**Exploring how Instructors can Design Their Online Course Interfaces for Better Usability and Utility in Brightspace**

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The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly increased reliance on online learning. Students are required to interact with multiple online course interfaces daily. Each of these course interfaces can vary in their level of usability and utility that they offer to the student. Evaluating the usability and utility of online course interfaces is necessary for improving user experience. Poor usability and utility can affect students in multiple ways. Learning outcomes, performance, motivation, satisfaction, and task efficiency are some areas that suffer because of poor usability and utility. Instructors often aren’t familiar with principles of interface design and can make mistakes which may negatively affect the usability and utility of their course interfaces. We conducted exploratory research within Brightspace to discover what instructors can change, implement, and avoid within their course interface to improve usability and utility. Using a survey and a structured interview, we gathered information on the quality of labels used in course interfaces, what content organization and presentation are preferred by students, what interface elements are useful to students, and prior student experience with online learning. When testing label quality, we found that some labels were more intuitive than others. More specifically, we show that students initially search course sections such as “Announcements”, “Calendar”, and “Course information” when they are looking for information about their course and deadlines. We also found that some of the existing widget labels and labels in Carleton’s custom Brightspace navigation menu are uninformative and could be renamed to increase usability. The “Content” and “Progress” navigation bar menus were generally understood by students. However, most students could only give vague or inaccurate descriptions of what the “Tools” and “Jump To” menu labels contain. Some widget labels were especially confusing to students. Students often failed to describe the “Content Browser” and “D2L Content Navigator” widgets. We recommend that Instructors review their widgets with students and name the widgets so that students can understand their intended functionalities. We did not find any statistically significant differences in preference for one of the course content organization schemes suggesting that the instructors can use either of the three course content organization options: weekly subject-based, weekly date-based, and content type-based; however, students gave insights into why some organizations might be more problematic than others. We found a statistically significant difference in content presentation with a preference for the “Visual Table of Contents” (VTOC) widget over both the “D2L Content Navigator” and “Content Browser” widget. The VTOC was considered more visually appealing and better for tracking progress and students were less concerned about its design. We found that on average, various widgets were moderately to very useful. The “Course Information” widget, the “Meeting Links” widget, the “Announcements” widget, and the “Calendar” widget were perceived as most useful. The “Google Search” widget was found to be not useful or of little use. Lastly, we gained valuable insights into student experience with previous online course interfaces and interface design in general. Many students noted that they wanted consistency between courses, no overwhelming amounts of information or widgets, no overlapping sections or widgets, and more informative labels. This research helped us formulate several recommendations for instructors to consider when designing their course interfaces.