Determining components for an appealing website for prospective ABIT students at the University of Hawaii Maui College

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Abstract: A reliable decision about a website can be made within seconds. A website may have superior products, services, or usability, with an initial negative impression from poor design can steer viewer's interests elsewhere. You only get one chance to create a good first impression, make it count. This paper discusses a needs assessment conducted at the University of Hawai`i Maui College (UHMC) to determine what components to make an appealing website for prospective Applied Business and Information Technology (ABIT) students. The ABIT program is UHMC's first four year degree. The needs assessment was created and delivered in an online format addressing prospective, undergraduate, and graduated students at the UHMC campus. Having continuous support in the ABIT program, there is an indication that the ABIT website needed to be updated. A majority of the respondents suggested many good ideas with their personal input. Survey results indicated that there are a number of areas on the ABIT website that will need to be addressed. The survey results are presented and the issues more thoroughly discussed throughout this paper.

Introduction

When a program is newly added and accredited to a college education system, it is important to have information of all types available; for example, brochures, flyers and even a website for interested students. Most college universities have their own informational websites specifically designed and developed for their degree offerings. Students starting out in college do not necessarily know what they want to major in or even know of the choices that are available.

The 2008 recession increased the growth and enrollment at the University of Hawai`i Maui College (UHMC). During the Fall semester of 2009, "then-Maui Community College enrollment skyrocketed 26 percent" (UH-Maui College enrollment climbs, 2011). Enrollment at the UHMC increased substantially due to the economic downturn and with recent high school graduates beginning their first year in college.

ABIT was the first four-year degree offered at the UHMC. ABIT stands for Applied Business and Information Technology. It is a business degree that emphasizes small-to-medium size business management with an intense utilization of information technology. Overall, it combines an entrepreneurial education with information technology and liberal art courses. In completion of this program students will be prepared to own and operate a

small business, seek employment in small to mid-size companies, and or apply for graduate studies.

Background

Web design has an important role in building the image of a college program. A competently designed website has the capacity to positively influence its visitors', while an unprofessional website does the exact opposite. Website scheming and development is crucial, and important to address the needs of the intended audience. The Internet is the ultimate open market and if you do not meet users growing expectations of what a web site should offer, it can be proven to be critically ineffective. Beginning with a needs assessment is a great place to start.

A needs assessment has several different definitions with many different approaches to conducting one. A needs assessment is defined as "a systematic approach to studying the state of knowledge, ability, interest, or attitude of a defined audience or group involving a particular subject" (McCawley, 2004). Also, in conducting a needs assessment, it helps verify the level of knowledge, interests, opinions and preferences in the audience. In the data collection process it allows the investigator to describe "gaps" between the existing and what is needed. The purpose of the needs assessment would be filling in the "gaps".

Purpose

The purpose of this needs assessment is to determine what components would make a website appealing for prospective ABIT students. Presently, there is a lack of valid, reliable and accessible information for students to learn more about the ABIT program. It's important in determining what components, information (curriculum, photos, videos, student testimonials, etc) are needed on the ABIT website. There is currently an ABIT website available for students, but the ABIT Program Coordinators wanted to update the site, to be more modern and, have effective and up-to-date information for prospective students. It is important to employ a needs assessment, because "when a website designer creates a website, he/she does not have a clear notion about the user preferences" (Gupta, Bagchi, & Sarkar, 2007) and proper judgment should be considered while linking the website together.

Methods

During Fall 2010, Educational Technology graduate students planning to graduate during Spring 2011 are required to complete a final Master's project. Creating an instructional module, action research or a needs assessment were choices students had. Once a topic was chosen and finalized, students were required to complete numerous assignments. First, a problem statement was submitted. Once the problem statement had been approved, an idea paper covering the purpose of the entire project was submitted. During Spring 2011, the survey was implemented, data was collected and analyzed.

The researcher for this study was a Spring 2009 graduate from the ABIT program, who continues to support, help, and work with other ABIT faculty and students.

A direct needs assessment was successfully conducted. A direct needs assessment is "formal research that gathers data from clientele" (McCawley, 2004). Using the direct assessment, resulted in learning more specific needs for the website.

The sample population consisted of those who were aged18-65+ that are past, present, and future ABIT students and students are exploring their options around the UHMC campus. An electronic survey was created and contains questions based on a Likert-type scale. There were several open-ended questions that students were able to give personal opinions or comments when asked. No personal information was requested. Survey monkey was used to create the survey. There were nineteen (19) Likert-type scale and four (4) open ended questions. Data being collected referred to different perceptions regarding a variety of areas of the ABIT website: visual appeal, navigation, content and relevancy.

