



# ConnectCarolina 2018 User Conference

User-Centered Design:  
Effectively Using Feedback in  
Your Projects



Making the connections

# Welcome





## Agenda:

- What is usability anyway?
- Why is user feedback important?
- Selecting the right tools for feedback
- Lessons Learned
- Questions



# What is usability anyway?



## What is usability?

- **How well people can learn a product and use it to achieve their goals**
- Key Factors of a system with “good” usability
  - Intuitive design - nearly effortless understanding of navigation and architecture
  - Easy and quick to learn how to accomplish tasks
    - Easy to remember after initial exposure
  - Tasks can be accomplished quickly and efficiently
  - Errors occur infrequently and are easy to recover from
  - Subjective satisfaction – users enjoy the system



## Thought Exercise

- Think about something in your life that has good usability?
- In what ways does it meet the criteria described?
  - Intuitive
  - Easy to learn and remember
  - Quick and efficient
  - Few errors / good error recovery
  - Enjoyable



# Why is user feedback important?



## User feedback is important because...

- Software is built **by** people **for** people
  - There's a human on the other end of the system
  - A user-centered approach keeps you in touch with our audience's needs
    - Reduces **guesswork** and **projecting our assumptions** about the audience onto the design
- High usability reduces user error and need for assistance
- People are more likely to use a system if it's easy and enjoyable





## Usability is NOT

- Making every possible user happy
- Catering to user preferences and/or whims
- Simply changing the graphic design of a product or site



## Understanding What Users Need

1. Understand your audience
  - Are there different types of user involved?
  - For which group(s) is your product primarily designed?
2. Identify the major pain points and goals that each group has when using your product
  - What do they need to accomplish and what appears to be getting in the way
3. Select the tool(s) that will best help you test your assumptions and move forward in design process



# Selecting the Right Tools for Gathering Feedback



## Right tool depends on the underlying issue you're facing

- Don't understand the needs of your primary users
  - Assumptions, outdated information, projecting our opinions etc.
  - Symptoms:
    - Not getting desired level of usage (entire product or certain features)
    - People aren't motivated to follow your desired business process
- Users don't know how to accomplish their goals with your technology
  - Confusing workflow or language, insufficient documentation
  - Symptoms:
    - People have lots of workarounds instead of using the system as intended
    - Excessive support requests



## Choosing Which Techniques to Use

- 1:1 Interviews
  - Structured conversation with a user that aims to understand their experience while minimizing the perspective of the interviewer
  - Great for supplementing other techniques
  - Downside: can get skewed results if you don't talk to a representative sample of your audience
- Think-aloud usability tests
  - Structured one-on-one interviews that focus on how people actually use a piece of technology to perform a set of tasks. Participants try to complete tasks while thinking out loud. Observer notes areas of difficulty, confusion, etc.
  - Easy to implement, and useful for any stage of your design/redesign process
  - Downside: same as 1:1 interviews



## Choosing Which Techniques to Use (continued)

- Observation / Field visits
  - Observing users in the actual environment in which they complete the tasks you're interested in improving. Involves visiting users, asking them questions and following them around as they go about their normal activities.
  - Best used early in projects (requirements gathering and needs assessment)
  - Downside: time consuming
- Focus Groups
  - Structured, attentively monitored group discussions that reveal a target audience's conscious preferences, recalled experiences, and stated priorities.
  - Ideal for understanding user memories, perceptions, values, and motivations
  - Downside: not effective for understanding what people actually do, as opposed to what they think they do or would do in a situation



## Choosing Which Techniques to Use (continued)

- Surveys
  - Set of questions that allows a large group of people to describe themselves, their interests, and their opinions/preferences in a structured way
  - Good for capturing structured information from a large audience
  - Downside: difficult to accurately interpret results when used in isolation



## Example: Academic Advising Website

- Selected 1:1 exploratory interviews with students in order to
  - Identify areas for further investigation
  - Understand student perceptions and attitudes
  - Turned out to be crucial, because it shifted the focus of our project
- Selected a survey to
  - Collect basic demographic information
  - Help us confirm the issues described in 1:1 interviews were applicable to a larger audience





## Exploratory Interviews and Survey Findings

- Most frequent users of site: Students and Advisors
- Primary Reasons for using the site:
  - Students:
    - Appointment scheduling
    - Course planning/Academic worksheets
    - Specific questions
  - Advisors:
    - Academic worksheets
    - Directing students to specific pages (graduation, professional schools, etc)



## Identifying Primary Needs and Pain Points

- Both groups reported biggest frustrations with the amount of information on the site, and the way it was organized
  - Too much text, hard to find information, hard to keep it up to date
  - Finding an advisor was too complicated with multiple extensively cross-referenced lists
  - Site is primarily informational, and importance of certain info varied based on academic year

**\*Provide clear, concise, targeted information at time of need\***



## Now What?

- User feedback helped tremendously with needs analysis and requirements gathering, so we wanted to continue getting feedback in the design process



## Choosing a Technique for Feedback During Design

Most areas of concern centered around the volume and organization of information on the site, indicating an information architecture issue.

