

MEMORANDUM

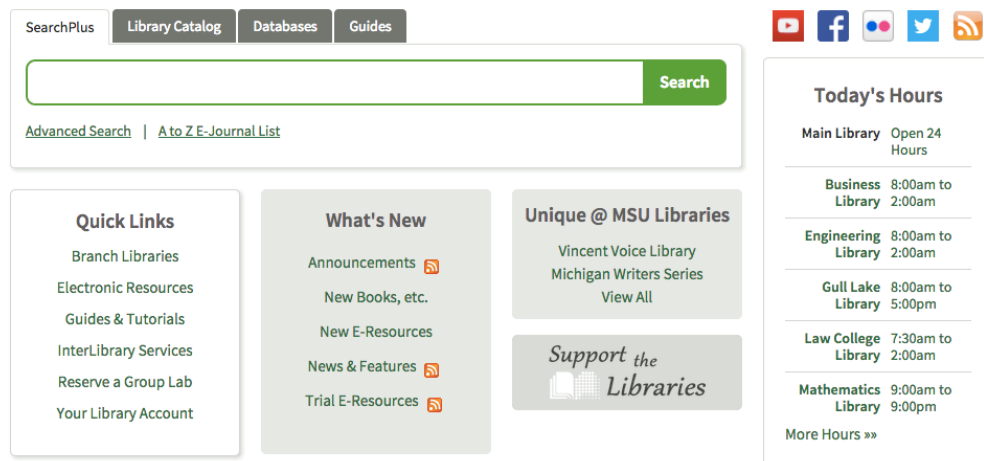
TO: Dr. Ben Lauren, PhD.

FROM: Irfan Mir

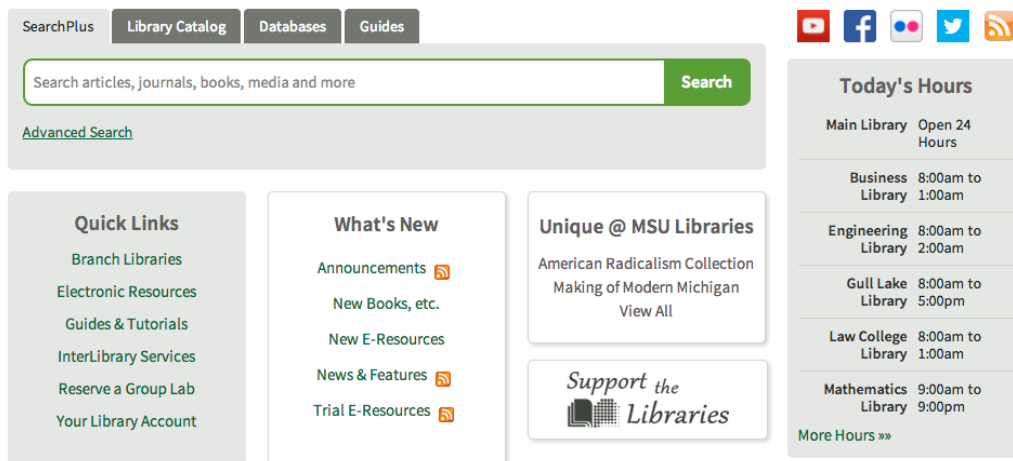
DATE: May 6th, 2015

SUBJECT: **MSU Libraries Post Mortem Report**

We spent the last two months organizing and applying Rhetorical and Project Management principles in the completion of a project with a self-selected team. I chose to participate in a research study to determine the color-scheme of the MSU Libraries' homepage. My group and I understood the prompt as the MSU Libraries' initiative to optimize their website and we met to plan how to present ourselves in the kick-off meeting. We had a successful kick-off meeting; however, both the client and Dr. Lauren felt we were over zealous in our suggestions. That is because we, primarily I, brought up a thorough list of changes that we thought would optimize the entire site. This, however, was a transgression because we did not take the scope nor stakeholders, like the librarians, into view— only our own opinions— a lack of empathy which is the exact opposite of proper UX design. Briefly, the prompt was that the background-color, despite being grey, attracted attention where in this case it was inappropriate. The client presented us with the below compositions, the first one being the original MSU Libraries' homepage and, the second being, their initial redesign where the important content has the background-color to draw attention.

