IPRO 311 Midterm Report

Problem

One of the main reasons for the establishment of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is to make available a collection of information about the atrocious realities of the Holocaust so that future generations can learn about the harsh reality of this dark period of world history. What makes the Mediator so valuable is its ability to search through many kinds of information in a uniform way.

Goal

The main focus of IPRO 311 this semester is to improve the Mediator by making it more attractive, accessible and user-friendly. Methods to improve the Mediator include making the necessary adjustments after user studies were made, creating public relations materials and creating a user manual.

Sub-Goals

1. Testing for JASIST conference
2. Create the user manual for Mediator
3. Revamp and update the website
4. Create a new poster
5. Create brochures, hand outs, and other PR materials.
6. Do user studies about the interface and results page
7. Design/create a display for IPRO day that is highly mobile
8. Create a short film documenting the events of the Holocaust

Team Members

✓ Carbon, Joseph
✓ Odriozola, Susana
✓ Olatunde-Bello, Omolaoye
✓ Olive, Daniel
✓ Oster, Joshua
✓ Rife, Carolanne
✓ Tam, Chi

Group Progress

Our team was able to make substantial progress on our sub-goals, leading us on track to complete the main goal of the project on time, namely, improving the Mediator to be more usable. In order to stay organized, our team utilized email, instant messaging and phone to ensure that goals were being met in a timely manner. Our team also used iGroups extensively to post important documents publicly, so that all members have access to these documents whenever they need them. Furthermore, each week, the team members engaged in a chat room to detail what was done and to plan for future goals. Through these channels of communication, our team was able to build strong personal

bonds. Communication is crucial to the ability of a team to progress, making sure everyone clearly understands their duties and those of their team members. Consequently, we were able to avoid any miscommunications or misunderstandings that could have led to some duties not carried out and others being carried out twice. Furthermore, we were elated to find out that the archives of the museum would agree to adopt the Mediator for use.

Although we did not meet with the executives of Intranet Mediator Inc., Professor Frieder, our faculty advisor and Jordan Wilberding, the IR lab liaison met with executives from the USHMM in Washington, D.C. Despite the fact that they were not able to persuade the executives of USHMM to implement the Intranet Mediator into their archive, we were greatly motivated to nevertheless improve and simplify the user manual to both attract other users and to regain the interest– through perhaps, an improved system and persuasion – of the executives of USHMM.

Activities performed in class revealed the strengths and weaknesses of all team members. The team decided to divide into subgroups to more effectively meet the objectives and divide into the sub-goals in order to realize our main goal. Thus, those with strengths in a certain area worked in a sub-group that required the use of their strength. This way, the best people were placed in the best sub-group to achieve the most in the shortest amount of time – instead of randomly placing the team members into random subgroups. The latter can lead to those who are not good in, for example, LaTeX to be forced to code. However, one distinction must be made. Even though some might argue that splitting the work can lead to some members not being able to learn certain skills – for example, those who are not good in LaTeX would not be able to practice, we made sure that each sub-group teaches other sub-groups what they have done so that all the group members are fully involved in this project.

The "Icing-on-the-Cake" Sub-Group – Susana, Chi

The focus of this group was to create an attractive display to explain to an audience what we have done this semester and also to educate them in the atrocities of the Holocaust. This display is completely highly mobile. It is also simple to dissemble and easy to move around. It contains an area for the showing of a short, self-made movie that walks the audience through how the events of the Holocaust. Also, the display includes the horrific details of the holocaust, showing photos and visuals that portray the immensity and impact of this genocide.

The "Cake Itself" Sub-Group – Carolanne, Dan, Joe (Team Leader)

This group focused on creating the user manual and making it more user-friendly in order to attract potential users to implement the Intranet Mediator on their data. In addition, this group created a title page and logo that are attractive and colorful, giving our user-manual a better appearance. Furthermore, LaTeX was used extensively for the typesetting of the user manual.

The "Cake Decor" Sub-Group – Josh, Omolaoye

This group is our public relations group. They have created brochures and handouts to present to users. These brochures and handouts contain the most important features of the Intranet Mediator and how it caters to users. In other words, this group

compacted our extensive work into a simple, concise format. In addition, Joe created a movie for show in the display, which was compiled from photos, videos and music that the team, as a whole, researched. Furthermore, this group conducted user studies and improved our system accordingly to better serve the clients and other users.

Obstacles

As a team, we overcame many obstacles – some major and some minor. For example, the team members of this IPRO are not as computer-literate as those from the IPRO from the previous IPROS. Fortunately, the few who can use LaTeX improved and simplified the project and then explained to the other members, so that all the members were educated in these areas. Therefore, one reward that was gained by many of the members is understanding how to program computers and to use technology more extensively, such as LaTeX. One major obstacle was that the original display was not as simple to move around as wanted – for it was originally planned to construct it out of 8' by 4' wooden panels. These panels were simply too bulky and hard to carry around. They were also very expensive. It would also have been very time-consuming to paint all the panels. On top of all of this is the fact that none of the team members work with wood extensively to be able to offer sufficient knowledge on building the display, which became another sub-project. The team overcame this obstacle by communicating with each other about the problems of the original display. Rather than being quiet because of shyness or fear that the members in the display sub-group would feel bad, all team members offered their true feedback. This allowed the display sub-group to improve the display, building it with PVC pipes instead. These pipes were less expensive and made the display very easy to dissemble and move around, solving our largest obstacle.

In addition, one ethical problem that arose was the fact that some members missed or were late to meetings. Not only are they wasting their own time by being late, they are wasting the time of others who need to update them on what is going on and on simply waiting for them. After some heavy penalties, this problem has been solved as all the team members were able to attend meetings in a more punctual manner. Another ethical problem that arose was the question of copyrighted materials. It was obvious that the group could not simply use the materials of others without properly citing them or asking for permission. However, it was clarified that since all the research that were used is solely for educational purposes, copyrighted materials could be used as long as they are cited.

Conclusion

Now that our direction has been determined, we can work hard toward reaching our goal. The tackling of ethical problems and great teamwork between the team members, we were able to – collectively, as a team – achieve our common goal of simplifying the Mediator by making it more user-friendly and accessible to the public.

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