

WMU Webmasters' Users Group July 30, 2008

Present: Michael VanPutten, Enrollment Management; Joe Fee, Evaluation Center; Megan Anderson, EUP; Luann Harden, EUP; Nancy Meister, DOSA; Cindy Town, UCTC; Michael Whang, ULIB; Lou Ann Morgan, DigiCenter; Amy Huffman, HR; Alex Aivars, CAS; Lisa Knutson, AE; Deb Withee, COE; Bradley Morgan, OIT; Nancy Kroes, OIT

Mike Elledge, *presenter*

Assistant Director, Accessibility & Usability Center
Michigan State University
<http://usability.msu.edu/default.asp>

Mike Elledge, from the MSU Usability Center generously donated his time to present information about web accessibility and usability to the WUG group. The MSU Center presently has nine computers set up for research, training, web evaluation and testing in a controlled lab setting. Using a combination of internal clients and units, they test web accessibility and evaluate web content. The staff members commonly use wireframes and heuristic reviews based on Jacob Neilson's recommendations for good design.

Usability

The center utilizes focus groups and qualitative examination of web sites for evaluation. A common practice is to use dedicated grad students to take notes during testing. Some common tactics used during evaluation include:

- Ask users what information they think would be helpful to have on the site.
- Find out what paths users use to find information.
- Evaluate the time it takes for users to complete a specific task.
- Evaluate the success/failure of completing tasks.
- Feelings of ease of use or difficulty finding information.
- Bring users back after changes have been made to re-evaluate.

Accessibility

Universities commonly have an accessibility policy in place to serve as a guideline for their web development. It is important to plan ahead to address accessibility, to build in project time to perform usability testing, and to have users test the architecture before building a site.

Some common strategies include:

- Assess electronic forms for accessibility; provide alternative PDF docs
- Use labels that make sense to the user
- Go through an accessibility checklist to evaluate web sites
- Use CSS to build the site
- Check the Dreamweaver preferences to enable accessibility controls
- Use captions and alt tags on photos
- Use "long descriptions" instead of alt tags for descriptions over 22 words

A complete set of Mike Elledge's Powerpoint presentation is available in the other resources area of the WUG Web site: <http://www.wmich.edu/wug/other-resources/>.