

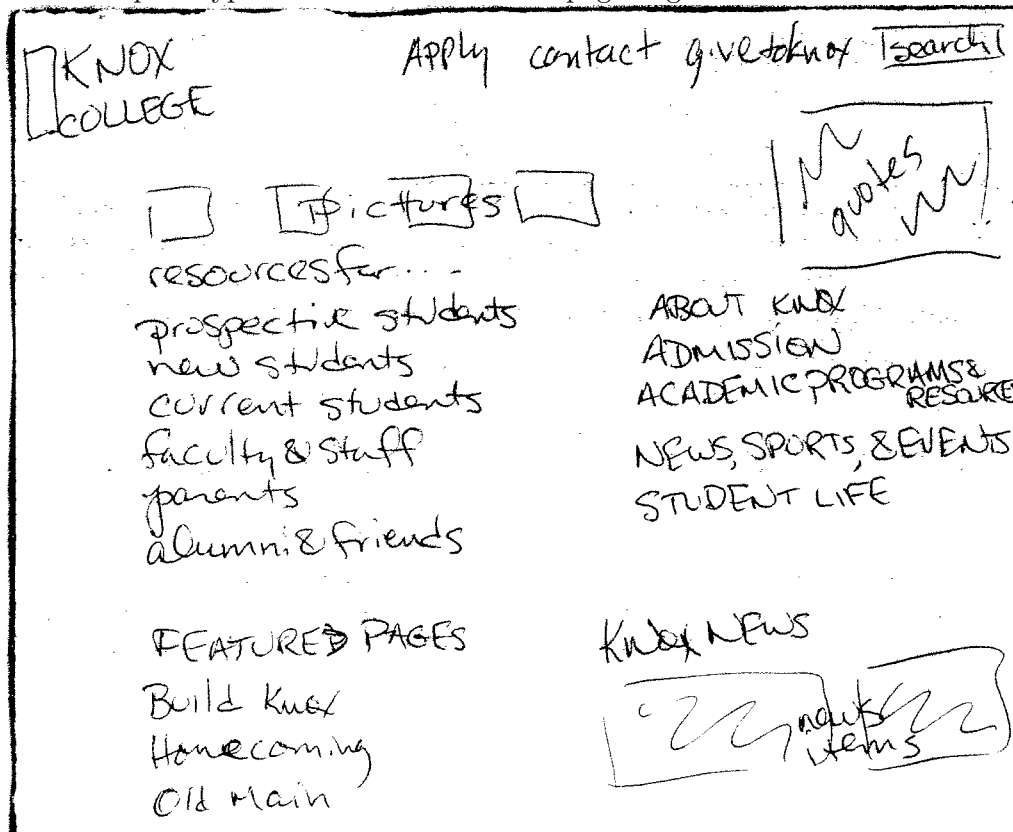
Lab 7

18 Oct 2007

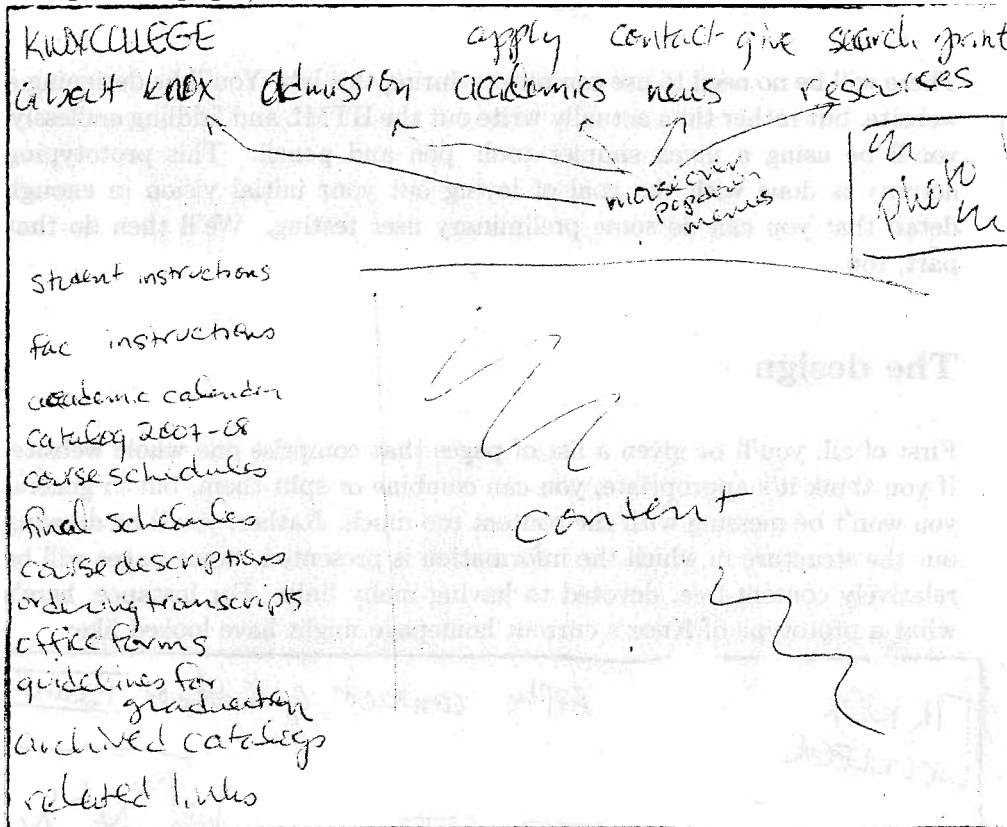
There will be no need to use computers during this lab. You'll be designing a website, but rather than actually write out the HTML and fiddling endlessly, you'll be using a much simpler tool: pen and pencil. This prototyping activity is done with the goal of laying out your initial vision in enough detail that you can do some preliminary user testing. We'll then do that part, too.

The design

First of all, you'll be given a list of pages that comprise one whole website. If you think it's appropriate, you can combine or split them, but in general you won't be messing with the content too much. Rather, you'll be drawing out the structure in which the information is presented. Some pages will be relatively content-free, devoted to having many links. For instance, here's what a prototype of Knox's current homepage might have looked like:



Some of the designs you make will be for the actual content pages themselves; those might look more like this (a hypothetical prototype for several of the Registrar's pages):



These examples should give you an idea of the level of detail you should try for: true content isn't really your job and can just have placeholders, but the navigational structure and overall presentation should actually be laid out. The actual sites you're laying out today won't be as complex as the Knox website, of course.

The testing

In the next phase of the lab, you'll be paired up with somebody who was working on a different website, and I'll give them a list of tasks they need to accomplish on yours. (You'll get a list of tasks for theirs as well, and once you've done one, you'll switch places.) To "operate" your website, you'll

