Note: This syllabus may represent a past offering of this course and future course offerings may differ.

HCDE 407: Software User Assistance

Instructor: Prof. David K. Farkas
Quarter/Year: Spring 2012
Course Schedule: Mondays/Wednesdays
Course URL: http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC407/syllabus.html

Course Description
Software User Assistance (SUA) is a part of HCI. SUA specialists create content that enables users to better understand and better use digital technology. SUA is the largest area of technical communication (see STC.org and WritersUA.com), and there are many thousands of SUA professionals. SUA is also an excellent skillset for people who want to work in UX or who want to broaden their usefulness within software development teams. Community managers in support forums also draw heavily on SUA skills.

Course Objectives
• Learn to write clear and useful procedures and technical explanations
• Learn to deploy this content in a wide range of media (particularly manuals, help systems, wizards, online demos/tutorials, videos, and forums)
• Use of content management systems to create and manage information objects that can be re-used in many forms
• Usability testing of SUA

Grading and Assignments

Exercise 1 (Procedures): Ungraded
Exercise 2 (Procedures and Overviews): 20%
Exam 1: 20%
Exam 2: 20%
Draft of Course Project: 10%
Course Project: 30%

Note:
Students may receive an increment of 0.1 to 0.3 points on their final grade for a high degree of class participation and helpfulness to other students.

The weighting of grades may be changed as the course proceeds. Minor assignments and readings may be added.

Each student is required to post at least once each week to GoPost on a topic related to the course. Points will be deducted for not posting.
Course Schedule

Week 1

March 26 (Class 1)
Introduction to course and course project
Introduction to user assistance (UA)

March 28 (Class 2)
Kinds of UA; Key issues in UA
UA and UX

Week 2

April 2 (Class 3)
Introduction to target software applications
Designing and writing procedures

April 4 (Class 4)
Audiences and personas
Introduction to technical explanations

Week 3

April 9 (Class 5)
Procedure-writing workshop
Minimalist documentation and layering
Submit Exercise 1 (Procedures—ungraded).
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April 11 (Class 6)
User task flow, the task hierarchy, and findability
Plan task hierarchy for target software.

Week 4
April 16 (Class 7)
Designing and writing marketing content
Peruse sample white papers as assigned.

April 18 (Class 8)
Designing and writing troubleshooting content
Responding to user queries in support forums
Submit Exercise 2 (Procedures and Overviews—(20%)
Peruse sample troubleshooting content as assigned.

Week 5
April 23 (Class 9)
Designing and writing tutorials, demos, wizards, and templates
Peruse sample tutorials, demos, wizards, and templates as assigned.

April 25 (Class 10)
Exam 1 (20%)

Week 6
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April 30 (Class 11)
Designing and writing reference and embedded help
SDK documentation
Peruse SDK (software development) documentation as assigned.

May 2 (Class 12)
Usability testing in UA
Read course notes, “Evaluation and Usability Testing.”
Read the sample usability test reports as assigned.

Week 7
May 7 (Class 13)
Video in UA
Watch sample videos as assigned.

May 9 (Class 14)
Manuals and centralized help systems
Peruse sample manuals and help systems as assigned.

Week 8
May 14 (Class 15)
Exam 2 (20%)

May 16 (Class 16)
UA for mobile (guest lecture: Joe Welinske)
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Week 9
May 21 (Class 17)
Review exam
Planning a comprehensive user support strategy
Submit draft version of your course project (10%).

May 23 (Class 18)
Standard production processes (including localization)
Content management systems and DITA

Week 10
May 28 (Memorial Day)

May 30 (Class 19)
Demos of course projects and videos
Course wrap-up
Submit course project (30%).