Before the survey was implemented; approval was required from the Committee on Human Studies (CHS) at the University of Hawai`i's Institutional Review Board. Several documentations were submitted, which included the purpose of the research study, consent letters, who would be involved, listing of possible compensations or liabilities, and contact information.

The online survey did not require a login and password; the survey was public for a period of ten (10) days from February 1 and ending on February 11, 2011 at 5pm. All answers to questions were anonymous.

A counselor and four faculty members assisted in the project. The counselor forwarded the survey via email to 90 students. The four faculty members had an average amount of 35 students in each class and they forwarded hardcopies of the survey instructions to one of their classes.

Results
Data from the online survey were analyzed to determine what components would help make the ABIT website more appealing to students. At the end of the implementation period, the researcher analyzed the participants' responses comments and suggestions. A total of 53 respondents participated in the survey. The percentage of respondents that participated in the online survey showed that a good amount responded to most of the Likert-type scale questions as compared to the open-ended questions. (See Table 1).

Survey Questions

Table 1. Percentage of respondents that participated in the survey.

Survey Question	Amount answered	Amount skipped	Percentage of people who responded
Respondents basic information			
Are you male or female?	53	0	100%
What is your age?	53	0	100%
What year ABIT student are you?	52	1	98%
Which area interests you about the ABIT program?	52	2	98%
Visual Appeal			
The pictures on the page helpful and clearly related to the subject.	53	0	100%
The site is interesting.	52	1	98%
The style is consistent throughout the site.	52	1	98%
Visuals enhance rather than detract from the message of the site.	48	4	91%
The size of the text is easy to read.	47	6	89%
Navigation			
There are clearly marked buttons and links that transport you to locations within the site and allow you to find your way quickly to information you need.	51	2	96%
Links are current and working.	52	1	98%
Content and relevancy			
The organization of the site is logical and clear.	50	3	94%
The content appears to be up-to-date.	49	4	92%
The content have some educational value.	51	2	96%
The text is clearly written and easy to understand.	49	3	92%
There are no grammar or spelling errors.	49	3	92%
The content provides a unique perspective needed for the ABIT program.	46	7	87%
The content is sufficient for the intended audience.	50	3	94%
The content is meaningful and useful.	52	1	98%
Open-ended questions			
What did you like the most about the ABIT website?	34	19	64%
What challenges did you encounter in the website?	31	22	58%
Are there any features (video, graphics, blogs, forums) you would like to see included on the website?	33	20	62%
Do you have any other comments or suggestions? Improvements?	30	23	57%

In **Table 2**, the question was asked "Are you male or female"; which resulted in 28% were male and 72% female that participated in the survey. None of the participants skipped this question. (See Appendix).

In **Table 3**, the question was asked "What is your age"; which resulted in 47% were between the ages of 18-30; 25% were between the ages of 31-45; 28% were between the ages 46-64. None of the participants skipped this question. (See Appendix).

In **Table 4**, the question was asked "What year ABIT student are you?"; which resulted in 36% were between their 1ˢᵗ and 4ᵗʰ year in the ABIT program; 8% had already graduated; 17% were interested students; and 39% were seeing their options. One participant skipped this question. (See Appendix).

In **Table 5**, the question was asked "Which area(s) interests you about the ABIT program?", which resulted in 19% were interested in the Applied Business area; 13% in the Information Technology area; 37% were interested in both the Applied Business and Information Technology area; 29% were interested in the program itself. Two participants skipped this question. (See Appendix).

Likert-type scale questions results

Each Liker-type scale questions were analyzed, averaged out, and grouped into three (3) different categories: visual appeal, navigation, content and relevancy

In **Table 6**, these are the results of each questions average rating score, the overall combined average and scaling result for the visual appeal category. The overall rating of the visual appeal of the ABIT website was a 4, which indicated that the participants agreed that the pictures on the page were helpful, the site was interesting, the style was consistent, visuals enhance rather than detract, and the size of the text was easy to read. (See Appendix).

In **Table 7**, these are the results of each questions average rating score, the overall combined average and scaling result for the navigation category. The overall rating of the navigation of the ABIT website was a 4, which indicated that the participants agreed that there were clearly marked buttons transporting you to locations of the site quickly to the information and links were current and working. (See Appendix).

