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The BLADE Group

Usability Test Report



*Graduate Student Usability Testing
of the Humanities and Technical
Communication (HTC) Web Site*



Executive Summary

Introduction

The BLADE Group recently conducted usability tests on the revised Web pages of the Humanities and Technical Communication (HTC) department <<http://www2.spsu.edu/htc/home/index.htm>> at Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU). Usability testing improves the ease of use of a product. There are many tangible benefits, including cost savings in updating, support, and training. Highly regarded usability consultants Joseph Dumas and Ginny Redish also identify an intangible benefit of usability testing; an organization benefits by enhancing its reputation—but only if the feedback is positive.

The purpose of the HTC site usability testing was to determine:

- Whether or not the site easily and quickly provides prospective graduate students with specific and thorough information about the HTC program
- Users' overall knowledge and perception of the program before and after reviewing the HTC site
- Users' overall perception of the redesigned HTC Web site

The BLADE Group's first step was to conduct a heuristic evaluation of the HTC site. The evaluation helped determine which aspects of the site to test (scenarios) and what changes to make to the Web pages during the course of the testing.

The usability test scenarios asked participants to find the following information:

- Admission requirements
- Graduation requirements
- Programs of study
- Class hours
- Class content

Throughout the course of this very specific testing, the BLADE Group learned about general features of the site, such as navigation and organization.



Participants

The BLADE Group developed a narrowly defined profile of the user required to conduct discount usability testing. Users must hold a Bachelor's degree in a communications-related field; be a knowledgeable, experienced computer user; regularly use the Web for at least six months; have an interest in continuing their education; work for at least a year in technical communication, and never have applied to SPSU's graduate program.

Actions Taken

Two sets of changes were made to the HTC pages. The BLADE Group made the initial change before the tolerant user, who is the first person to run through the test. During the course of the first usability test, it is not uncommon to stop and restart the procedure. This process requires more tolerance and patience of the user.

The BLADE Group made the following changes:

1. The first change was to modify the link to the Writing Program button. If the user clicked on that particular button, "under construction" would appear—the rationale being that HTC's Writing Program is only applicable to undergraduate students who are preparing to take the Regents' Exam.
2. On the Prospective Students, Current Students, and Peers and Professionals, the BLADE Group added hypertext links to correspond to the frame navigation buttons in the left-hand column. This change was initiated due to the tolerant user's attempts to click on the topics as if they were navigation links.
3. In the Writing Program, the "under construction" was changed to an introductory paragraph explaining the purpose of the Writing Program. Again, based on the tolerant user's confusion during site navigation, the "under construction" message was eliminated.
4. The navigation button that read TCOM was changed to Programs since TCOM is a term unfamiliar to anyone not enrolled in the Humanities and Technical Communication program. Also, the BLADE Group believed a more specific label would indicate to users that this particular link leads to pages with details of the Bachelor's and Master's programs.

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These changes are reflected on the following Web page which was used for testing and reporting: <http://www2.spsu.edu/htc/ut1/index.htm>.

Findings

The usability test findings are grouped in three headings: favorable, local, and global.

Favorable findings include:

- The HTC site includes an extensive amount of comprehensive information.
- There are no major navigational or link errors.
- The information included in the mouseovers is helpful when users take the time to read it.

Most of the global findings concerned content, navigation, and terminology. Specific findings include:

- Overall HTC Web site is designed around the department's hierarchy of information rather than the Web user's need to find information about the HTC program. Therefore, users seemed confused as to where to find graduate student information.
- Acronyms, abbreviations, and unclear terminology were sometimes confusing to the user. It slowed users down and some users seemed unclear about references filled with abbreviations. Examples include TCOM, MSTPC, HTC and Peers.
- There are possible marketing opportunities for HTC to utilize, which may be missed today. The opportunities include:
 - Marketing the Writing Program to all undergraduate students.
 - Advertise distance learning courses and degrees available to professionals interested in continuing their education.
 - Identify the fact that the GRE is not required for admission into the HTC graduate program.
 - Show the options (Tracks of Study) currently available for students who enroll in the Humanities and Technical Communication program.

Most of the local findings concerned content and concept. Specific findings include:



- Users had problems finding the requested information due to the volume of information on a page. Because users scanned pages, important information such as the number of hours required to graduate and the required courses was overlooked on text-heavy screens of information.
- Some users did not read the mouse overs. However, the users who took the time to read the mouse overs, made the correct selection to complete the scenario.

Recommendations

Based on the test findings and observations, the BLADE Group developed the following recommendations. Short-term recommendations address local issues. Long-term recommendations address global issues.

Short-term:

- Add an index or site map
- Add an introduction page to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery and Virtual Tool Museum
- Make the mouseover information permanent
- Emphasize visual design by adding white space, using more tables, utilizing bulleted lists, and boldfacing important terms and headings.

Long-term

- Organize the information by undergraduate and graduate information
- Add links to relevant administrative information
- Add a search function.

A Web site that is consistent, predictable, and organized in the users' language and by users' tasks is the ultimate goal of usability testing. The BLADE Group respectfully submits this comprehensive report of usability testing on the Humanities and Technical Communication Web site.



