Spotlight Magazine

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GrC 462: Senior Project

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March 18, 2024

Introduction: Proposal Abstract

In response to challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Political Science (POLS) department at Cal Poly halted the distribution of its annual publication, *Alumni Connections*, resulting in declining alumni engagement. Recognizing the need for a more captivating and accessible platform, POLS department chair Ning Zhang initiated a project aimed at revitalizing the publication. For my senior project, I will be leading design efforts for this new publication entitled *Spotlight Magazine.*

The aim of this project is to utilize Adobe InDesign and page design principles effectively to create an engaging quarterly departmental magazine for the POLS department. The magazine showcases highlights of faculty, students, department events, and other updates. I will build on skills acquired from design projects in Graphic Communication, while learning to self-direct my creative process as the sole designer on this project. I will adhere to Cal Poly branding guidelines while crafting a unique and effective design.

The technology that enables the communication of ideas shapes both design language and the practice of design itself (Carpenter & Honeywill, 2000). Thus, research and familiarity with design technology terminology, especially relating to Adobe InDesign, is vital to the implementation of this project. While InDesign is a relatively new technology, its foundations are deeply rooted in a rich historical tradition. InDesign represents a continuation of technological progress dating back to the fifteenth century, beginning with the invention of movable type, and making significant strides with the development of the PostScript page-description software language in the mid-1980s. The terminology and typographic conventions integral to InDesign have evolved over numerous generations (French, 2014).

Carpenter and Honeywell contrast page design with engineering design. The field of engineering serves as an example wherein a design has linear criteria for success, evaluating whether it is structurally sound. In page design, the rules and criteria are not as straightforward (2000). This raises the question of how to judge the success of a page layout design. Carpenter and Honeywell suggest that when it comes to page design, success is measured through something much more subjective: how the design is perceived by others (2000). For this reason, my success criterion hinges on feedback from varied perspectives. A successful final design will include a positive user experience, implementation of design principles, proper file management and workflow practices, and consistency with Cal Poly branding guidelines.

I plan to spend the first few weeks of the quarter conducting research and gathering sources related to magazine design technology. Additionally, I will begin work on my proposal presentation. Next, I will begin the design process. My goal is to have a first draft ready by the end of Week 7. Additionally, I will prepare my literature review and progress presentation during Week 7. I will allocate Week 8 for feedback and revisions on my first draft, and intend to submit a complete draft for Cal Poly branding approval by the end of Week 8. During Weeks 9 and 10, I will focus on preparing the document for print, preparing for presentations, and reflection.

Literature Review: Understanding User Experience in Magazine Design

Elements of User Experience in Magazine Design

The foundation of the user experience in a magazine page layout is the grid (Caldwell &
Zappaterra, 2014). Grids help in pre-planning the sizes and shapes of various elements like type,
graphics, and white space, streamlining the layout creation process. However, the key to creating
exceptional designs lies in the designer's ability to confidently manipulate and personalize the
layout within the defined grid framework. A grid should be treated as a point of reference
without overly constraining creativity (Caldwell & Zappaterra, 2014).

Visual hierarchy is another critical aspect of user experience in magazine layout design.
Hierarchy in design acts as a visual guide, directing users to the most important information and
leading them through the layout as intended by the designer (Poulin, 2018). It serves as a
systematic method of organizing content and ensuring visual consistency, thereby facilitating
efficient user navigation (Graver & Jura, 2012). Designers employ various techniques such as
typography, color, contrast, and scale to establish hierarchy and emphasize key elements such as
headlines, subheadings, pull quotes, and images (French, 2014). Through strategic use of
hierarchy, designers can create focal points, establish flow, and enhance the overall readability
and impact of the layout (Carpenter & Honeywill, 2000).

User-Centric Approaches to Page Layout Design

User-centric approaches to page layout design put the needs and preferences of the
audience at the forefront of the design process (Martin & Muncie, 2017). Rather than imposing
rigid structures or aesthetic preferences, designers prioritize creating layouts that are intuitive,
user-friendly, and seamlessly cater to the audience's expectations. This approach involves
employing principles of user experience design, such as clear navigation, logical information

hierarchy, and responsive design, to ensure that users can easily find and interact with the content they seek (Blair-Early & Zender, 2008). By adopting a user-centric mindset, designers can create layouts that not only captivate users visually but also enhance their overall experience, leading to increased engagement and retention.

Understanding and analyzing reader expectations and preferences is the cornerstone of effective design. This involves conducting research to gain insights into the target audience's demographics, interests, habits, and content consumption patterns (Stull, 2018). By delving into these factors, designers can tailor their layouts to meet the specific needs and desires of their users. For instance, if the target audience prefers visual content over text-heavy articles, designers can prioritize incorporating more images, infographics, and videos into the layout to enhance engagement and readability (Martin & Muncie, 2017).

Challenges and Considerations

In the world of design, balancing creativity with usability is a perpetual challenge. While designers strive to push creative boundaries and create visually captivating layouts, they must also ensure that usability is not compromised. This involves finding the right balance between innovative design elements and user-friendly navigation, readability, and accessibility (Stull, 2018). Conducting user testing stands out as a primary approach to ensuring the usability of a design (Ritter, 2017).