In **Table 8**, these are the results of each questions average rating score, the overall combined average and scaling result for the content and relevancy category. The overall rating of the content and relevancy of the ABIT website was 4, which indicated that the participants agreed that the organization of the site is logical and clear; up-to-date content; text is clearly written and easy to understand; no grammar or spelling errors; provides a unique perspective needed for the ABIT program; content is sufficient for intended audience; and content is meaningful and useful. (See Appendix).

Participants' open-ended question results

First, participants were asked, "What did you like the most about the ABIT website?" with a total of 34 responses. There were some responses that contrasted with other responses, meaning some liked different areas of the website and those who did not find it appealing. To summarize the results due to some common responses, here are some of the respondents' statement results. (See Table 9).

Secondly, participants were asked, "What challenges did you encounter in the website?" with a total of 31 responses. There were some responses that contrasted with other responses, meaning respondents encountered no challenges and some stated several different challenges. To summarize the results due to common responses, here are some of the respondents' statement results. (See Table 10).

Thirdly, participants were asked, "Are there any features (video, graphics, blogs, forums) you would like to see included on the website?" with a total of 33 responses. Their responses were very open, thoughtful, detailed and great ideas to make the ABIT website more appealing to prospective students. Furthermore, to summarize the results due to common responses, here are some of the respondents' statement results. (See Table 11).

Lastly, participants were asked, "Do you have any other comments or suggestions? Improvements? " with a total of 30 responses. The respondents gave even more great ideas to make the ABIT website more appealing to prospective students. To summarize the results due to common responses, here are some of the respondents' statement results. (See Table 12).

Conclusion
The purpose of this needs assessment was to determine what components would make a website appealing for prospective ABIT students. In conclusion, the online survey created was effective enough to receive informative feedback on what components would make the ABIT website appealing for prospective ABIT students from those who participated. After analyzing the data collected the results showed that there is a need to update the ABIT website with more interactivity (photos, videos, forums, blogs, past and present student testimonials, information on the program, job skills and offerings, and more).

Since the researcher was able to determine the needs from the results of the survey, these results may be shared with the ABIT Program Coordinators. From there, the ABIT Program Coordinators may use these results as a course project idea in redesigning the ABIT website with all the feedback given. As the researcher of this study, it would be interesting to see all these suggestions go into redesigning the ABIT website.

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Appendix

Table 2. Question: "Are you male or female?" response percentage.

	Percentage	Responses
Male	28%	15
Female	72%	38
Person(s) skipped question	0%	0

Table 3. Question: "What is your age?" response percentage.

	Percentage	Responses
18-30	47%	25
31-45	25%	13
46-64	28%	15
65-older	0%	0
Person(s) skipped question	0%	0

Table 4. Question: "What year ABIT student are you?" response percentage.

	Percentage	Responses
Between 1st-4th	36%	19
Graduated from ABIT	8%	4
Interested student	17%	9
Seeing my options	39%	20
Person(s) skipped question	1%	1

Table 5. Question: "Which area(s) interests you about the ABIT program?" response percentage.

	Percentage	Responses
Applied Business	19%	10
Information Technology	13%	7
Both	37%	19
The program itself	29%	15
Person(s) skipped	2%	2

Table 6. Average rating per question, overall combined average and scaling result for visual appeal category.

Out of a scale of 5 *Strongly agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3;* *Disagree =2; Strongly disagree = 1*	Average rating per question	Responses	Scaling Result
The pictures on the page helpful and clearly related to the subject.	4	53	Agree
The site is interesting.	4	52	Agree
The style is consistent throughout the site.	4	52	Agree
Visuals enhance rather than detract from the message of the site.	4	49	Agree
The size of the text is easy to read.	4	47	Agree
Total	*20*		
Overall combined average for visual appeal	*4*		*Agree*

Table 7. Average rating per question, overall combined and scaling result
average for navigation category.

Out of a scale of 5 Strongly agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree =2; Strongly disagree = 1	Average rating per question	Responses	Scaling result
There are clearly marked buttons and links that transport you to locations within the site and allow you to find your way quickly to information you need.	4	51	Agree
Links are current and working.	4	52	Agree
Total	*8*		
Overall combined average	*4*		*Agree*

Table 8.Average rating per question, overall combined average and scaling result for
content and relevancy category.