Usability Test Report

*Graduate Student Usability Testing on the
Humanities and Technical Communication
(HTC) Web Site*

Introduction

Report Overview

This report contains the following information:

- Introduction – explains the purpose of the usability test, provides an overview of the Web site, includes changes made by the BLADE Group (why and when), including screen captures
- Test Plan – describes the test plan and procedures, identifies the project goals, user profile information, scenarios used for testing and includes the test schedule
- Results – includes results of the time to task and user ratings by scenario
- Findings – explains the global, local, and favorable findings
- Recommendations – lists recommendations based on the testing as well as suggestions for future testing
- Appendices A – F– contains complete appendix for each user who participated in the usability testing, including a user overview, consent form, pre-test questionnaire, pre-task questionnaire, post-task questionnaire, scenario responses, post-test questionnaire, and the logger transcript
- Appendix G - contains the original Test Plan
- Appendix H - includes the BLADE Group Heuristic Evaluation
- Appendix I - includes the Rollout Checklist followed for this project

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Purpose

This usability test was designed to test the graduate portion of the newest Humanities and Technical Communication (HTC) Web site from Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta, Georgia. The test sought to:

- establish whether or not the site easily and quickly provides prospective graduate students with specific and thorough information about the HTC program
- determine the overall perception of the program before and after reviewing the site
- determine the overall perception of the site.

Overview of the Web Site

The following are facts about the Humanities and Technical Communication (HTC) Web site:

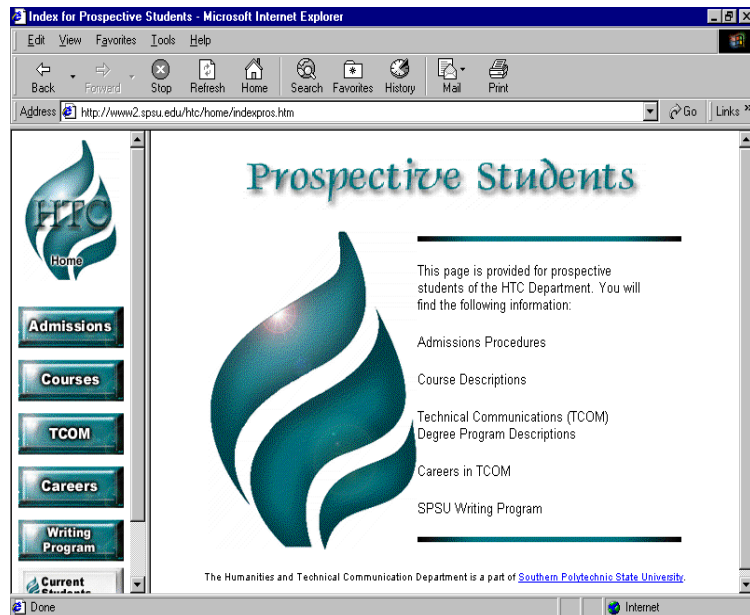
- it is an academic department, which is linked from the main Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU) Web site
- there are no guidelines established by the University regarding standards to be used in Web page design and navigation so consistency between SPSU and HTC pages was not tested.



As part of this project, the BLADE Group made preliminary requested changes to the HTC Web site at the beginning of the usability test. The following change was made on February 26, 2000 prior to the initial walkthrough.

Because the Writing Program is designed for undergraduate students preparing for the Regents' Exam, the BLADE Group changed the link to the Writing Program to show "under construction."

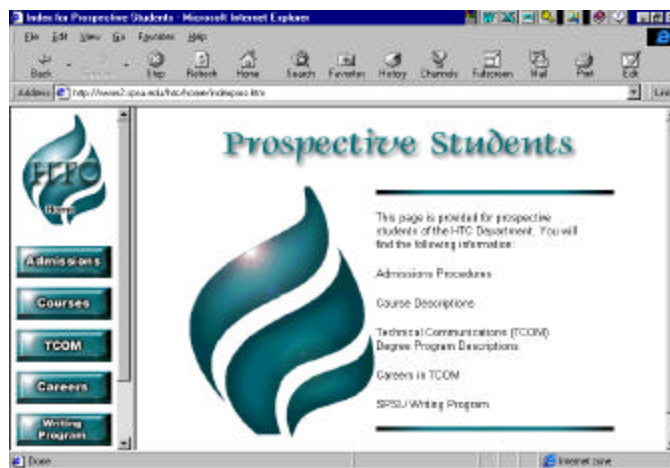
When a user clicked on the Writing Program, an "under construction" message and icon displayed



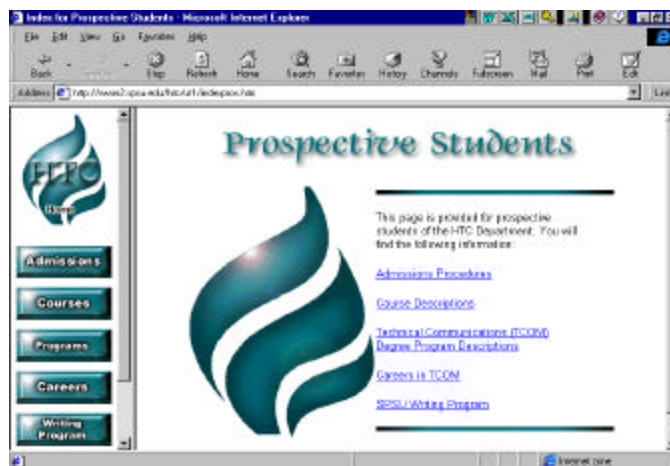
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A second set of changes were made based on our initial walkthrough comments. The three changes were:

Change 1 - In an effort to facilitate navigation, extended descriptions were made into hyperlinks.



