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SWE 432

HW 2 - PatriotWeb Usability Evaluation

Task: Degree Evaluation

PatriotWeb has a tool to help students evaluate progress towards their degree. It's useful for helping students plan ahead to meet their degree requirements, and it's incredibly important the closer a student gets to graduation. It also has a feature called 'What-Is Analysis' which lets the student check what the current progress would be if the student had a different major.

Rankings/Criteria

Priority on a scale of 1 to 5

1. Rate of user errors
2. Time to learn
3. Retention of skills
4. Speed of UI performance
5. Subjective satisfaction

Rating of what the user interface's goals should be

- Rate of user errors : **very high**
- Time to learn: **high**
- Retention of skills: **moderate**
- Speed of UI performance: **moderate**
- Subjective satisfaction: **low**

Because PatriotWeb deals with such important information as class registration, tuition, and financial aid, user errors could cost a student significantly. Many of the tasks accomplished on PatriotWeb are time-sensitive, meaning that time to learn is also of a high priority. Since PatriotWeb is a tool that must be over course of several years, retention of skills is somewhat important, but should taken care of if time to learn is prioritized correctly. Speed of UI performance is under the same circumstances, if time to learn is handled well, then the speed of UI performance will benefit as a result. Subjective satisfaction is low since the student can't quit the system.

Rating of what the user interface actually achieves.

- Rate of user errors: **moderate**
- Time to learn: **high**
- Retention of skills: **high**
- Speed of UI performance: **moderate**
- Subjective satisfaction: **moderate**

The one big issue that is most likely to cause user errors is the list of class requirements in the Detail Requirements page, since the table border's are drawn in a strange way, it may lead the user to think that there is a class missing that really isn't, or vice versa. It's easy to understand and remember once it's noticed, but first-time users may find it confusing. The time to learn and retention of skills isn't bad, the names of the features may be somewhat vague, but it's simple to rule out which feature the user isn't looking for. This also helps the speed of UI performance, especially when an evaluation is generated for a current curriculum. Generating a What-if analysis takes a bit more time due to the unnecessary requirement of having to submit every piece leading to the Major, rather than placing all the dropdown menu's on the same page. Subjective satisfaction is moderate, generally because the tables are somewhat confusing to look at. There seems to be no real need for General Requirements or Additional Information, as Detail Requirements are the most informative.

Narrative

The Degree Evaluation tools isn't too difficult to find after logging in. A student looking for the tool would likely look under 'Student Services' as opposed to 'Personal information', 'Employee Services', or 'Financial Aid'. The only issue is that even though each category has a description of its contents, there is no mention of the tool anywhere, preventing students who have no knowledge of the tool from discovering it.

Clicking the 'Student Services' link brings the user to another page that has the same issue. 'Student Records' would sound like the most likely place to find the tool, but for those who don't know about the tool, the description again makes no acknowledgement of it. This is even stranger when it already lists all but 3 features that can be accessed through the link.

Following the Student Records link brings the user to a page where the Degree Evaluation tool is listed, and when clicking the link, a page requiring the user to select the most recent term they are registered in is shown.

The student is then presented with the current program they are enrolled in, with navigation links at the bottom for 'Previous Evaluations', 'Generate New Evaluation', 'What-if Analysis', and 'View Holds'. The pages from each navigation link contain the same navigation bar with the

exception of 'View Hold's, which is not only missing from the other pages, but the 'View Holds' page itself has no navigation links to the other pages.

The 'Previous Evaluations' page came up with an empty list, despite that fact that I had generated many evaluations in the past. It also makes no mention as to when they are deleted, so it's unclear as to why they are not listed.

Both Generate New Evaluation and What-if Analysis bring the student to the same type of options page, with the additional task of choosing a major being a part of the What-if Analysis. When choosing a major however, a submit button must be pressed between choosing a term, choosing a major, adding a concentration, and adding a minor, instead of having all the dropdown menus on one page.

The first option on the page is General Requirements, which upon selecting will display a table showing the students credits, tables representing each category of classes required for the degree, and what classes the student has taken for each category. However, it doesn't list classes that are required that haven't been taken, which is a bit ironic for a General Requirements page.

The second option is 'Detail Requirements, which show the same table of credits, but this time the tables show classes that are taken in each required category as well as what specific classes haven't been taken that are required. The tables in this are handled in a peculiar way. The border is drawn in a way that makes it somewhat look like the first entry in a category belongs to the one before. It makes sense once the user realizes how it's laid out, but somewhat confusing at first.

The last option is 'Additional Information', which has no description as to what kind of information it leads to. It turns out to be a list of current classes the student is enrolled in, a list of 'Rejected Courses' that has no explanation as to how it affects the degree, and 'Program Restricted Subjects and Attributes', which also doesn't explain its relation to the degree.

Summary

The degree evaluation tool is pretty effective at accomplishing the task it's set out to do. Most of its setbacks are minor annoyances that can be overcome quite easily, like the mentioned issue reading the tables, or ignored altogether, such as the seemingly unnecessary General Requirements or Additional Info. Since the Detail Requirements of both the Current Curriculum and What-if Analysis seem to be useful, once the user learns to do that, it should be easy to use the rest of their time using PatriotWeb.