Webpage Innovation: Redesigning the GID webpage

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ABSTRACT

The GID award and program are held under the Institute for Innovation and Global Engagement (IIGE), directed by Dr. Divya McMillian, director of the Global Honors Program, along with Lan Allison, the GID administrative specialist and Global Honor Program advisor. We redesigned GID Lab's web page with our innovative design process in this design and research project. In the beginning, LJ Norman, another GID awardee, and I investigated the existing issues of GID Lab's web pages. Then, through a series of surveys and testing with many stakeholders and users, and produced a more efficient, beautiful, and accessible web page design. Our intended goal is to have a functional webpage published by the end of the quarter, but we created a semi-functional PowerPoint wireframe instead at the end.
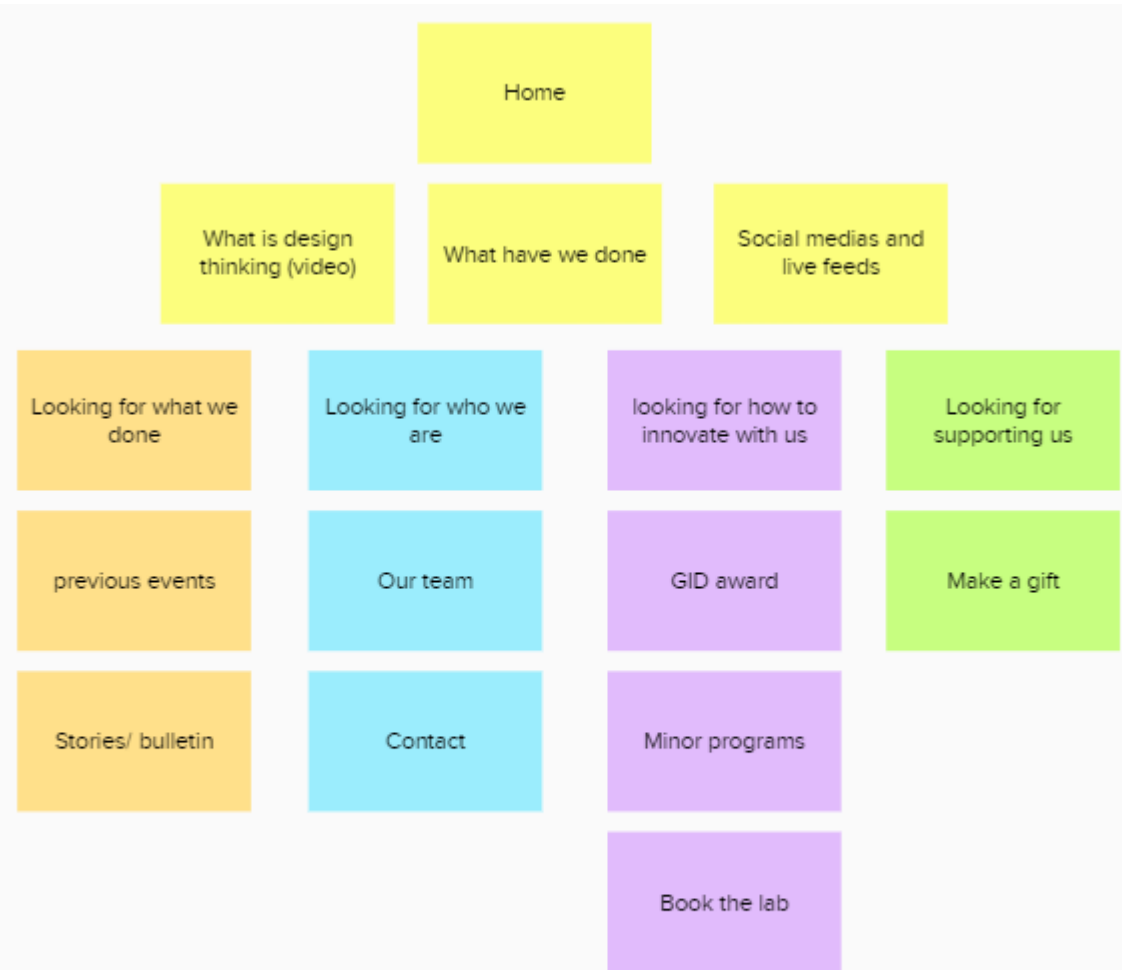
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

With the development of the Internet, the design of web pages has become fancier nowadays. We can often see various web page designs in different places to attract people, but it can easily make us aesthetically tired when there are too many designs. According to my personal experience and some informal statistics, only a tiny portion of most web pages are actually valuable for viewers. However, the design of web pages is not just as simple as throwing all the necessary information on the page. It requires skills from various aspects to make people comfortable and convenient while the creator achieves their goals. For example, a web page that aims at younger generations should be designed rejuvenated, while a web page aimed at elders should be straightforward. In this research, me and my GID team member, LJ Norman, researched redesigning the GID webpage to make it more effective and embellished. This web redesign project aims to improve the accessibility of the GID Lab web page, including better meeting the needs of our sponsors, better providing content that students need, and demonstrating GID Lab's features and experiences. At the same time, this research can better provide ideas for future web design, and hopefully, we will be able to demonstrate our innovative process of redesigning a website.