The original screen without the links on the extended descriptions

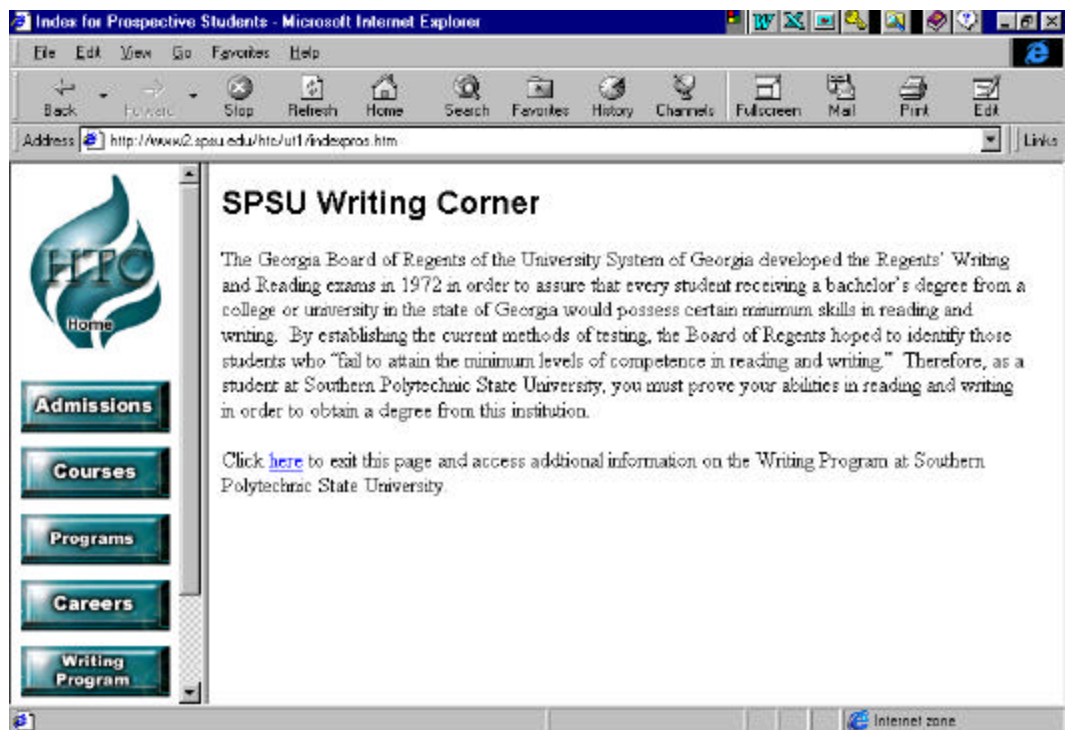


The revised screen with the links on the extended descriptions



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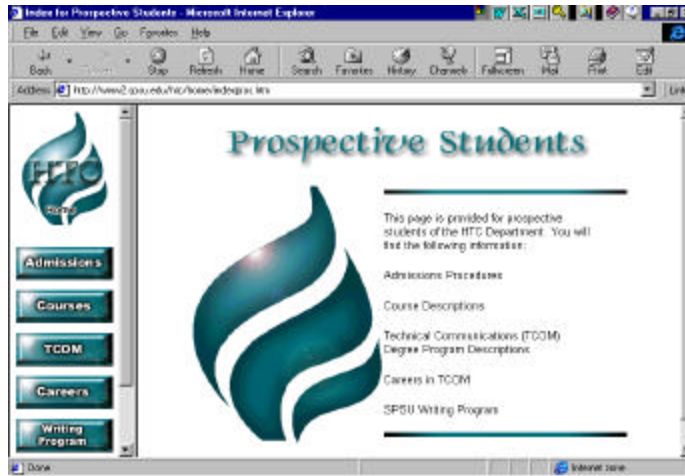
Change 2 - To clarify the purpose and target market of the Writing Program, an introductory page was added.



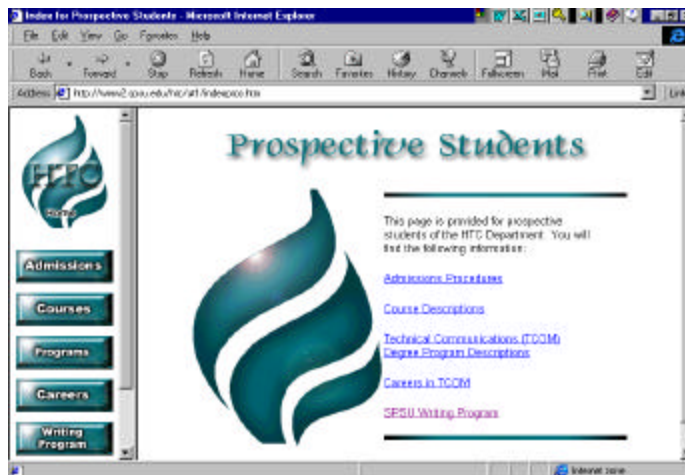


Change 3 - To better explain the link from the TCOM button, the button title was changed to read “Program.”