Out of a scale of 5 Strongly agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree =2; Strongly disagree = 1	Average Per Question	Responses	Scaling result
The organization of the site is logical and clear.	4	50	Agree
The content appears to be up-to-date.	4	49	Agree
The content have some educational value.	4	51	Agree
The text is clearly written and easy to understand.	4	50	Agree
There are no grammar or spelling errors.	3	50	Neutral
The content provides a unique perspective needed for the ABIT program.	4	46	Agree
The content is sufficient for the intended audience.	4	50	Agree
The content is meaningful and useful.	4	52	Agree
Total	*30*		
Overall combined average	*4*		*Agree*

Table 9. Question: "What did you like the most about the ABIT website?"
Listing of what participants liked and didn't like about the ABIT website.

Total Responses: 34	
What they liked the most	**What they didn't like**
• *Short and to the point* • *Easy navigation, access and use* • *Separation of categories* • *The colors* and *links are good* • *It encompasses all of the information that would draw interested students* • *Numbers to contact for more information* • *It captures the reader's attention and gives them a comforting fee* • *To encourage those who are interested in this field.*	• *There was not anything that caught my eye on the ABIT website. The website should catch the reader's eyes, and have them actually want to research more in the UHMC ABIT program* • *I didn't. I think for a college website for technology, it was really basic and lacking in any TECHNOLOGY. In other words it should better reflect what you are offering and be more interesting* • *Really boring*

Table 10. Question: "What challenges did you encounter in the website?"
Participants that encountered challenges vs. those that did not encounter challenges.

Total responses: 31	
Those that encountered no challenges	**Those that encountered challenges**
• *I didn't find any challenges.* • *It's too simple to have any challenges.* • *No challenges were faced while browsing the website.* • *No challenge at all.*	• *Getting to the site.* • *Lots of links too many to go through, if I had the time, I would have gone through the whole website.* • *Finding anything useful or interesting was challenging.*

Table 11. Question: "Are there any features (video, graphics, blogs, forums) you would like to see included on the website?"
Statements from participants on ideal features for the ABIT website.

Total Responses: 33	
• *More pictures, it is a technology degree, and there are no wow factors on the website, don't students in this program learn to create web sites.* • *I would like to see a picture that actually relates to the ABIT program.* • *Needs more interactive elements.* • *Applicable scholarships.* • *Forums and blogs would be great on the website.* • *Professor profiles, more about the degree program.* • *What is expected of an ABIT student?* • *Use a link to the maui.hawaii.edu site for application purposes.* • *More current information for current students.* • *What companies/ industries are looking for recent ABIT graduates* • *Success stories.*	• *Blogs and forums would be good, but you would need a few key people to help contribute to the site.* • *A list of events that must be completed prior to achieving an ABIT (Four year) degree.* • *It would be nice to see current, alumni, and future students be more involved. Based on our demographics, I feel we need to gain a connection with our community.* • *I'd like to see a couple of videos, more images of graduates from the program, and a couple of comments from those graduates.* • *Yes, I like to know about people, who already have knowledge and their experience through video or blogs.* • *Videos could be used to welcome future ABIT students and perhaps newly enrolled ABIT students.*

Table 12. Question: "Do you have any other comments or suggestions? Improvements?"
Comments and suggestions from the participants.

Total Responses: 30	

• *From one respondent who gave ideas in regards to most links:*
  o *Why not have the home picture of an Actual ABIT graduate.*
  o *On location page include pictures of the area, seems to focus on the foreign or continental USA demographic, so highlight the island better.*
  o *Under fees, include tuition rates for both residence and non-residence living expenses are not realistic, quite misleading.*
  o *Under student profile, link to past graduates created web sites and explain this will be learned by all students.*
  o *Somewhere on site have pictures and bio of key faculty.*
  o *Is it really necessary for "accreditation" to be both on navigation and top left (boring page, once is more than enough).*
	• *Make the website actually useful to perspective, and current ABIT students.*
	• *Correct some spelling and grammar.*
	• *Please proofread and make changes. For example, it's no longer MCC... it should be UHMC.*
	• *Not enough info on future jobs and skills gained by training,*
	• *Other suggestions might be a calendar of events specific to ABIT, if any. Maybe highlighting a few clubs that might be a specific interest to ABIT students, and maybe scholarships that might be of interest to ABIT students.*
	• *The content on the pages shouldn't be static but changing throughout the year in order to make it a viable resource for incoming and current ABIT students.*