

Heuristic Evaluation Report

ODU History Department webpage

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Source of Report:

<https://www.odu.edu/historydept>

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Introduction

My group decided to do a heuristics elevation of the website for the history department at ODU.

We want to ensure that user's interested in pursuing higher education within ODU's history department will be able to find the information they need without any inconvenience. We use the ten usability heuristics for the evaluation which are:

- Visibility of systems status
- Match between system and the real world
- User control and freedom
- Consistency and standards
- Error prevention
- Recognition rather than recall
- Flexibility and efficiency of use
- Aesthetic and minimalist design
- Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors
- Help and documentation.

We are using this to see how the usability of the website is for everyone. We will decide the areas that the website excels in and the areas that they need to improve. We will also decide how they can change their website to make it better.

Methods

The method that we will use was that we first go through the website to see how easy it is to navigate the website. Then we navigate the website with the list of the ten usability heuristics to elevate the functionality of ODU's history departments' website. If usability issues have been

identified, they will be placed in a table and assigned a severity rating. After identifying the issues and assigning their severity rating, recommendations will be made to help fix or improve the problem.

Procedures

Using Nielsen's 10 usability heuristics, our group evaluated the ODU History department's website. Evaluation consisted of looking at each heuristic individually and determining how well the website managed each one. Severity ratings were assigned to the heuristic issues that were discovered, these ratings would be based on these factors:

- The impact of the issue and its inconvenience
- The frequency of the issue

The severity ratings will be on a five point scale, it will suggest how severe an issue is and how urgent the issue should be addressed:

- 1 - No clear usability issue
- 2 - Cosmetic issue, fix whenever is convenient
- 3 - Minor usability issue; low priority fix
- 4 - Major usability issue; high priority fix
- 5 - Extreme usability issue; fix urgently

Materials

The materials that we used were the website for the history department.

<https://www.odu.edu/historydept>

We also used the website that has the ten usability heuristics on it.

Findings and Recommendations

Our group's evaluation of ODU's department of history's website did not find too many usability issues. The website is very straightforward and does not overload the user with unnecessary information. The website has different pages that can be clicked through and each one gives the user a solid idea of what they are looking at. An undergraduate and graduate program shortcut buttons are placed on the department's homepage which can provide an experienced user quick access to what they want to get to.

None of the issues that we did find on the website managed to reach an extreme usability issue, there was only one that was deemed to be a high priority fix and that was the Directory. The issues we found are described in the table below with the severity ratings beside them.

Primary search bar for department website	3
Resource page seems lacking	2
Faculty bookshelf	3
Directory shortcut	4

(Severity Rating: 5- fix urgently, 4- Major Priority, 3- Minor Priority, 2- Fix when convenient, 1- No clear issue)

Finding 1

No primary search bar for the Department's website

The website does not have it's own search bar to find information primarily for the Department of History's website. It's a universal search bar for the entire Old Dominion Website, it works but this can cause searches to be cluttered with irrelevant information the user might not need.

- Violates:
- Severity: 3
- Fix: Implement a search bar primarily for the department's website.

Finding 2

Resource page holds little information

The other pages within the department's website contain a good amount of information until you check the Resources page. In comparison to the other pages on the site it seems very bare.

- Violates: Consistency and Standards
- Severity: 2
- Fix: Brief information of what each link consists of and what it's primary purpose is.

Finding 3

Faculty Bookshelf

Each page of the website stays within the department's website except for the Faculty bookshelf page. When the user clicks on the faculty bookshelf tab, the page loads to an entirely different website. This can cause a slight hindrance to those who may not be familiar with the website.

- Violates: Flexibility and Efficiency of use
- Severity: 3
- Fix: Load the site onto a different tab in the user's internet browser

Finding 4

Directory Shortcut

The website has a directory shortcut placed on all pages of the website. When the user clicks on it it will take them to the Faculty page.

- Violates: Help and documentation
- Severity: 4
- Fix: The directory shortcut should load to a more straightforward page with contact information available to you at first glance without having to scroll through a page.

Discussion

In this evaluation we tried to find issues that could possibly inconvenience or confuse the users of this website. Our group wanted to ensure that anyone looking into pursuing higher education within the history department would be able to go through the website and find any information they needed without any hindrance.

Because this heuristic evaluation didn't require users it is quite difficult to gain an understanding of what a standard user might feel navigating through the website. Since our group had a clear focus on looking for possible usability issues we were more aware of what to look for. In comparison to a standard user, these issues might not be paid any attention or may

not cause any real inconvenience. A future study should be conducted that can make use of a sample navigating the website and evaluating how said sample might view the website.

Conclusion

As an overall conclusion to our heuristic evaluation of Old Dominion University's history department website, we found that when it came to functionality and efficiency, the site was much better than originally expected. There were alterations that could have been made to ensure that the site was easier to navigate. A few of the issues we had found during our evaluation include the lacking of a search bar for a sitewide search, the lacking of information on the resources page of the site, the bookshelf shortcut sending the user to an unfamiliar site within the same tab instead of opening a new one, and finally the directory page which could be easier to navigate to find the contacts one is searching for.

Appendix

Ten usability heuristics

1. Visibility of system status

The design should keep the user informed on what is happening with the department.

2. Match between system and the real world

The website should be in the user's language and should not use words that the user does not know. The website should use only words that users can understand.

3. User control and freedom

There should be an undo button that the user can press if they make a mistake so that they can go back to where they were. The user should have control over what they are doing in the website.

4. Consistency and standards

The website should have different words for situations and actions that mean basically the same thing so that way the user does not get confused.

5. Error prevention

The website should prevent problems from happening on their website.

6. Recognition rather than recall

The website should be designed so that menu items and tabs should be visible and easily accessible.

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

The website should be designed for both novice and experienced users so that they can easily navigate through the website.

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

Make sure that the website is not crowded with too many things and that what is on the website pertains to what the site is about.

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

Error messages should be in a language that the user can understand and can make it where they can fix the error.

10. Help and documentation

There should be access to things or documents that can help them navigate the website better.