

Debra Lowe: Internship Journal 4

Fourth Quarter Journal: November 11, 2009 – December 9, 2009

102 hours 11 minutes

Total hours on Internship: 406:12

11/09-11/13 Hours 18:46

I was given another graphic arts job to do, and that makes me very excited. I cannot judge my skill (I've seen both better and worse) but I know I'm a closet artist and love designing. This week I was able to do a "facelift" for a pair of the COMD (communication disorder) courses. It's not a Rembrandt, but I was able to re-vamp the buttons, headers, and over-all color and feel of the course. It's a great job because I have creative freedom (within the request of the instructor) to make something new. In short, it's fun for me.

Both courses are by the same professor. He has put in a request for (his words) "happy pastels" and high contrast. The first course was COMD 3700 and I didn't have additional instruction there. On COMD 3400, the instructor commented that he definitely wanted the banner changed. "Too many ears" was the specific problem. With instruction like that, I was curious as to the old appearances of the courses. While these looked professional enough, I could see why a professor who enjoyed "happy pastels" and didn't want an ear-dominated course would like a course makeover.

Before: Old COMD 3400



Before: Old COMD 3700



When I decide to re-make the appearance of a course, I first try to discern what I can about the instructor and the course. It gives me a feel for what it should look like. For example (going to extremes), I wouldn't design a course about childcare with grey and formal appearances. Neither would I be likely to design a serious accounting class with cartoon characters, unless the instructor was specifically trying to liven things up. These courses are for those interested in deaf education and audiology. The instructor was more of a fun-loving person, and otherwise, I was given a large amount of leeway. The course itself is mostly recorded lectures and lecture notes, so this wasn't a big constraining factor.

I started working with a pastel palate to design the course. I had learned the instructor was most fond of purple. I did several mock-ups of basic looks. There were a variety of colors and designs, but these were the final cuts:

After: New COMD 3400



After: New COMD 3700



Are they better? Good question, but they're what the instructor was looking for, and that's what matters. They do look a little cleaner, and they're easier to read. I have learned that what makes the instructor happy is a big part of what instructional designers do.

11/16-11/20 Hours 19:37 Subtotal 38:23 hours

Sigh. Of all the courses I get/have to edit, why this one? Of course, I was told better me than some others, but of all the courses I work with, why must I, a single female in her 30s, have to edit the Human Sexuality videos. Of course, I'm mostly just being silly. My undergrad degree was in biology, so it's really not a big deal, but it has led to a rash of jokes that are probably less than office-appropriate. It doesn't help when a designer starts a conversation with "Hey, I have another sex video for you." But it's all in good fun. It really all boils down to video editing, and it's tedious, whether editing videos on sprinkler equipment or sexual abnormalities. You stop hearing what their saying (mostly) and start hearing the things you're not supposed to hear. Pauses, coughs, strange noises, etc. all become the part an editor hears.

Editing the videos was somewhat strange because of the topic material. I usually like to listen out loud, but this would have been awkward and probably distracting, so headphones were a must. The instructor had a bit of a cold, so there were a lot of sniffs and throat-clearing. Interestingly, the throat-clearing happened most often right before an awkward word or phrase. Half of the time it was attached to the word, so editing took a bit of finesse, and a sense of humor. There were about a half-dozen videos all total, and sometimes their titles made me laugh ("Sexual Fulfillment without iClicker"). Otherwise, this was terribly boring. I was able to do a couple of other things online while editing, but nothing too involved so that I could transfer my attention at any second to remove another throat-clearing cough from a reference to another part of the anatomy.

11/23-11/25 Hours 16:28 Subtotal 54:51 hours

More videos, but these are COMD videos. The instructor had her daughter record the voice component, and her pronunciation is a little irregular. She had very long pauses, and sometimes was dissatisfied with COMD Transcripts and recorded a slide several times before she felt she had done it well enough. This meant much more editing. I've edited for this professor before, so at least I knew what to expect.

Also this week, I was given several transcripts for a different COMD class to get online. If it seems like I work a great deal with the Communication Disorders department, it is because they utilize the FACT center more than most other departments combined. I also work in the cubicle next to the designer in charge of the COMD department.

Anyway, the instructor sent along some transcripts to her PowerPoints, and I needed to proof them, format them, and upload them to her sites. There were two sites, and several transcripts. Both sites link differently, but it was a pretty easy thing to do.

There is a lot of talk about the budget and cut-backs. The atmosphere around the office has been a little strained. It doesn't impact me too much because I work in a cube, and I know that once I graduate I have no job anyway, but it does make things a bit more stressful for those I work with. But I'm sure office buzz is not the main interest of my internship journal. Alas.