- **Information architecture** = the structural design of shared information environments (i.e. how you organize information for people to access)



## Choosing a Technique for Feedback During Design

- **Card sort exercise** = method for understanding how people interpret and organize information
  - Cards represent topics on the website
  - User can:
    - Create new cards
    - Rename existing cards
    - Leave out cards
  - Person organizes cards, then explains process behind their choices





## Card Sort Activity





## High Level Themes and Observations

- Lots of information/too much text
- Redundant information
  - Lots of text that could be replaced with links to appropriate section of student catalog or partner office websites
- Jargon and confusing labels
  - Curriculum Tools, Undergrad Bulletin, Advice by Student Year, Maximizing Advising Interactions
- Exploratory information vs. acute, time-sensitive information
- Information not tied to a specific question a student has or action they want to take
  - Several students suggested an FAQ format
- Contact information section is very difficult to navigate





## User Feedback Allowed Us To:

- Develop a solid understanding of our users/audiences that we could continually reference during the redesign process
- Stay focused and targeted when considering our design options
- Maintain an empathetic connection to students and advisors throughout the process
- Avoid confusing our own opinions / voices with that of users
- Develop relationship with users, so we could follow up with them later
- Create alignment within the office and the project team





## How did we use the feedback?

- Concise text
- Removed jargon
- Consolidated related topics (e.g. course planning and course sequencing)
- Linked to partner sites for policies/procedures
- Moved transactional information (“how do I...”) into FAQ for students
- Optimized home page for top reasons students visit the site (appointments, worksheets, targeted questions)
- Added sections for “seasonal topics” that change depending on time of academic year (e.g. transfer credit or graduation)
- Made it easier to search for an advisor



## Home Page: Before

THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL


Accessibility | Calendar | Libraries | Maps | Departments | ConnectCarolina | Search

### ACADEMIC ADVISING PROGRAM

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Search this site...

About ▾ See an Advisor ▾ Curriculum Tools ▾ Policies & Procedures ▾ Resources ▾ For Students ▾ For Families ▾ For Faculty ▾




**FREQUENTLY USED LINKS**


- Schedule An Appointment
- Academic Worksheets
- Newly Admitted Students
- Credit Overloads
- Applying to a Professional School?
- Academic Appeals
- Other Forms


**Did You Know...**

1. Summer drop-in hours will begin May 14. Steele Building will have drop-ins Monday – Friday from 2:00 – 3:30 PM. Hardin Hub will not have summer drop-in hours.


**Are you a newly admitted student?**  
[Click here for more information!](#)

  
MAKE AN APPOINTMENT


  
DROP-IN INFO

  
CHAT WITH US




#### CONNECT

 **UNC Academic Advising**  
@UNCAcadvising

Take a PAWS from studying and join us! #ExamPAWS #FreeSnacks



[Embed](#) [View on Twitter](#)

#### CONTACT

Academic Advising Program  
College of Arts and Sciences & General College  
214 East Cameron Avenue, CB# 3110  
UNC-CH • Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3110  
p: (919) 966-5116 • f: (919) 962-6888  
fax for appeals: (919) 843-4775