The original screen with the TCOM button



The revised screen with the Programs button



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Description of Test Plan and Procedures

Overview

This section of the Report provides:

- an overview of the actual test plan conducted
- user profile and screening information
- test schedule
- quantitative results compiled from the time to task activities
- quantitative results from written responses.

Goals

The original goals in testing the graduate students on the Humanities and Technical (HTC) Web site were to determine the ease or difficulty of locating the following graduate information:

- admission requirements
- graduation requirements
- programs of study
- class hours
- class content
- job placement
- faculty experience (option activity if needed).



User Profile

The User Profile was designed to focus on users who:

- received a Bachelor's degree in a communications-related field
- do not have a Master's Degree in technical communications
- are not currently studying technical communications in school
- have an interest in a career that emphasizes communications such as writing and Web design
- are interested in continuing their education
- have at least one year of work experience in professional writing, e.g., producing newsletters, developing multimedia, writing proposals, developing marketing brochures, etc.
- use a PC in a Win '95 environment
- perform online searches of multiple sites for at least 2 hours each week, e.g., business, news, sports, academic, etc.
- have at least 6 months' experience accessing the Internet
- are familiar with basic Web navigation such as how to move backward/forward, click on links, and enter a URL
- never applied for admission to a graduate school at Southern Polytechnic State University
- live in the Atlanta-metro area.

Screening Profile

There were five users who participated in this study. In comparing their qualifications against the user profile, the following was found to be true:

- 100% had a Bachelor's degree
- 100% do not have a Master's Degree in technical communication

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- 100% were interested in continuing their education
- 100% had experience with basic navigation such as moving backward/forward, clicking on links, and entering a URL
- 100% had surfed the Web longer than 6 months
- 100% had experience surfing the Web for business and/or personal information; 75% had experience surfing the Web for news; 50% had experience surfing the Web for travel information
- 100% had at least one year's experience in at least two of the following categories: producing newsletters, writing proposals, training materials, multimedia, brochures, designing graphics and writing memos
- 100% had experience in a Win '95 environment
- 100% were interested in a career in writing, Web design, etc.
- 100% had not previously applied for a graduate program at Southern Polytechnic State University
- 100% lived within driving distance of Southern Polytechnic State University.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the screening questionnaire, the following was also found out about the participants:

- 100% indicated they had not surfed the Web for information on academics
- 100% had not made purchases on the Web
- 40% (2 out of 5) were male; (60%) 3 out of 5 were female.

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Scenarios

The following were the scenarios each participant was asked to complete:

Scenario 1 - Beginning at the Southern Polytechnic State University Home Web page, explore the Web site and find any graduate program(s) offered in writing, Web design, etc.

Scenario 2 - Beginning at the HTC Home Web page, find possible careers available to you after completing the program.

Scenario 3 - Beginning at the HTC Home Web page, find the admissions requirements, 3 required courses to complete the program and the number of hours required to graduate from this program.

Scenario 4 - Beginning at the HTC Home Web page, find 3 courses in the program that interest you.

Scenario 5 - Continuing from Scenario 4, which graduation option do you think you would select (if you were currently enrolled in this program)?

Scenario 6 (optional scenario) - Beginning at the HTC Home Web page, review the faculty experience.

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Test Procedures

The testing of the graduate information on the HTC Web site consisted of five scenarios with one optional activity available should time permit. In each of the scenarios, the user was requested to find certain information, write down his/her answer and then call the Help Desk to signal his/her completion. The logger completed a log of all actions and comments. His/her time to complete was noted for each task.

There were seven questionnaires completed by each user. Each original completed questionnaire can be found in the Appendix for each user. They were:

Questionnaire Title	Purpose	When Given
Pre-Screening Questionnaire	Select users who fit the profile	Completed before user was selected as test candidate
Pre-Test Questionnaire	Determine their knowledge and interest in this Graduate program	Completed at the lab before the usability test commenced
Post-Task Questionnaire	Obtain feedback after completing scenarios	Completed at the lab after scenarios 1, 2, 3 and 5
Post-Test Questionnaire	Obtain overall impressions after using the pages and finding the information	Completed at the lab after completing scenario 5

Test Schedule

Listed below are the dates and begin/end times for each user. The tolerant user was selected as the first person to run through the test who agreed to tolerate interruptions and, possibly, not a perfect testing environment. The pilot participant is the first person to “officially” test the Web site.

Date	Begin	End	Subject
3/6/00	5:30 PM	6:30 PM	Tolerant User
3/13/00	5:30 PM	6:30 PM	Pilot Test
3/27/00	8:45 PM	9:45 PM	User #1
4/3/00	5:30 PM	6:30 PM	User #2
4/8/00	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	User #3
4/10/00	5:30 PM	6:30 PM	User #4

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Quantitative Results

Overview

This section of the Report provides:

- a narrative description of each scenario
- an explanation of the task to be completed by the user with each scenario
- a recap of each user and his/her time to task by scenario
- a recap of the completion success of each task by scenario
- recap and comparison of pre-test and post-test responses.