show them your sketch of the main homepage; when they point to or say what link they mean to follow, you provide them with the sketch of the page they've gone to. If they need to back up, back up to the previous page. (This requires a certain amount of organisational skill on your part.)

Encourage them to think out loud, but *don't* tell them where to go!

The point of this section is to suss out what actual users do when presented with your design, and is a common first-stage process in designing any UI (not just websites). Take notes of where your tester seemed to follow a different chain of reasoning than you, or looks in a place you wouldn't have expected. These are a good indication you need to redesign things. After they've completed a task, feel free to ask questions about why they "clicked" in a certain place (these can be very helpful in formulating a fix), but try not to get defensive about your design.

Being a prototype tester

When it's your turn to be the tester, you should get a feeling of freedom: you pretty much can't be wrong. A slight amount of perverse reasoning is to be valued in a tester, because this helps to find edge cases (but don't overdo it). Importantly, though, if you have no idea where to go to solve your task, remember, *that's not your fault*; just try something and see where it goes. Even if you "fail" at a task, that's to be viewed as a problem in the design (which will thereby be fixed). See? Everyone wins.

The analysis

While your guinea pig is doing the tasks, take notes about what they're doing, especially if you didn't expect it. After you've both taken your turn, and while this is all still fresh, write out any changes you would want to make to your design. If your tester got completely lost at some point, that's really not a problem as long as you take that experience and use it to fix the design.