Linguistics will receive information from a faculty supervisor once these assignments are finalized. No special course registration is required for these assignments.

Initial Research Requirement: ENG 669 (MA only)

Students in all MA concentrations except Linguistics must enroll in ENG 669, Methods and the

8. Bolded comments on the homepage looks unattractive and are distractive.

Participants disliked the bolded comments on the homepage. They thought previous students' comments are unimportant and should not be put in such an important place. Such a design looks like an advertising pamphlet, rather than a professional website for a graduate program. Also they thought the bolded font is ugly and distracting.

Suggested solutions:

- Remove the comments from the homepage. Consider place them under the “Students” link.
- Add pictures of students, professors, facilities and public study spaces on the homepage.

Conclusion

Through this usability study, I find the majority of users are not satisfied with the MSTC website. While on the other hand, users claim they will still often use this website because it provides information that can be hardly found elsewhere. There is a huge gap between the needs of users and the quality of the website.

Overall, the majority of users were satisfied with product enough to be willing to use it to perform captures again in another situation. The software stands to gain much by making a few simple changes to enhance intuitiveness for its users. The usability issues in this report should be addressed in order of criticality, as follows:

Facing these problems, I proposal the following solutions to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and user satisfaction of the MSTC website:

Navigation: put mostly searched and most important information in more obvious places in the navigation; remove unimportant or less relevant links from the main navigation, use lists of sub-links under each main link instead (improve hierarchy of the navigation); add path of navigation on the website so that users won’t need to use the back button often to jump between the present and previous pages; shorten the length of the link title to no more than 5 words; use one left-side navigation instead of two.

Contents of articles: add pictures and other multimedia elements to make the articles more attractive; remove unnecessary or expired links, and add links where they are needed; change long and complicated sentences in articles into shorter and easier sentences; ensure the article contents are relevant to its link title; ensure the information on certain topics is complete and closely located; ensure the information provided is accurate and current, include only necessary information in articles, and keep articles short and easy for reading.

Structure of articles: use headings and paragraphs to make the structure of articles clear; make paragraphs shorter; use lists and tables to clearly present information.

Appendices

Appendix A: Scoring SUS

SUS yields a single number representing a composite measure of the overall usability of the system being studied. Note that scores for individual items are not meaningful on their own.

To calculate the SUS score, first sum the score contributions from each item. Each item's score contribution will range from 0 to 4. For items 1,3,5,7, and 9 the score contribution is the scale position minus 1. For items 2,4,6,8 and 10, the contribution is 5 minus the scale position. Multiply the sum of the scores by 2.5 to obtain the overall value of SU.