

Web Thesis Project DESI 1052

Brief 2009-10

Introduction and Rationale

This course integrates the work of the MA Web Design and Content Management programme and gives students an opportunity to produce a major item of independent work.

Aims

The course aims to give students an opportunity to plan, design, implement and publish a website. The project website can be related to a personal, professional or cultural interest.

Note: In some cases, the student's effort will be balanced between all aspects of the work (technical, graphic, content, functions, business plan etc). In other cases (eg when working on an existing website or when using a CMS) the student's productive effort will be less balanced. In every case, it is necessary to take an 'architectural overview' of all aspects of the project. The word 'architectural' is used for two reasons (1) architectural design is a useful analogy for web content planning and design (2) to draw the analogy that on small projects building architects do everything but on large projects they work with structural engineers, services engineers, interior designers, landscape architects etc etc.

For larger projects, the Web Thesis Project can take the form of a Prototype (see Wiki entry: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prototype>).

Learning Outcomes

On completing the course students will:

- be able to carry out web-related research
- be familiar with relevant software and professional practice matters relating to web consultancy
- be able to assemble web content
- be able to research, plan, design, publish, manage and maintain a website for a well-defined purpose
- be able to explain and justify and justify the web project in relation to its precedents (books, articles, electronic publications etc)
- be able to generate an innovative project

Brief

The Web Thesis Project starts with a brief statement of the aims of the project. This compares to the idea of a 'brief', as used in the legal professions and the design professions, and to a 'business plan' as used in a commercial context, and to an 'elevator pitch' as used in an elevator. These meanings are summarized below with links to Wikipedia for more information:

- A [legal 'brief'](#) (Latin 'brevis', short) is a written legal document used in various legal adversarial systems that is presented to a court arguing why the party to the case should prevail.
- A [design 'brief'](#) is a short statement of client requirements, often formulated by or with the designer and including summaries of opportunities assessed, constraints identified and needs for further investigation clarified.

- In business circles a '[business plan](#)' is a formal statement of a set of business goals, the reasons why they are believed attainable, and a plan for reaching the goals. It may also contain background information about the team attempting to reach those goals (eg if you are working with a company or an engineer).
- In investor circles an '[elevator pitch](#)' is an overview of an idea for a product, service, or project. The name reflects the fact that it should be made in the time span of an elevator ride: a maximum of 30 seconds and 140 words (ie a Twitter message). For examples, please do a [Youtube search on elevator pitch](#). The basic components are (1) a statement of 'what problem you are trying to solve' (2) a statement of 'how your venture solves that problem'. The word 'pitch' is used, as in [sales pitch](#) and [pitch book](#), to mean 'a persuasive promotion by means of argument and demonstration'

The Brief we require is for a Web Thesis Project. A [thesis](#) sets out your 'position' in the sense of your conclusions on a topic which has been investigated. At the end of the project, this will include an account of the research and case studies which support your conclusions. For scientific work this includes (1) an explanation of why the subject was chosen (2) a literature review (3) an explanation of how the research was done, you're your conclusions. In the creative arts, a thesis will follow the same pattern, including a literature review and reasoned debate, but the conclusion will be product or (as in a design thesis) or designs for a production (as in an architectural thesis).

The **Initial Brief for your Web Thesis Project** will have these components:

1. A 140 word Elevator Pitch, explaining the problem and the value proposition (note that the 'value' would probably be non-financial for a poetry website)
2. A longer account of the problem, with reference to how the need has been met with comparable web projects (both cognate and non-cognate) and with comparable non-web projects (eg projects which meet the need using print or advertising). For example, when Wikipedia was first proposed there should have been comparisons with cognate products (eg Encarta - a CD encyclopedia, and Britannica - a paper encyclopedia) and also with non-cognate websites (eg the Yahoo Directory, which was indexing a vast amount of information online)
3. A longer account of the value proposition, explaining how the web project will create value. The value can be financial or non-financial or both.
4. Explain the [Unique Selling Proposition \(USP\)](#) which distinguishes your idea.
5. A summary on one side of A4 paper, handed in and posted in the student area of the [Website Architecture Forum](#).

