HCDE 407: Software User Assistance

Instructor: David K. Farkas
Quarter/Year: Winter 2013
Course Schedule: TTh, 11:30AM – 1:20PM
Course URL: http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/HCDE%20407-2013/index.html

Course Description
Software User Assistance (UA) is an important part of the user experience. UA specialists create content that enables people to better understand and better use digital technology. They also design and manage community support for software products. UI (user interface) designers need to understand UA because UIs will not be effective if they try to convey what really should be part of the UA.

Course Objectives
In HCDE 407, you will learn to write procedures and embedded (pop-up) help that is displayed directly from the UI. You will also learn about help systems, SDK and troubleshooting content, wizards, videos, online demos/tutorials, and manuals. You will learn to write clear and compelling technical explanations, including white papers and marketing content. You will also learn how content management systems enable the reuse of UA content.

Grading and Assignments
Grading is based on the following:
- A website, your course project.
- A 15-minute presentation explaining the site’s design and construction. The presentation may be given to the entire class or only to the instructors.
- An exam covering all readings and class discussion
- A mid-quarter design document (creative brief) in which you fully describe your proposed website
- An analysis of selected Web pages

The grading will be calculated on the basis of a scoring system with a mathematical maximum of 460 points. If you get 400 of the possible 460 points, you get a 4.0 for the course. If you get 360 of the 460 points, you get a 3.6. The current version of the scoring system may be modified during the quarter.
You may also receive “bumps” of 1-3 points for a successful oral presentation to the class or for other special course contributions.

Course Schedule
Week 1
Tuesday
Introduction to course
Introduction to user assistance (UA)
Note: This syllabus may represent a past offering of this course and future course offerings may differ.

Thursday
Kinds of UA; Key issues in UA
UA and UX
Planning a comprehensive user support strategy
Examine the AM/FM Flashlight UI Exercise and UI graphic and be prepared to discuss them in class.
Read Microsoft Manual of Style (MMS), “Microsoft Style and Voice.”

Week 2
Tuesday
Introduction to target software application: Priority Contact
Overview of UA genres
Plans for course project
Examine Priority Contact.
Read MMS, “Content for a Worldwide Audience.”

Thursday
Designing and writing procedures
Procedure-writing workshop
Read course notes, “How to Write Procedures.”
Read course notes, “Writing with a Task Orientation.”
Read MMS, “Procedures and Technical Content” (through p. 113).

Week 3
Tuesday
Introduction to task-hierarchy user assistance
User task flow and UA task hierarchy
Plan task hierarchy for Priority Contact
Read Farkas, “The Logical and Rhetorical Construction of Procedural Discourse.”

Thursday
Audiences and personas
Procedure workshop
Introduction to technical explanations
Submit procedure exercise (Bring two extra two extra copies for workshop activity.)
Read MMS, “Accessible Content.”

Week 4
Tuesday
Findability
Minimalist documentation and layering
Read MMS, “The User Interface” (first half of chapter).
Read MMS, “Indexes and Keywords.”
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Thursday
Designing and writing reference and embedded help
Read "Embedded Help Analysis."
Read DeLoach, "Divide and Conquer: Providing Web-based User Assistance at the Point of Use.
Read MMS, “Content for the Web.”
Read MMS, “Procedures and Technical Content” (second half of chapter).

Week 5
Tuesday
The user's cost-benefit analysis
Centralized help systems and manuals
Peruse sample manuals and help systems as assigned.
Read DeBoard, “Heuristic Evaluation Questionnaire.”
Read MMS, “The User Interface” (second half of chapter).

Thursday
Usability testing in UA
Procedure and overview workshop
Read course notes, “Evaluation and Usability Testing.”
Read Rosenbaum, “Stalking the User.”
Read the sample usability test reports as assigned.

Week 6
Tuesday
Designing and writing troubleshooting content
Responding to user queries in support forums
Read Farkas, “The Diagnosis-Resolution Structure in Troubleshooting Procedures.”
Peruse sample troubleshooting content as assigned.

Thursday
Designing and writing tutorials and demos
Designing and writing wizards
Peruse sample tutorials, demos, and wizards as assigned.
Read Tidwell, "Design Pattern on Wizards."
Read MMS, “Content for the Web.”

Week 7
Tuesday
Video in UA
Watch sample videos as assigned.
Read MMS, “Practical Issues of Style.”
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Submit procedure assignment.

Thursday
Guest class: Bob Watson, Microsoft and HCDE
Designing and writing SDK/developer documentation
Peruse SDK (software development) documentation as assigned.
Read MMS, “Grammar.”

Week 8
Tuesday
Designing and writing marketing content
Read Radding, “The Whitepaper Whitepaper.”
Peruse sample white papers as assigned.
Read MMS, “Punctuation.”

Thursday
Guest class: Joe Welinske, Welinske.com
UA for mobile
Read selections from Welinske, Developing User Assistance for Mobile Apps, as assigned.
Review the section “Gesture,” on pp. 83-84 of the MMS and the individual gesture entries listed on p. 84.

Week 9
Tuesday
Exam

Thursday
No Class: Writers UA Conference

Week 10
Tuesday
Review Exam
Standard production processes (including localization)
Content management systems and DITA
Read Fisher, “Moving from Single Sourcing to Reuse with XML DITA.”
Upload group projects.

Thursday
Course wrap-up
Presentations on group projects