When you review this section of the report, the ratings identified for each scenario are based on a scale of 1-5. An explanation of the scale is below:

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|---|---------------|
| 1 | none |
| 2 | moderate |
| 3 | average |
| 4 | above average |
| 5 | high. |

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Scenario 1

Narrative - Beginning at the Southern Polytechnic State University Home Web Page, explore the Web site and find any graduate program(s) offered in writing, Web design, etc.

Task - Write down the name(s) of the program(s).

User	Time (minutes)	Completed
Pilot Test	4	yes
User #1	11	no
User #2	5	yes
User #3	6	yes
User #4	12	no
Average Time	7.6	n/a
% Completion	n/a	3/5 (60%)

Ratings - The following were the ratings submitted on the post-task questionnaire:

Asked to Rate:	Rating
Navigation	3.75
Able to find information	2.5
Level of organization	3.5
Appeal of the site	3.0

(1=none 2=moderate 3=average 4=above average 5=high)

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Scenario 2

Narrative - Beginning at the Humanities and Technical Communication (HTC) Home Page, find possible careers available to you after completing the program.

Task - Write down three potential careers that interested them.

User	Time (minutes)	Completed
Pilot Test	8	no
User #1	6	yes
User #2	1	yes
User #3	4	yes
User #4	1	yes
Average Time	4.0	n/a
% Completion	n/a	4/5 (80%)

Ratings - The following were the ratings submitted on the post-task questionnaire:

Asked to Rate:	Rating
Navigation	4.2
Able to find information	4.2
Level of organization	3.8
Appeal of the site	3.6

(1=none 2=moderate 3=average 4=above average 5=high)

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Scenario 3

Narrative - Beginning at the Humanities and Technical Communications (HTC) Home Page, find the:

- admissions requirements
- three required courses to complete the program
- number of hours required to graduate from this program.

Task - Write down the above information.

User	Time (minutes)	Completed
Pilot Test	9	no
User #1	10	yes
User #2	7	no
User #3	5	yes
User #4	5	yes
Average Time	7.2	n/a
% Completion	n/a	2/5 (40%)

Ratings - The following were the ratings submitted on the post-task questionnaire:

Asked to Rate:	Rating
Navigation	3.8
Able to find information	3.8
Level of organization	3.8
Appeal of the site	3.4

(1=none 2=moderate 3=average 4=above average 5=high)

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Scenario 4

Narrative - Beginning at the Humanities and Technical Communications (HTC) Home Page, find three courses in the program that interest you.

Task - Write down the three course titles.

User	Time (minutes)	Completed
Pilot Test	2	yes
User #1	4	yes
User #2	3	yes
User #3	6	yes
User #4	5	yes
Average Time	4.0	n/a
% Completion	n/a	5/5 (100%)

Ratings - A post-task survey was not completed after Scenario 4. A final post-task survey was completed after Scenario 5.

Asked to Rate:	Rating
Navigation	n/a
Able to find information	n/a
Level of organization	n/a
Appeal of the site	n/a

(1=none 2=moderate 3=average 4=above average 5=high)

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Scenario 5

Narrative - Beginning at the Humanities and Technical Communication (HTC) Home Page, which graduation option do you think you would select if you were currently enrolled in this program?

Task - Review the three options for graduation and write down the one they preferred.

User	Time (minutes)	Completed
Pilot Test	2	yes
User #1	6	yes
User #2	1	no
User #3	2	yes
User #4	5	yes
Average Time	3.2	n/a
% Completion	n/a	4/5 (80%)

Ratings - The following were the ratings submitted on the post-task questionnaire:

Asked to Rate:	Rating
Navigation	4.5
Able to find information	4.5
Level of organization	4.5
Appeal of the site	4.5

(1=none 2=moderate 3=average 4=above average 5=high)

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Pre-Test and Post-Test Responses

Users were asked to complete the same questionnaire before they began their usability testing and immediately following their completion of all activities. These responses are based on the following scale:

- 1 none
- 2 moderate
- 3 average
- 4 above average
- 5 high.

The results are:

Question	Avg. Pre-Test	Avg. Post-Test
How much knowledge do you have of the TCOM Master's program?	1.4	4.2
Rate the likelihood you would pursue a request for information about a program of this type.	3.2	3.0
Rate the likelihood you would seek enrollment in this type of program.	2.5	2.0

These questions provided a view of the users before they began their usability testing (average pre-test information) versus their view after completing the usability testing (average post-test information). The numbers provided here are averages of all responses.

The BLADE Group was encouraged at the leap in their knowledge regarding the Master's program after they had completed the testing. As is evidenced by some responses from the users, the site contains large amounts of good information.

When reviewing the other two ratings the BLADE Group cannot provide analysis on these until further study can be done to substantiate the findings.



Findings

Overview

This section of the Report provides:

- steps used to compile the findings
- keys to assist with reading this section, including an explanation of the categories used to divide findings, the differences between global, local and favorable ratings, and severity ratings
- favorable findings
- global findings
- local findings.