Addressing accessibility and inclusivity in design is an increasingly important consideration in today's digital landscape. Designers must ensure that their layouts are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities or impairments. For digital designers, this involves adhering to accessibility standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and incorporating features such as alternative text for images, proper contrast ratios for text

readability, keyboard navigation support, and compatibility with screen readers (Gilbert, 2019). By prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity in design, designers can ensure that their layouts are usable and enjoyable for all users, regardless of their abilities or limitations.

Synthesis

When considering user experience in the design of *Spotlight Magazine*, my process involves understanding the reader profile and extracting reader preferences and expectations. *Spotlight Magazine* readers can be defined by their connection and interest in Cal Poly's Political Science department. As they engage with the publication, they likely seek information about new advances in the department, events and initiatives, and opportunities for involvement. To effectively cater to these preferences, it is crucial to craft layouts that are visually engaging and easy to navigate, while also delivering relevant and informative content.

Incorporating accessibility and usability while balancing creativity and aesthetic for the magazine involves a multifaceted approach. Part of my role as the designer involves ensuring that the magazine is accessible to all readers, regardless of any potential physical or cognitive limitations. This includes considerations such as legible typography, sufficient color contrast, and clear navigation pathways. At the same time, creativity and aesthetic appeal should not be compromised. Visual elements should be thoughtfully integrated to enhance the overall design without sacrificing usability.

In applying grid systems, hierarchy, type, and visuals, the design must advocate for user wants and needs. This involves structuring the layout in a way that guides readers seamlessly through the content, prioritizing important information such as department updates and event listings. Utilizing visually appealing typography and imagery can further enhance the reader experience, capturing attention and conveying the magazine's content effectively. Aligning

design elements with reader preferences and expectations will enable me to create layouts that

resonate with the magazine's audience and foster engagement.

Results
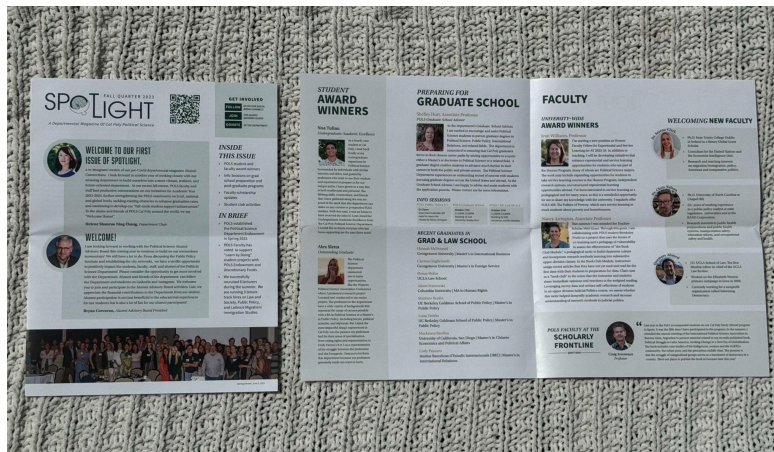
    I successfully completed a logo and engaging layout concepts for *Spotlight*. I designed

the magazine on Adobe InDesign. This magazine plays a crucial role as it is distributed to donors

and alumni, thereby bolstering their support for the Political Science department. The edition I

produced over the quarter holds particular significance as it will be distributed at an opportune

moment: during PolyGives. I anticipate notable increases in support across various metrics,

including social media following, Alumni Board membership, and most significantly, monetary

donations.

Conclusion

The successful completion of the layout for the winter quarter edition of *Spotlight* has significant implications for my synthesis. Understanding the user experience and reader profile is essential in crafting layouts that cater to the preferences and expectations of *Spotlight's* audience, primarily consisting of individuals connected to Cal Poly's Political Science department. By incorporating accessibility and usability features while maintaining creativity and aesthetic appeal, the magazine can effectively engage readers across various metrics, including social media following, Alumni Board membership, and monetary donations during events like PolyGives. Through careful application of grid systems, hierarchy, typography, and visuals, the design advocates for user wants and needs, ensuring that the magazine's content is delivered in a visually engaging and easily navigable manner. This alignment with reader preferences and expectations will ultimately enhance the overall reader experience and foster increased engagement with the publication.

Reflection & Limitation

I have accomplished most everything I wanted to, though my schedule shifted considerably from my expectations. Initially, I planned to finish the winter quarter edition earlier, but had to adjust according to the availability and development of content. Despite the challenges, I am proud to say that I am planning to finalize it this week so it can be printed and sent out by the first week of April, just in time for PolyGive to encourage greater alumni donations.

Moving forward, I am excited to build on my project by creating a spring quarter issue next quarter. Additionally, I aim to leave the department with established branding and assets that can be utilized in the future to sustain this publication's momentum and impact.

Reflecting on my process, I recognize that there are areas where I could improve. One such area is being more proactive in drafting and collecting feedback. Incorporating feedback early on can lead to a more refined and polished final product, ultimately enhancing its effectiveness and reception. Therefore, in my future endeavors, I plan to prioritize soliciting and integrating feedback throughout the project lifecycle to ensure continuous improvement and success.

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