Midterm grading notes

Shorts

Video: 2 concepts needed (3 for first, 1 for second); clear explanation of concepts needed.

Tasks vs. scenarios: 2 for explaining the difference, 2 for explaining why.

Fidelity: 4 brief ideas, 1 point each. For example: that effort can be wasted, that it can focus on the wrong level of detail, that it can reduce future flexibility, that it can reduce the number of ideas generated, etc.

Sixth Sense

- These for each of the two applications
- 2 overall quality of application and its description
- 3 three justification elements
- 1 use of readings

General observations on Sixth Sense

If someone gave extra justifications then I gave more points if they didn’t use readings. If, overall, it was well thought out and written I also gave some leeway in the readings. But, if they didn’t use them at all there was at least 1 if not two points taken off.

- Many people didn’t use readings which is BAD, given that it was explicitly stated in the directions.
- Most of the ideas were good and well thought out, but sometimes people just simply described what that interface did and didn’t give an opinion on WHY it was good or bad.
- Then, if they did say why it was good or bad, many people didn’t exclusively say why the technology was especially good for a mobile application.

Project

- These times two, once for each tradeoff
- 2 for making the choice/tradeoff clear
- 4 for giving some reasonable justification
- -1 for no obvious connection to class concepts/readings

General observations

- Sometimes it wasn’t clear what the choice that was being made was. Some papers just presented a decision and talked about some of the consequences of that decision downstream. That’s a useful thing to do, but it doesn’t tell me what the choice was.
- Likewise, some answers didn’t talk about the specific reasons the choice was made – the attributes or characteristics on which one choice was better, worse, or different than the other.
- A relatively good example: “We were trying to decide between interviews and surveys. Interviews give deeper data, but surveys can be faster and we didn’t have much time so we chose to focus on them and only did a couple of interviews to supplement.”
- A relatively bad example: “We chose to do surveys. This meant we didn’t have a lot of in-depth quotes to use later.”
- I was pretty lenient in grading, because we haven’t talked very much explicitly about tradeoffs, and because the consequences often are the result of the characteristics that were traded off. But why I made this choice is a fundamentally different story than what happened be cause I made this choice. Both are great for learning for future design activities, but only the first can help you with a decision you’re about to make. (Though, note, that making predictions about what would happen with each choice is one way to help come up with appropriate decisions, and in fact is one of the ways scenarios help illuminate design decisions.)

HFS

- 5 Description of interface/object
- 5 Understanding of design principles
- 5 Redesign ideas
- 5 Critical thinking, justification of redesign
- 4 writing and presentation

General observations on HFS

- You guys did a good job on describing interfaces/objects. Some managed to integrate your critique along with the description, which is good.
- We can see a great improvement in the understanding of design concepts over the first few assignments.
- Some of you gave a good, basic critique, without too much attention paid to discussing possible design trade-offs, others factors that come into play, etc. In other words, there’s not much complexity in the critique. But we also see quite some good ones and people clearly put more efforts in thinking and writing.
• Remember your critique could make a strong case for your redesign, so make connections between them.
• We see more justifications and comparisons for redesigns, which is very nice.
• For HFS, I also found that students are doing an improved job in using concepts and ideas from the class to critique designs. One issue I saw is that some people selected objects that are overly simplistic and mundane. It might be more straightforward to apply class concepts to these objects, but it's not as interesting and exciting as seeing a thoughtful analysis and critique on sophisticated designs.

Trillium I

• 6 List appropriate stakeholders based on your design goals, and justify the choice.
• 7 List questions you are interested in for each groups of stakeholders. The list of questions should be comprehensive and well thought out with good justifications.
• 8 Briefly explain the research procedure and illustrate the methods you would use for the data collection. Discuss different possibilities and justify your choice.