#### CORE VALUES

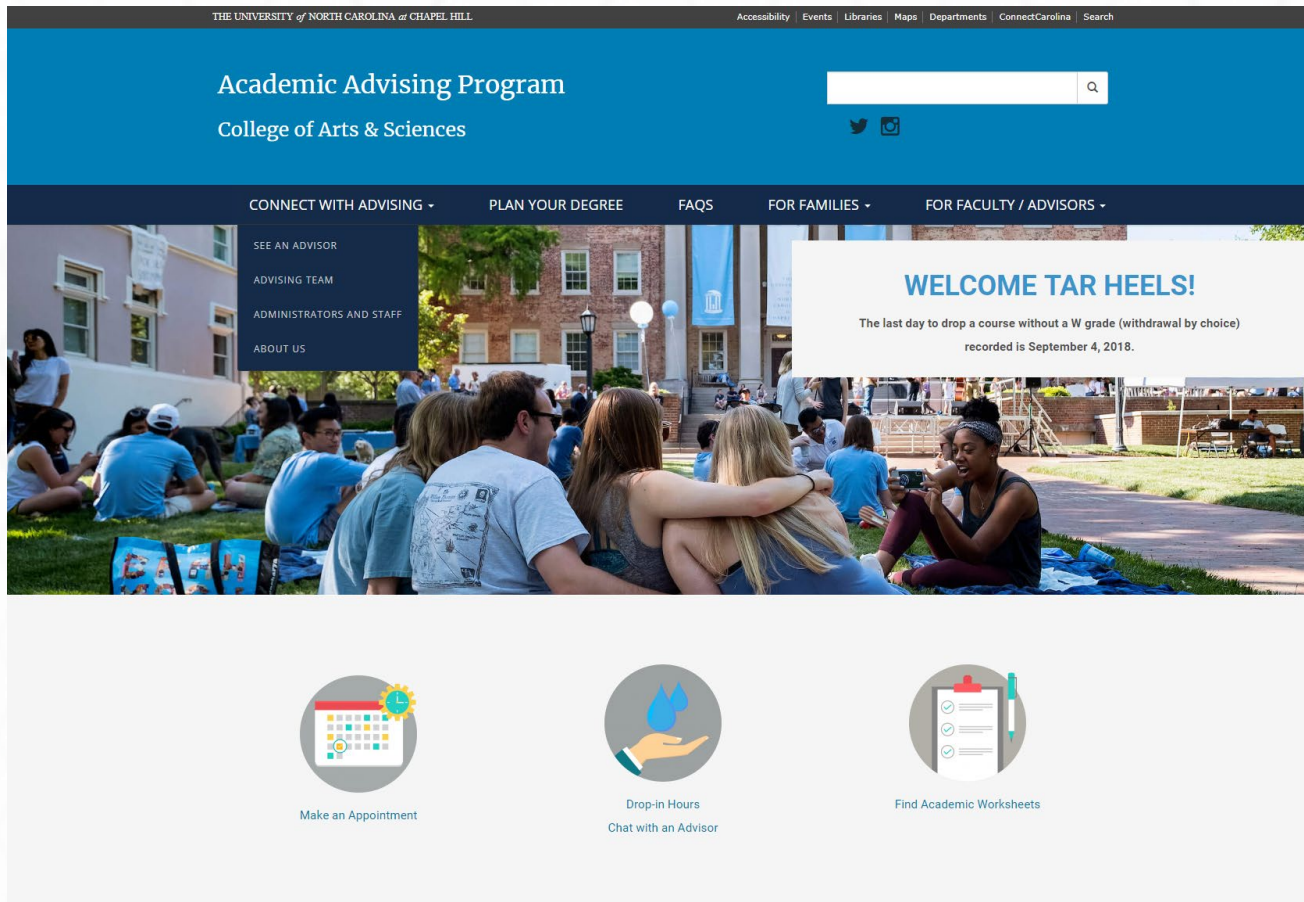
The College and Academic Advising support the University's core values encouraging diversity and equal educational and employment opportunities throughout the University community. These values are articulated in the University's non-discrimination policy and by the office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs.

[Report Website Issues](#)

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## Home Page: After





# Lessons Learned



## Lessons Learned

- Active listening with an open mind is key
  - Flexibility at first, then a more structured approach
- Listen first, take detailed notes, then analyze afterwards
- Strong buy-in and support from leadership is essential
  - Feedback is an investment in alignment within your office
- No obligation to act on every piece of feedback, overall trends are enough



## Potential Pitfalls

- Focus on the present. Avoid questions about future use situations.
  - People are staggeringly bad at predicting what they will do in the future (i.e. “Would you use X feature if we made it?”)
- Don’t allow users to generalize their experience to others-ask them to focus on their own experience.
- Avoid asking about or encouraging feedback about features or suggestions. We have technical and design experts for that, and users often don’t understand the complexity of what they’re asking for.
  - Focus on the user’s personal experience and feelings to understand their needs and pain points.
- Don’t worry about making everyone happy.



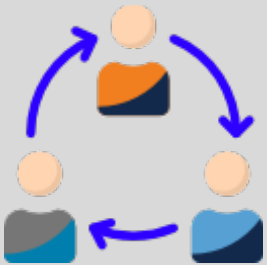
# Questions?



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- Observing the User Experience: A Practical Guide to User Research by Elizabeth Goodman, Mike Kuniavsky, and Andrea Moed





**Thank You for Your Participation!**