Research Report

The Research Report deals with the same basic issues as the Initial Brief but sets them out in a structured format. It is

- (1) submitted in December after the project was begun.
- (2) re-submitted with revisions and additional material in the Autumn of the year in which the project is completed

The research which supports and explains your conclusions will contain references to a wide range of media. This must include print publications (eg books) and web publications but can also include references to podcasts and broadcasts. References to print publications must be done using the [Harvard \(parenthetical\) system](#).

The sections of the Research Report are likely to include:

1. Elevator Pitch
2. Initial Brief

3. Competitor websites and comparable productions
4. Project Plan (Business, Commodity, Firmness, Delight)
5. Analysis of the implemented website (using statistics to analyse the project plan)
6. Conclusions and future development

Sections 1-4 will be included in the December draft and revised for the final submission in the following Autumn

Programme

OUTLINE PROGRAMME - for Full Time Students

Autumn Review a group of websites which might be used as precedents for a Web Thesis Project (this should be done from October onwards and will be presented as part of the Content Management Course in January 2009)

January Present outline proposal Web Thesis Project

Easter Present full draft of website

Summer Present a full implementation of the web thesis

Autumn Analyse traffic and other data (server logs, Google Analytics, usability etc) and submit a short report which reviews (1) the aims as set out in the research report (2) the implementation of the web thesis idea (3) an analysis of the website from May to September

OUTLINE PROGRAMME - for Part Time Students

Spring Review a group of websites which might be used as precedents for a Web Thesis Project (this is done as part of the Content Management Course)

January Present developed proposal Web Thesis Project

Easter Present full draft of website

Summer Present a full implementation of the web thesis

Autumn Analyse traffic and other data (server logs, Google Analytics, usability etc) and submit a short report which reviews (1) the aims as set out in the research report (2) the implementation of the web thesis idea (3) an analysis of the website from May to September

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Following the analytical approach used in the Content Management course, the categories we will use for the Web Thesis Project are:

Business. A website need not be commercial but there must be a set of clearly defined aims, explaining the reason for being 'busy' on the website and for someone (you or a client) providing the necessary resources of time and money for its production and maintenance.

Commodity. These considerations relate to the 'benefits', 'content', 'information architecture' and 'functionality' a user will experience when visiting and using the website.

Firmness. These considerations relate to the technology (hardware and software) used to create, operate and manage the website

Delight. These considerations relate to the aesthetic design of the site: colour, line, font, pattern, symbolism, associations etc.

Please bring sheets of A4 to each crit (with sufficient copies to give hand-outs to each student and each critic) with *no more* than one side of A4 devoted to each of the above topics. Before Christmas, the sheets will summarize your ongoing research. After Christmas, they will summarise your proposals.

The above analytical framework will be used for each of the main stages of the Web Thesis Project:

- Research
- Draft Design
- Final Design
- Assessment
- Analysis of implementation

DETAILED PROGRAMME

Notes on the Crits

1. They will be held regularly in Term 2
2. There is a set theme for each crit, but we also want to *look at the whole project* on each crit day
3. The dates and activities in the below chart are specified by month. Specific dates and minor modifications to the submission requirements, may be made.
4. You should come to each crit prepared to give an Elevator Pitch (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elevator_pitch) followed by a 5 minute account of the project. You must then be ready to answer questions.