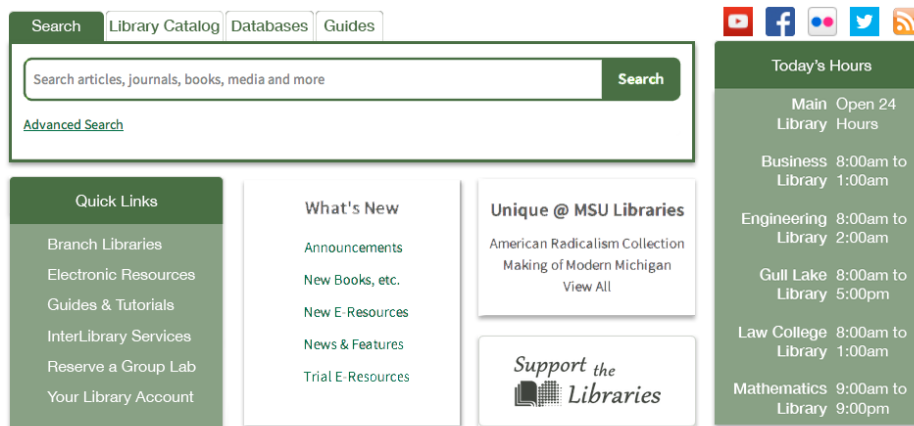


The initial design of the MSU Libraries' homepage



The MSU Libraries' initial redesign of their homepage

The project proceeded successfully until the second sprint where the client appeared disappointed and unsatisfied in our redesigns. I used Dr. Lauren's advice and attempted to use techniques taught in Chapter 7, of *The Essential Guide to Rhetoric*, to sort out her reaction into a request for a design for a greater revision— something similar to our ideas in the kick-off meeting. This is where our over-zealousness got us in trouble. Albeit more work, we worked hard in performing more research and revisions until we reached something the client and our team was comfortable with. Interestingly enough, and a lesson learned, was that the client felt I, as Project Manager, appeared irritated about the expansion of scope, which irritated the client.

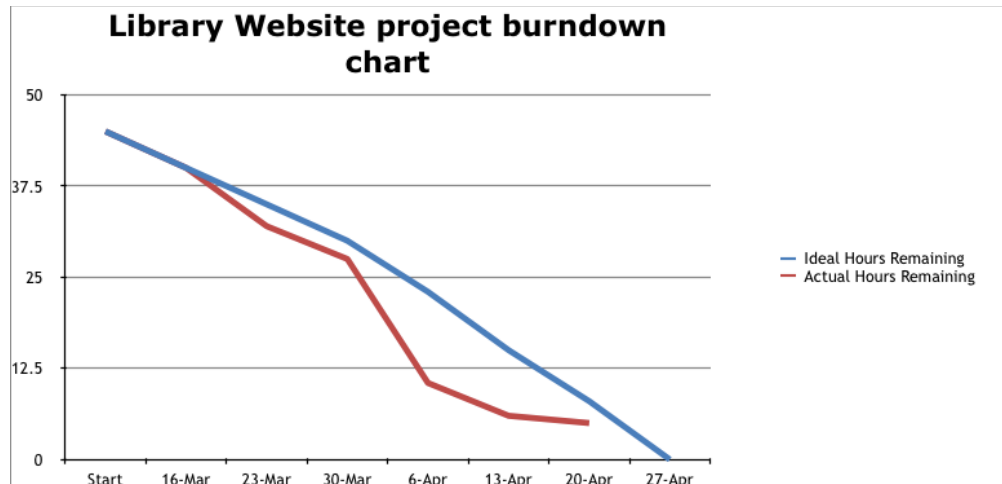


Final revised composition by the team

Overview

Our purpose was to determine the proper color scheme for the MSU Libraries' homepage for the benefit of the MSU students with respect to the various stakeholders including the MSU Librarians. Contextually, we were supposed to confirm the client's beliefs that the color draws attention and, if so, to put a proper color behind the important

content. Given approximately 2 months to complete research and design, we did so in 3 sprints and despite our hiccup we were able to get ahead of schedule; however, our weekly reports should have been more punctual. The project wasn't very unique overall, but was quite niche as it involved a single concern. Because of this, we were able to get work done quickly and with increasing quality. This is also an important lesson learned because in tech environments or any corporate environment not everything one will do will change the world or benefit humanity; nevertheless, it is important to approach each project with dedication and skill to apply empathy and innovation in all that is done.