11/30-12/4 Hours 26:00 Subtotal 80:51 hours

One of the many tasks I do at the FACT center is continual updates. While we prefer faculty to have their materials prepared in advance, we have many patrons who are eking out their curriculum week by week. Some of our instructors like to keep things fresh, and feel that advanced material preparation would limit their ability to adjust their teaching. We have many new instructors as well, and some want material online as they teach it. There are other reasons that faculty may wait to put things online, but there are only two solutions. Either the instructors can put the material online themselves (which is the preferred and more common method), or for those who need it, we can assist them. One of the ongoing tasks I have been helping with is the transcripts for COMD 3100 and 3700 courses. These courses deal with audiology and hearing. While preparation had taken place for the videos and assignments, the one oversight was that the hearing videos were not suitable for people with hearing impairments.

In all of our courses we must be concerned with access for those with disabilities. Because we have done work for the Hadley School for the Blind, we have become acutely aware of accessibility for the blind. Our courses must be processed by screen readers, and so the center has developed templates that read as seamlessly as possible. Recently, we have had more courses being used by those who are hearing impaired. This leads to a whole additional set of challenges. Some courses have videos or sound files. While most of the time, this is not a problem, and enhances the courses, but when we have a student in one of these courses that needs accommodations, there must be changes.

This is the case with the COMD courses. When evaluating these courses, the instructor decided that transcripts of the videos would be reasonable accommodation. The instructor had an assistant create the transcripts, but the formatting and uploading falls to the FACT center. The 3100 course has two videos for each week, and the 3700 course has one. Each course has completely different ways of posting materials. 3100 has the more typical pages and standard links, while 3700 has no actual pages, but uses the learning module tool differently, and all materials are only linked through the module. This

week it was my job to finesse these pages. I've been downloading the .rtf files and formatting them. There are a lot of little changes, and thankfully I have a science background so I can identify when the technical and anatomical terms are misspelled. Fortunately, the transcriber seems to have done a good job, with only minor complications. The transcriptions are very literal, and this can cause problems, because if the instructor repeats a word or uses partial sentences, this is exactly how it is transcribed. I decide what stays and what must be altered. I keep the transcript as close to the original as possible.

After the transcripts are corrected, I convert them to .pdf files. These files are uploaded to the Blackboard site, and then are linked. For the 3100 course, the links are done with html, and it's just a matter of linking it in the right location. For 3700, there are a few Blackboard tricks and it's up.

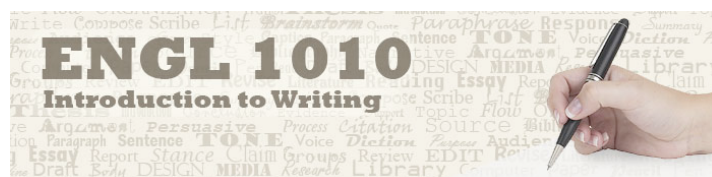
12/08-12/09 Hours 21:20 Subtotal 102:11 hours

Well, this week is my last entry for my journal although, as of March 2010, I am still working at the FACT Center. Most of the time, the work has not been particularly taxing once basic familiarity with all the tools is reached. The instructional designers are wonderful to work with. This has been great, but the department has been having troubles. It has been hit with budget cuts, and on the chopping block are all of the student and graduate positions. Also, full-time positions are being cut. With all the increases in online education, I'm concerned about the near future of the FACT center.

Nevertheless, my position remains until May, and the work goes on. There are more videos to edit this week, and the running joke of the "sex videos" (Human Sexuality course) continues. The current videos are the simple edit – just a format change that takes less time – and not the full edit of all the little errors. It's a job that takes time, but little effort.

I was able to talk with the instructor who was renovating his whole teaching style again. He has even more changes in store for this new semester. He has decided to not implement everything we had discussed completely, but is moving toward new and exciting lessons for his classroom. He seems a bit more excited about teaching than when I first spoke with him.

This week I also get to help with more graphics for web courses. This time the instructor was very specific regarding what she wanted, right down to the colors and lists of words. I still need to check with the Instructional Designer to verify the vision, but this is my prototype:



I still enjoy the work at FACT, although I really would love to work with people more. This has been both a very enjoyable experience, but valuable too. I have gained a great deal of skill in the field of online course creation and instructional design. I don't fully know how I'll be applying all that I've gained in this internship, but I can see that there are great possibilities. I have truly appreciated this opportunity.