Raw Data Handling

Once all the usability testing was completed, all user response sheets and logger sheets were compiled and distributed to all team members. From the raw data, each BLADE Group team member came up with a list of his or her usability issues involving any concerns or considerations of the user. Next, the team conducted a top-down analysis of the issues and categorized the issues by findings based on the following groupings. The final list of findings presented in this report reflects the combined effort of all team members.



Categories of Findings

To begin to organize the usability issues, the BLADE GROUP first categorized all the issues by findings. The categories of findings are:

Navigation	How to get from point A to point B (menu, icons, keyboard strokes, etc.).
Feedback	What the system tells the user (dialog boxes, time to complete tasks).
Visual Design	The look of the screen, the icons or the help (e.g., do radio buttons look like buttons).
Consistency	External (from program to program) and internal (within the program).
Terminology	The words the user would use.
Context	Not a usability problem, but shows up in testing (e.g., bugs, marketing issues).

Types of Findings

Once each finding was sorted using the list above, the BLADE Group was able to further delineate findings using these categories:

Global	A global finding indicates a major problem throughout the product or, in this specific case, the Web site. A global finding affects many aspects of the user interface.
Local	A local finding consists of a minor problem that can be fixed easily or need not be fixed at all.
Favorable	A favorable finding indicates a recorded response identifying a positive finding during the testing.



Severity Ratings

For each global and local finding, the BLADE Group applied a severity rating based on the following descriptions.

- Level 1** Problems prevent completion of a task.
- Level 2** Problems create significant delay and frustration.
- Level 3** Problems have a minor effect on usability.
- Level 4** Problems are more subtle and point to an enhancement that can be added in the future.

Organization of the Findings

To organize the findings, the following topics are discussed:

Finding	Provides a narrative explaining the finding.
Severity	Provides assigned severity level determined by the BLADE Group.
Cause(s)	Specific examples identifying example(s) of the finding.
User Comments	Actual user quotes taken from the tapes and recorded transcripts during the user testing. Captures qualitative results of the testing.
Test Results	Compiled, quantitative results to back up the finding being discussed.
Short-Term Remedy	Possible “quick-fix” option for owner of site to address finding being discussed.
Long-Term Remedy	Possible expansive option for owner of site to address finding being discussed.

Short-Term and Long-Term Remedies are grouped into a collective list called Recommendations.

Favorable Findings

<p>#1</p> <p>User Comments</p> <p>Test Results</p>	<p>Users indicated their level of knowledge regarding the Master’s Program in Technical Communication was greatly increased after completing the usability testing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “by viewing several different pages, the information became easier to find” • “spending time in the site can really assist the user in finding relevant information” <p>The average user rating increased from 1.4 to 4.2 when users rated their knowledge of the TCOM Masters Program (before the testing versus after completing the testing).</p>
<p>#2</p> <p>User Comments</p> <p>Test Results</p>	<p>Users commented on the thoroughness of the information contained on the Humanities and Technical Communication’s Web page.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Video is pretty hot...graphic design...Web page authoring ... a lot of people are getting Web pages so that’s good” • “This is a good page (list of courses) that tells prospective students what is offered in the program. I’m sure there are plenty more” • “The part about studies is good” <p>The average user rating increased from 1.4 to 4.2 when users rated their knowledge of the TCOM Master’s Program.</p>

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Favorable Findings, continued

#3	No major errors occurred when users were testing the page.
User Comments	There were no specific comments made regarding this issue but the BLADE Group found this impressive.
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100% of the time, users linked to the correct pages without any HTTP errors.
#4	The information contained in the mouse overs was effective in directing users when they read it.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “jump right out at you”• “I just noticed the pop-ups ... that’s good information”
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100% of the time, users linked to the correct pages without any HTTP errors.



Global Findings

Navigation	Users found requested information through a trial-and-error approach. Users did not see an obvious path to find specified information within the Humanities and Technical Communications (HTC) site.
Severity	Level 1
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall Web site organization of prospective students, current students, and peers and professionals did not provide a clear division for the target audience. The site is organized by the department's hierarchy of information and not by the user's need to find information.• There is no search function within the HTC Web Pages.• There is no site map for user's reference.• Link buttons and terms were abbreviated and may not have been clear or understood by all users.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm just clicking, hoping to stumble on some information"• "I'll try to find where I was before...I experience most of my success by surfing, clicking around trying to find information"• "I'm going to look at the front page again to make sure I didn't miss anything (pause) well, I don't seem to see anything"• "Perhaps the graduate program needs to be clearly marked"• "I just noticed the links (frame navigation buttons) on the left" (User has nearly completed the first two scenarios.)



Global Findings, continued

Test Results

- 6 out of 25 (24%) of all answers to the scenarios rendered incomplete or incorrect information from the users.
- 2 of the 5 scenarios (40%) of the activities took more than 7.2 minutes to locate the information.
- At least one straight path was not obvious in some of the scenarios and for all the scenarios, the users took a long time to find the information.

Short-Term Remedy

- Add an index or site map.
- Expand the link descriptions, include more relevant links in the middle of and at the bottom of pages.

Long-Term Remedy

- Separate and clearly distinguish graduate and undergraduate information.
- Use parallel hierarchy for both graduate and undergraduate page organization.
- Add a search function.