The previous GID Lab web pages are created and maintained through WordPress and hosted on an external web server provider, limiting our design to a certain extent. In addition, we need to contact our web host frequently to know our development accessibility, but they rarely respond, which delays our design and experience. Therefore, we changed our web design thinking by using wireframe and PowerPoint to implement our design features instead of using the actual backend of the server. The biggest disadvantages of this approach are that we don't know whether some features we designed can be implemented on the web page, and we don't see the development cost. But the advantages are that we can simply and intuitively display our design ideas and use software such as google drive to synchronize corrections and implementations. Meanwhile, due to the re-emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic and intermittent holidays such as Christmas and New Year's Day, we are having a hard time communicating with various technical issues, stakeholders, and faculties. Therefore, we did not complete this project within the autumn quarter since we could not implement it on the webserver. Instead, LJ Norman and I were able to each complete a website mockup via PowerPoint before the quarter ended.

METHOD

Step 1: Know who is using the page and understand their needs

As a college department website, its most significant stakeholder must be the department itself. Therefore, we contacted multiple faculties regarding their expectation of the webpage. Also, we learned the needs of the department sponsors from the GID Lab advisor. From our interviews with them, we know that this website is to introduce GID Lab better, encourage more students or community partners to participate in us, and attract more sponsors to support our department. Therefore, this became our redesign goal for the webpage.

Step2: Completely understand the current page and point out the issue

In order to understand the current website, we completely visited GID Lab's web page and organized the arrangement and content in each web page. We used "Mural" software to categorize and reformat the content distribution.

We also have listed information and pages on Mural that may be needed to enhance our webpage and arrange places that we think they should be. And this process is also known as "card sorting".

Step3: Community survey and rough design model

Community surveys are an important part of web design because the site is for everyone, not just our own minds. I invited three UW students to use the previous GID Lab web page, assigned them to find specific information, record their search paths and times, and record where they felt the content should be when they searched.

Through the survey, we learned that most of the students' needs for the GID Lab web page concentrate on "minor information", "scholarship", and "community events", and they are more inclined to find portals to these contents on the main page. Therefore, our next step is to make these portals more accessible.

Step 4: Wireframe and function implementation

Based on our previous survey and research, we understood how pages and information should be organized on the web page, and we made a detailed wireframe for the web page. I choose PowerPoint to do my wireframe because I can move materials around in the PowerPoint canvas and assign button portals linking to different pages. This approach can restore the functions and appearance of a web page to the greatest extent, and easy to facilitate instant modification.

In this step, we start thinking about the complete web design. A complete design should include the compatibility of web pages for different clients, the requirements and usability of plug-ins, etc. In addition, we must think about the implementation possibility when we attempt to add something to the webpage. Therefore, don't over-design the wireframe.

Step 5: User test and webpage publication

As with the last test, we found three more students to test our newly designed GID Lab webpage and followed the same test steps as last time, but this time we used PowerPoint instead of the actual website for the test. With some minor touches, we finally finished the design process of the new web page and were ready to migrate the design to the web server.

In theory, our next step is to rebuild the GID Lab's web page on the server backend and conduct the next technical test and release. However, because LJ and I were not much familiar with the technology, and lack of communication with the web provider due to holidays and COVID-19, we were not able to make it implement to the webpage and publish our design. Therefore, our final design rest on the PowerPoint wireframe we designed.

PROPOSED SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This design project was not finalized and stopped on the web implementation. Through this research, we learned that simple, obvious, and accurate content is better than wordy text. And because the needs of different people are different, we should identify the needs of each user as soon as possible and direct them to the appropriate place as soon as possible. Through the survey, we found that people prefer interactive web pages, especially pages with many pictures, graphics, colors, etc., than pages with rich text content. Also, people are doing better at identifying information on web pages with various designs than text. Therefore, my design recommendations for the GID Lab website are:

1. For the home page, in addition to the necessary text explanations and sponsored content, add as many portal buttons as possible, especially for pages that are frequently needed
2. Sort pages contents and portal base on user group. For example, we should group content commonly used by students, and group content commonly used by community partners, instead of letting different people see the same large classification list.
3. Floating windows are a great way to increase content exposure since they keep content at the top or bottom of the page. Compared to pop-up windows, they are less annoying. Therefore, we should make our headers a floating window to make them more accessible. Also, we might be able to float sponsor content to gain them exposure.
4. Adding a search bar may be a good idea to help people look for their information.
5. Mobile client accessibility is important for the GID Lab webpage since many people use their phones to browse this page.

REFLECTION

First, as the first GID Award recipient in the Global Honor program, I am very grateful to IIGE and GID lab for a research opportunity and scholarship. I would also like to thank the faculty at GID Lab for all they have done for our students during these tough times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this program, I gain many skills in project planning, communication, and leadership that I believe will be of great importance to my future career. I plan to become an urban planner and designer in the future, and I hope the experiences and skillset will benefit me from being an outstanding person. Also, I would like to encourage more students to participate in the GID Lab program to enhance their college life and benefit their careers.

GID Website Card Sorting -Lan