DRAFT DATES	ACTIVITY
	RESEARCH. Explain your chosen project and outline the proposed research, under the headings of Business, Commodity, Firmness and Delight . The research proposals should, obviously, be related to the particular project you intend to do. If, for example, you wished to produce a poetry website then under ' Business ' you would investigate (1) how other poetry websites are funded (2) the range of revenue streams they draw upon (AdSense, Text-links, Amazon etc) (3) non-financial reasons for running a poetry website (4) cross-funding (eg between web publications, print publications and broadcast publications). Under ' Commodity ' you would look at the usability and functionality of various poetry websites: original publications, reviews, community, social networking etc. Under ' Firmness ', you would look at the technology used to edit and maintain the site: HTML, CSS, XHTML, PHP, Javascript, MySQL, Access, Dreamweaver, CMS etc. You should include the information architecture of the site under 'Firmness' and look both at how the information is organized and how the site navigation operates. Under ' Delight ', you should turn yourself into an art critic and evaluate the sector (poetry websites) for line, colour, pattern, mood, symbolism, meaning, graphic style, typography, criticism (the range of terms you might use includes: beautiful · sublime · disgusting · fun · cute · silly · erotic · entertaining · pretentious · discordant · harmonious · boring · humorous · tragic)
Nov	Submit draft research report. The four main headings will be <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elevator Pitch 2. Initial Brief 3. Competitor websites and comparable productions 4. Project Plan (Business, Commodity, Firmness, Delight)
Dec	Submit updated research report
Jan	Crit 1 on DRAFT DESIGN, with a special focus on 'Business': Explain the Aims and the possible Revenue Streams [This should be presented with reference to comparable websites, with examples of each of the revenue streams]. If you reject the idea of planning for revenue, then you must explain why each of the main possibilities has been considered and rejected. You should think of this crit as a 'pitch' of the type which would be made to a client or to potential investors

Feb	Crit 2 on DRAFT DESIGN, with a special focus on 'Commodity': Proposed Content and Information Architecture and Navigation [This should be presented with the help of Post-it notes on a sheet of plastic]
March	Crit 3 on DRAFT DESIGN, with a special focus on 'Firmness': Proposed technology [This should be presented in a manner which makes it easy for critics to see the technology you intend to use]
April	Crit 4 on DRAFT DESIGN, with a special focus on 'Delight': Proposed aesthetic and graphic design policy [This should be presented with the help of (1) a few screenshots of websites with a comparable graphic policy (2) examples of non-web art or graphic productions which show a comparable design philosophy (3) your own collage/montage to show the design policy in non-electronic form]
May	CRIT ON FINAL DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION (+ Assessment) There will be two stages to the crit (1) an opportunity for fellow students and critics to explore the website (2) a presentation
Oct	Presentation of an analysis of the site and implementation, using server stats, analytics, Search Engine Results Position, promotion, keyword analysis and other relevant metrics (if submitting a prototype, this can take the form of test results)
Nov	Submit a revised version of the Research Report containing a report on site development, on the analytical exercise and on changes made to the website project since the previous Christmas

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Assessment will be based on the following criteria but, because of the individual character of masters level projects they will relate in different ways to each project. The School's grading is based on the following system:

- A. Excellent 70-100%
- B. Very Good 60-90%
- C. Good 50-59%
- D. Satisfactory 41-49%
- E. Bare Pass 40%
- F. Fail <40%

Quality (and quantity) of research [A= the thesis is fully supported by research and testing, C= good use has been made of research and testing to explain and justify the thesis, E= there is just enough research and testing to justify the thesis]

Quality of business plan and website content [A= a well-researched and imaginative business/funding plan well supported by evidence from comparable projects, C= a satisfactory business plan with a reasoned funding/business model, E= there is a plausible plan for funding the project]

Quality of technical implementation [A=a well-researched and convincing technical plan/prototype for implementing the project, C= a satisfactory plan/prototype for implementing the project , E= a 'bare bones' plan/prototype for implementing the project]

Quality of functionality and usability [A= the prototype/design provides for a high quality user experience, C= the prototype/design provides for a satisfactory user experience , E= the prototype/design satisfies the basic requirements for the user experience]

Quality of graphic design [A= excellent quality and well-reasoned graphic design, appropriate to the target user group, C= satisfactory graphic design, appropriate to the target user group, E= basic graphic design for the target user group]

Quality of publication and promotion [A= excellent plan for site publication and promotion, using the most appropriate marketing opportunities, C= satisfactory plan for site publication and promotion, using appropriate marketing opportunities, E= sufficient thought has been given to publication and promotion to launch the project website]