Burn down chart depicting our use of time

Difficulties

A difficulty we encountered was scheduling; that is, finding time in our busy and conflicting schedules to get the niche work done. Nevertheless, as time progressed, we made more time— the in-class exercise in scheduling and time-management helped us do so. In the time we were not working, we were able to communicate quite well together in an open, accepting environment. However this strength was followed by weaknesses, which we used as learning experiences.

Communication

We communicated well. While we began to use a project management system, Podio, we decided not to do so, but to manage our time and project using 3rd party applications. During my time as Project Manager, I used OmniFocus to schedule and organize the remaining tasks. Even though it was highly unorthodox, we chose group texting as our method of communication. It was unreliable because one of us did not have an iPhone, leaving room for lack of compatibility issues. We also used email as an alternative and more formal medium for communication. Despite the occasional challenge, communication was a strength for us. We developed an environment where we could freely express ourselves professionally and unprofessionally when upset. Despite being

an unprofessional medium of communication, when texting, we were able to use the rhetorical techniques we learned in class. Our ability to communicate strengthened our collaboration as we able to voice ourselves and hear back relatively quickly. This allowed for quick decisions and while they may not have been the best decisions, the speediness allowed us to try, learn, and try again. As someone who had worked in the UX world as a team of one, group work was different. It was stressful being project manager and contributing to the progress; thus, I felt a sense of relief when I was not project manager. Being able to communicate freely and seek help without worry of disapproval was quite nice. We were an open and supportive team— emotionally supportive that is.

Collaboration

How we collaborated was a different experience as we came together randomly, solely united by our interest in the project. This is unlike what we learned in our readings on building teams where teams are constructed based on strengths and weaknesses. However, as luck has it, we had different strengths, which seemed like a good thing as we could make up for the others' weaknesses. However, this, especially with this being a small team, did not allow for a system of checks and balances. Meaning only one of us were working in the area that was our strength. In other words, it felt as if we were working alone. Working alone whether it be design, writing, or project management can be a daunting task and I believe that although we focused on our strengths, with the scale of this project, we felt out-numbered.

Lessons learned

In project management

Although our work was niche, a valuable lesson I learned was to dedicate oneself wholly in everything one does in the workplace. To innovate in every design and iteration, empathize with the client, colleagues, and the user— all humans. Furthermore, to apply rhetoric in all that one does as everything is an expression, a communication of sorts.

In rhetoric

The lessons learned in rhetoric extended to even seemingly informal environments such as the digital space. In the second phase, we encountered a situation where rhetoric was essential when there was a miscommunication with the client. Where despite my attempt to communicate professionally, I appeared frustrated. The client did not appreciate it and I now used what I learned in rhetoric in digital communication to express an apology to the client.

In communication

The use of texting seemed to interest the class as well as Dr. Lauren. As aforementioned, it was unorthodox, but it helped us. I strongly believe that implementing a rapid, less-formal means of communication is a great asset in completing a project. This is seen in some corporate situations with an informal chat system as discussed in class. This also allows those who may not usually be heard, but have every right to be, to be heard. The only lesson learned from doing this is that I suggest is that the method of communication be a single app (Hangouts; Kik) or system (iMessage between Apple products; SMS between Android devices).

In collaboration

Collaboration can be improved by announcing one's strengths and weaknesses and taking on roles instead of being put into ones. It was an awkward situation when we could not decide who would be the first project manager. Our use of technology guided our rhetorical thinking and communicating. Despite using informal media, we had formal communications using what we learned in class in *The Essential Guide to Rhetoric*. I hope to use what I learned in rhetoric to express myself properly in as many things that I can.

In difficulties

The challenges we faced can be avoided by understanding what everyone's strengths and weaknesses are and by then creating groups based on that instead of solely based on interest. Of course interest in a project is a crucial aspect, but perhaps having interests in 3 projects and then weighing skills together to allow for strong teams with members whose project is one of their 3 choices will allow for greater success. We could have definitely been more prepared in our final presentation, but did not get much time to do so; in fact, some teams got less time than us. I feel as if the course of the semester accelerated and it would have been better if we began with the practice proposal and then the project sooner so that we could have more time for the final work.

Many thanks for the opportunity. We believe the MSU libraries enjoyed and will benefit from our work and it was an honor to work on a project of this scale. With the material learned in class, we were able to take it on and conclude it successfully.

Attachments: Original composition, Proposed revision, Final revision, and Burn down chart.