Global Findings, continued

Feedback	Some links did not match users' expectations; users expressed uncertainty regarding information contained in these links. In addition, several users were confused about the separation of graduate and undergraduate information.
Severity	Level 2
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users received minimal information about pages from corresponding links.• Links and page headings did not clearly distinguish graduate and undergraduate information.• Users were unable to find general administrative information such as tuition costs or specific information about evening courses.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Clicks on link to Electronic Gallery) "I'm just exploring ... there's no reason why I am here..."• Clicks on Virtual tool Museum then hits back button• "Doesn't clearly specifically say graduate ... I will remember where it is in case I'm wrong"• (Looks at undergraduate courses and thinks they are required graduate courses) "English 2010, English 1101 and 1102 ..."
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 out of 5 (40%) selected the Electronic Gallery or Virtual Tool Museum when searching for information requested in a scenario.• 100% of the time, users who read the mouseovers on the home page of Humanities and Technical Communication, made the correct button selection (Prospective Student) to complete their scenario.• 2 out of 5 (40%) read the mouseovers and had the lowest time to task (1 minute versus 6 minutes for non-readers).

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Global Findings, continued

Short-Term Remedy

- Make links more descriptive and specific.
- Make the current mouseover information permanent to direct users more quickly.

Long-Term Remedy

- Separate and clearly distinguish graduate and undergraduate information.
- Use parallel hierarchy for both graduate and undergraduate page organization.



Global Findings, continued

Visual Design	Users expressed reluctance about reading a large amount of text when trying to locate information. Users also scrolled excessively when trying to locate information.
Severity	Level 2
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some pages contain several screens of text.• Many pages contain only a small amount of white space.• Pages contain few indicators of important information.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "...admissions requirements...I don't see it in the first heading so I may have to read all of it...(sigh)...I'm scanning the Web site for the word 'requirements'...I can be lazy when I look at a Web page...I'm forced to read it now"• "...too much information on a page..."• "...I'll see if I can find the rest down this page..."• "...this is a Web site full of information, but not real exciting to look at..."
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not locate the required courses (versus general courses).• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not identify how many hours were required for the program.• 1 out of 5 (20%) was confused on whether admission requirements included taking the GRE.
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight significant information with bolded or enlarged text.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit text to 1.5 times the screen to hold users' attention and prevent excessive scrolling.• Incorporate more white space in page design.• Place information in tables whenever possible.



Global Findings, continued

Consistency	Users experienced inconsistent appearance, layout, color and information presentation when linking between the Humanities and Technical Communication Page (HTC), the Electronic Gallery, the Virtual Tool Museum and the Writing Program.
Severity	Level 1
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Links to the Writing Program, Virtual Tool Museum and Electronic Gallery contain minimal information about corresponding pages.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I guess I’m getting an overview...no specific details”• (Hits Electronic Gallery link searching for career information)”...Doesn’t seem like where I should be”• (Hits Writing Program link)”...I’m not sure if you can major in this or just take various courses, or is this considered a major?”• (Hits Writing Program link looking for required hours)”...no, that’s something else”
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 out of 5 (80%) selected the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery or Virtual Tool Museum when searching for information requested in a scenario.
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add introductory pages for the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum, explaining each section’s purpose.• Make links to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum more specific to each section’s purpose.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reconsider the location of the links to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum on the Humanities and Technical Communication page.



Global Findings, continued

Terminology	Users experienced reduced clarity due to the use of acronyms and jargon specific to this school and department.
Severity	Level 1
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audience not familiar with specific terms such as HTC, SPSU, TCOM, MSTPC.• the following terms can mean something different to each user: guidelines, procedures, prospective, current, tracks of study, peers, etc.• Writing Program was mistaken as the <u>graduate</u> program that focuses on all forms of communication.• Users crossed over between undergraduate and graduate information and were not aware they changed.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I’m going to Peers because I am looking for careers that might interest me.”• “I thought I was in graduate...looking for graduate.”• “seeing the prerequisites...assuming only three...this is confusing, what does it mean?”• “I don’t know what TCOM is” (Same comment made by two users.)



Global Findings, continued

Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 out of 5 (60%) of the users selected “Peers and Professionals” when searching for careers in Technical Communication (thinking “peers” was their peer not faculty peers).• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not locate the required courses (versus general courses).• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not identify how many hours were required for the program.• 1 out of 5 (20%) was confused on whether admission requirements included taking the GRE.• 2 out of 5 (40%) believed they were looking at graduate information when in fact they were looking at undergraduate information.• 4 out of 5 (80%) looked first in Courses for required courses, which is instead under MSTPC, which is under Program (or TCOM on the original site).
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include and repeat definitions of all acronyms on each page.• Do not use acronyms or jargon in links.• Write for audiences who do not have experience with technical communications or Southern Polytechnic State University.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separate and clearly distinguish between graduate and undergraduate information.• Use parallel hierarchy for both the graduate and undergraduate page organization.



