SPSU.edu Usability Evaluation Test Plan

March 10, 2013

Prepared for Stephanie Coleman,
Director of Web Services, SPSU

IDC 6120 Usability Testing
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Executive summary

The purpose of this usability test is to evaluate whether users can successfully navigate through and locate information using Southern Polytechnic State University’s spsu.edu web site (www.spsu.edu). The target audience for this test is prospective graduate students who are interested in distance learning. This test will specifically focus on this audience’s ability to:

- Learn more about SPSU’s credentials and program offerings
- Understand what the degree requirements are for a particular program
- Learn about SPSU’s distance learning experience
- Understand what they need to do to apply

The project sponsor is Stephanie Coleman, SPSU’s Director of Web Services. The usability test will be conducted by “the 900ers,” a team of three SPSU graduate students in the IDC program. The project advisor is Dr. Carol Barnum. The project is part of Dr. Barnum’s spring 2013 IDC 6120 Usability Testing course.

The usability study will evaluate the ability of six users to complete five scenarios. The users will have similar user profiles, except there will be no more than two users who are interested in any specific degree program. This diversity will ensure that the study results in feedback that spans the SPSU web site, rather than being skewed by any one degree program’s webpage. Because the user profile for this study is students interested in distance learning, the usability tests will all take place remotely, using computer-based study techniques rather than an on-site usability lab environment.

This test plan describes:

- Problem statement and test objectives
- User profile
- Test methodology
- Test scenarios
- Data collection plan
- Estimated project timeline
- Team member roles and responsibilities
- Test artifacts, including script to be used during the test, screening and post-test questionnaires, and the persona used to create the user profiles

Deliverables for this project include:

- Test plan
- Audio, screen, and/or video recordings (if participants have web cams)
- Usability test logs
- Presentation to the project sponsor
- Report of the study findings
Problem statement and test objectives

SPSU is interested in learning whether prospective students are able to successfully use the spsu.edu website. The university’s goals for prospective students are to get them interested in the school, to give them a sense of SPSU’s culture, and to give the students enough information and flavor to make them want to begin and attain their degree. It is important that the web site leaves users thinking, “I was able to find what I was looking for” and “It worked like I expected it to.” From the university’s perspective, the ideal path for prospective students is:

1. Find information that makes them feel SPSU is the right school for them
2. Plan a visit to the university (if they are planning to attend the university in person)
3. Apply

A heuristic evaluation that the 900ers conducted using the Travis persona indicated that the spsu.edu website has the following problems:

- Navigation paths are unclear—information is not always in logical places and, therefore, is sometimes difficult to find
- The look and feel across pages is inconsistent: headers, sidebars, and in-page navigation treatments differ between the SPSU main website and program-specific websites
- Link behavior is inconsistent: while most links open pages in the current browser window, some links trigger new tabs without warning
- Credential information is difficult to find: both university accreditation and professor qualifications are difficult to locate

The usability study will measure prospective graduate students’ success in:

- Finding information that will help them learn more about SPSU’s credentials and program offerings
- Understanding what the degree requirements are for a particular program, including what classes are offered, whether a thesis is required, and how long it will take to complete a particular program
- Learning about SPSU’s distance learning experience, including whether the program they are interested in can be completed entirely through distance learning
- Understanding what they need to do to apply, including understanding program costs, whether a GRE is required, what documents are required, and how to locate an application

This study will focus on functional and structural feedback about the spsu.edu website rather than website design. It will focus on the broader SPSU website’s key functions, not the content or website design unique to a particular program.
Goals that are not part of this usability test, but that the 900ers recommend be included in follow-up usability testing include:

- Success using the spsu.edu website from mobile phones and tablets
- Evaluating website design and information architecture
- Accessibility of the website for people who have disabilities

User profile
When creating user profiles for our usability study, we interviewed 11 people who are potentially interested in attending a university that offers distance learning degrees. As a result of our interviews, we created three personas:

- **Samantha**—an older potential undergraduate student
- **Carrie**—a younger potential undergraduate student
- **Travis**—an older potential graduate student

Because we have more access to potential graduate students who could be interested in a distance learning degree, we selected Travis as our primary persona. Collectively, though, our personas and the people we interviewed had many characteristics in common. Each participant will have the following characteristics.