General observations on Trillium I

• Not many of you think about the goal of the design before thinking about answering these questions. It is fine to not to have a well-defined goal before going to the field, and think about goals after you have some preliminary data. Then you probably need to rethink who are stakeholders based on the current goal and generate a smarter and more targeted plan of data collection. The design goal determines who are your users, who you should talk to, what data should be collected and how.
• The easy answer to the stakeholder question is “talk to everyone”. But you need to be more specific in this context and always justify “why” and what information you want to get from these people. For example, talking to employees who work there is good, but do you want to talk to them because they have more understanding of users, or are you designing something for them? When you say “employee”, do you mean the cook, clean persons, or cashiers, or all of them? Why?
• For Trillium 1, as Xuan pointed out, a common mistake was claiming to “do everything”, such as including everyone as relevant stakeholders, trying to learn everything about these people and using every possible method to study them. It's good to think broadly, but it is not as good to do everything without justification. For example, there may be constraints of resources and time, so that “doing everything” may not be practically applicable.
• For information you want to learn from stakeholders, some of you only provided one list of questions. Think about whether you want to learn different things from different groups of people.
• The justification of data collection methods are overall good, but there are quite some of you are not clear about how the research procedure and discuss the feasibility of these methods.

Trillium II

• 5 Is the idea clear
• 15 Is the idea reasonably justified
• -4 for no storyboard
• -1 to -3 for limited to no interactivity

General observations

• Apparently, finding seats in the Trillium is a real problem. 😊 And that's okay: the right design idea isn't necessarily a sexy, novel idea, as long as it's well-justified. So I didn't grade on "cool" at all this time – it wasn't part of the problem statement.
• In general, I was pretty lenient on the justification front, as long as there was a pretty good story about why the design was reasonable for the proposed problem, and there was some argument about why people (at least you) would use it.
• There was still a little more “what” than “why” in a lot of the writeups.
• Some people were pretty thoughtful in looking at limitations (e.g., how does a Surface table play in a dining hall), and critiquing their own designs; for others, the document mostly read like a self-sales pitch: this idea is TEH AWESOMES. The first approach seems more thoughtful and useful in design, and more in the spirit of the class. Don't forget to critique your own (and your classmates') designs, too.
• It was a little disappointing to see minimal justification based in other sources like readings, competing/related systems, etc. I didn't take off for it this time, but you'll want to do this in later assignments.
• Going back to “cool” vs. “boring”. People who chose seat-finding as a problem tended to focus on just the aspect of locating and reserving a physical space. This is a pretty narrow framing of the problem; designs where people thought a little more about the dynamics of why space is wasted, and why people want to sit alone or together, tended to come up with extensions such as finding people to eat with, dynamically rearranging space, helping people realize that they're taking up a lot of room, and so on. So if you choose a personal, familiar problem for your group project, be careful that you don't fall into a narrow, familiar take on what the design space around that project is.
• Also relevant to the projects: a design with a bazillion features is hard to explain, hard to justify, hard to prototype. It's good to think about lots of potential designs and features, but usually it's easier to communicate about and do more targeted designs. This will be a real concern for the project because “big” designs require “big” sketches, “big” storyboards, and “big” evaluations. There's a reason people are telling you to think hard about scope.
• Finally, designs that take advantage of special characteristics of the context or the materials are often better/more interesting. Some people proposed Surface applications that are essentially built-in table computers: you can check your email at the table. Fine, but you don't need a Surface for that. Some designs leveraged the surface's ability to detect and recognize objects to have self-adjusting information displays that move out of the way (okay) or provide info about the objects placed down (now we're talking) or even to use the objects as input into a virtual world game (mmm... designer-tingly). These may not be the right designs – maybe you really do just want a built-in email client to satisfy busyness and minimize phone/laptop hassle in the dining hall. But if you didn't actually go find out what a Surface was and can do, and think about what its special features have to offer, you made a pretty critical design mistake. Because of the structure of the grading you didn't lose points, but jobs and the market are not as forgiving.
Reflective/Papanek

- This was mostly a “feel” grade, 0-5 based on these factors:

- Did you do the appropriate reading or reading? Some people talked about reflective design in ways that clearly indicated they were making stuff up. Others read Papanek chapter 1... good, except that the goal was to think of more critical designs, which is why the question said read chapter 4.

- Were the connections to specific aspects and activities in the group project clear? “We used reflective design to get people's opinions” is not a clear connection (and, see above, not really what reflective design is).

- Did you clearly say whether you group did, or could have, or should have done the ideas you proposed? I would be surprised if most groups used reflective design or Papanek as part of their project in a serious way (though stronger, more thoughtful groups might have). If not, don’t say that you did. Say that you could have. It’s okay to say “we didn’t, but if we did this might have been different”... which was one of the main goals of the question, to get you thinking about what using ideas from these sources might mean in a project.