Global Findings, continued

Context	Possible marketing opportunities are missed because the programs or information are hidden.
Severity	Level 3
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Writing Program is not easy to find but all Georgia undergraduates are required to take it.• There is no information which explains the opportunities for distance learning.• The Tracks of Study explains the graduate program areas of concentration but was seldom selected by the users.• This program does not require the GRE but it is not documented.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Hits links to Writing Program) "...let's see what this is..."• (User purses lips) "...nothing here about taking the GRE; maybe the GRE is not required..."
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0 out of 5 (0%) of the users checked the link "Tracks of Study"
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move the Writing Program to a more prominent position that is easy to find from the school's home page.• Provide information on the distance learning opportunities.• Make the link to the Tracks of Study more prominent.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design a marketing strategy.



Local Findings

Navigation	Users had trouble finding the total number of hours required to complete the program on the Master of Science Program Page and the required courses.
Severity	Level 3
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users tended to scan the pages and overlook information in the process.• Some pages are text heavy and require users to scroll through several screens, increasing the chance that important information may be overlooked.• There is no explanation or way to draw users to the link to the Tracks of Study.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I’m going to try programs...(clicks on the MSTPC link) it talks about different plans again. Not immediately apparent what the three courses are.”• “Hours seem to depend on the options (A, B or C)...no, I take that back.”• (User furrows eyebrows) “I’m seeing some information but I don’t see the required hours.”• “I just noticed the pop ups (mouse.overs).”
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None of the users found the Tracks of Study, identifying the professional, graphics and technical options.• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not determine how many hours were required to complete the program.
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange text so it is easier to read. Use more headings, bulleted lists, and hypertext links.• Make mouse overs permanent to direct users more quickly.• Add more prominent links to Tracks of Study.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separate and clearly distinguish graduate and undergraduate information.• Use parallel hierarchy for both graduate and undergraduate page organization.• Add a search function.



Local Findings, continued

Feedback	Users selected links to the Writing Program, Virtual Tool Museum, and Electronic Gallery, although these pages did not relate to the scenarios. Users expressed uncertainty about what they would find on these pages.
Severity	Level 2
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Links to the Writing Program, Virtual Tool Museum and Electronic Gallery contain minimal information about corresponding pages.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "...let me try the Electronic Gallery ... and another screen comes up that doesn't look like where I should be"• clicks on Virtual Museum, hits back button
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 out of 5 (40%) selected the Electronic Gallery or Virtual Tool Museum when searching for information requested in a scenario, although these pages did not relate to the scenarios.
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add introductory pages for the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum, explaining each section's purpose.• Make links to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum more specific to each section's purpose.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reconsider the location of the links to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery, and Virtual Tool Museum on the Humanities and Technical Communication page.



Local Findings, continued

Visual Design	Users complained about having to read a large amount of text on the page containing course descriptions.
Severity	Level 3
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Page contains a large amount of text.• Page contains a small amount of white space.• No clear indication of which courses are required.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (looks for required courses, scrolls down page) "...I'll see if I can find the rest down on this page..."• "...I guess you have to read all of it...I'm scanning the page but I'm forced to read it all .. don't see the required courses."
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not locate the required courses (versus general courses).• 2 out of 5 (40%) could not identify how many hours were required for the program.
Short-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight significant information with bolded or enlarged text.
Long-Term Remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit text to 1.5 times the screen.• Incorporate more white space in page design.• Place course information in a table.

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Local Findings, continued

Terminology	There are several pages which have vague terms or jargon which were difficult to decipher.
Severity	Level 2
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home Humanities and Technical Communications (HTC) page used terms prospective, current and peers which can be confusing and misleading.• The acronym MSTPC links to graduate requirements.• Tracks of Study looks like the description of the page, not the link that leads to areas of concentration.• Courses does not link to required course information.• the link headings of Guidelines and Procedures were unclear.• TCOM was an unknown term.• Writing Program sounded all-inclusive and essential.
User Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Two users commented)...“I don’t know what TCOM is.”• “I’m just clicking and hoping to stumble on some information.”
Test Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 out of 5 (80%) of the users searched Courses for course information found under MSTPC.• 0 out of 5 (0%) of the users checked the link “Tracks of Study.”• 2 out of 5 (40%) looked for careers under Peers and Professionals.

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Local Findings, continued

Short-Term Remedy

- Rename “Tracks of Study” and draw attention to the information.
- Replace TCOM and MSTPC with more explanatory terms.
- Rename the Writing Program and explain.
- Use more descriptive terms than procedures and guidelines.

Long-Term Remedy

- Separate and clearly distinguish graduate and undergraduate information.
- Use parallel hierarchy for both graduate and undergraduate page organization.



Recommendations

The BLADE Group provided a short-term and a long-term remedy for each finding. The following is a compiled list which groups the findings into a few categories.

Short-Term Recommendations

- Add an index or site map.
- Add an introduction page to the Writing Program, Electronic Gallery and Virtual Tool Museum.
- Make the mouse over information permanent.
- Emphasize visual design by adding white space, using more tables, utilize bulleted lists, and boldface important terms and headings.

Long-Term Recommendations

- Organize the information by undergraduate and graduate information.
- Add links to relevant administrative information.
- Add a search function.

Suggested Future Testing

It is the recommendation of the BLADE Group that continued usability testing be done on this Web site to assure it is consistent, predictable and organized in the users' language and by users' tasks.