

Website Planning

Instructional Analysis

Planning a website takes more than just opening a web development tool and creating pages. It takes planning and organization to create a site that is easy to maintain. For this lesson, participants will learn skills in organizing and planning content for a website to be developed.

The participants will be tenure track faculty who have an interest in creating their own website. Most of the faculty who will attend will have little to no experience in planning or building a website. They will be familiar with using websites as well as using word processing. Faculty will be interested in creating their own site for a number of reasons including professional development and communication with students. Some faculty may have concerns about the difficulty of creating a website or even using a computer. It is critical to identify those faculty as they may benefit the most from learning how to plan a website.

Participants will be involved in several planning tasks that will lead to a website organization on paper. These tasks include writing down website task goals, identifying potential content, and organizing the content areas. This will be followed by a group activity where they will provide feedback on each other's website plan.

Design Rational

For this lesson, the goal is to teach faculty how to plan and organize a website in preparation to create a website. Planning is a critical web publishing skill that is often overlooked by those outside the web community. Johnson states, "One of the most

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important aspects of Web content is how it is organized” (2003, ¶1). Website

organization affects how the website is designed, its findability, and how easy it is to maintain. This is the reason why planning and organizing a website has been separated into its own lesson. Website organization is so important that it can make or break a website.

The other reason that planning and organization has been separated from the website creation is so faculty can walk away from the workshop and be given time to properly plan their website on paper. A short workshop is not enough time to create a fully thought-out website. Faculty need to remember that “You need to stay flexible and creative for a little while, until you work out the overall organization of the application” (Tidwell, 2006, Ch. 2, ¶3). By putting everything on paper prior to opening a web development tool, content ideas and organization can change easily until it is decided the website is ready for development. Without the proper planning and organization, the website can quickly become inflexible and unmanageable. This in turn can affect faculty perception on using a website as a teaching and professional tool.

For the instruction of the lesson, the instruction will be presented in lecture format using PowerPoint with activities. Faculty already have ideas for what they want their website to do, they just need to learn how to focus those ideas into an organization. The informational portion of the lecture will provide them with terminology and concepts they will need in order to participate in the activities. The activities will be broken down into three separate activities designed to focus their ideas and not scare them by how much work it takes to create a good website. Each activity will be increasingly challenging as the focus narrows into a potential website organization.

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The first activity will cast a broad net by asking participants what they want their visitors to be able to do on the site by setting goals and asking what content should be derived from those goals. Goals for both the participant and site visitors help determine what should be included in the content. The second activity builds on the first by asking the participants to organize their goals into content groups. The last activity asks participants to group up and review the proposed website plan. This is where the facilitator should review the proposed plans and provide feedback. Facilitator feedback is the only assessment done in the workshop. This is due to the personal nature of creating a faculty website, who can really say if one organization is right or wrong so long as the information can be easily found by those using the site.

In terms of how long the workshop should run, 45 minutes should be adequate time to visit all the main points. This should give participants enough time to learn the concepts and participate in activities. However as this lesson will be expanded for the project, additional time may be needed. At that point, the lesson should be retested for content and time with the target audience.

Experience as a Designer

As an instructional designer, I found this lesson difficult to design because I was so close to the content of the lesson. I know how I like to plan my websites and how I like to work with clients. This created a bias that which I had to move past before designing the lesson. Further I have been in the business of building websites so long that it took time for me to isolate why I chose the methods of teaching website planning beyond my personal experience.

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Once I was able to move past the bias, I discovered the technology term for organizing a website, information architecture. This opened up a way of looking at website planning that I was both familiar with as well as learning about.

Overall, this lesson will be revised in the future. I feel there are still too many of my bias' within the design. Reviewing additional literature on information architecture will help present a more balanced approach within the design. I also need to anticipate incorporating aspects of how to plan for making the site accessible per the rules faculty must follow for instructional technology in the California State University System. This will feed into the different content types faculty will need to anticipate they will be using or creating.

Experience as an Instructor

As a web professional, working with people to plan, organize and design a website is something that is second nature to me. I listen to the client, help the focus their needs, identify their potential users, and then take it all into account when organizing their site.

I found putting myself into the role of the instructor difficult because it forced me to present more than my normal five minutes worth of instruction on what I need from the client usually done in a hallway. This role demanded that I teach faculty how to plan a website for themselves. To do this, I had to take my knowledge of how I normally work and break it down into pieces anyone could understand.

I found the first two activities easy to manage since I was not providing any feedback. The first two activities were based on individual ideas for what should be in the participant's website. I found the last activity difficult because it involved a group

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activity where the instructor interacts with the participants providing professional feedback. It was difficult because I needed to make sure that I did not give too much feedback and rewrite the participants website using my development methods.

After the workshop was complete, my participant provided me with some feedback on the handouts as well as praise on how much she learned. Even still I felt that I did not do as well as I could in bringing industry standard information architecture into the workshop. I could see the bias' bleed through the design as well as in the instruction. I will need to find a balance between personal antidotal experience and information architecture design. I will need to look at this in the future, as this lesson will be included in my project as a part of a web development series.

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