Demographics
- **Age**—may range from late 20s to 50; our primary persona is in his 40s
- **Education**—has a Bachelor’s degree (multiple degrees would also be acceptable)

Technological savvy
- **Internet use**—uses the Internet at least for social media and entertainment (most interviewees also use the internet for work)
- **Devices**—must have familiarity with Windows or Apple computers

Motivation
- **Motivation**—should feel that a graduate degree will help with their careers and/or provide personal fulfillment; our primary persona wants a degree because he wants to keep learning, inspire his son, and improve his job-related skills
- **Area of interest**—may be interested in any area of study that SPSU offers as part of a graduate program
- **Program start**—must plan to start school within the next 18 months
Environmental and behavioral attitudes

- **Schoolwork**—sometimes works from home and also does schoolwork from work
- **Concerns**—has concerns about having enough time to spend on school work and about the lack of interaction with others in an online program

Subgroups

We decided not to include specific user subgroups in our usability test. We need to ensure that our users are interested in different areas of study, however, so our study results are more broadly applicable across the SPSU web site.

Test methodology

The usability evaluations will be administered remotely. Rather than having users go to a physical usability lab, we will conduct the usability test using GoToMeeting, an online meeting tool.

Selecting users

We plan to test a total of six users, plus one additional user as a backup in case one of the six users has to back out. Using our screening questionnaire, we’ll screen the graduate school candidates from our persona interviews as well as other candidates who fit the Travis persona, until we find 7 good candidates (five for the study, one for a pilot, and one as a backup). Once we’ve identified the users, we’ll set up a schedule for each usability evaluation.

Session length

The total length of each test session will be 60 minutes and will include:

- 5 minute welcome and introduction to the test
- 45 minutes to complete the five scenarios
- 5 minutes to collect the user’s overall impressions of the web site
- 5 minutes for a post-test questionnaire

After each scenario, the moderator will ask post-scenario questions.

Pre-test questionnaire

We decided to not include a pre-test questionnaire, because we didn’t identify any essential questions that would need to be asked that we hadn’t already covered in the screening.
Roles and responsibilities

Each of us will be a moderator for two sessions, an observer for two sessions, and a logger for two sessions, so we will each get to experience all of the roles. We will all recruit participants for the usability test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Welcomes the participant; conducts pre-test questionnaire; walks the participant through the scenarios, following the script; conducts the post-scenario questionnaire. Prior to the usability test, the moderator will email the GoToMeeting meeting invitation and all forms that need to be signed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logger</td>
<td>Logs the time of each activity during the test and whether the participant is able to locate the information they are looking for following a direct path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Captures all comments made by the participant and moderator during the test.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional usability test logistics

- The moderator won’t introduce the participant to the logger, the observer, or the project sponsor (if the project sponsor is also on the call). The moderator will say there are people on the phone observing, but we felt it would be less intimidating to not do introductions.
- We will provide the scenarios to the participant one at a time, but we won’t stop the participant in between tasks within a scenario. Each scenario builds on the previous, so we won’t limit the time for each scenario. We will give the participant the option to end a scenario if they feel they can’t complete it.

Test environment and equipment

Since the usability test will be conducted in a virtual lab environment, participants will need to do a small amount of set-up work prior to the test, and will need to meet some hardware requirements. We’ll ask the participants to share their screens (make them presenter in GoToMeeting) so we can observe their key strokes.

Software

- We’ll ask participants to use GoToMeeting. The moderator will send the participants an email prior to the test with instructions for downloading GoToMeeting, and contact information if they have any trouble, so they will be ready to go at the time the test begins. The moderator will make sure the participant has connected successfully as soon as the call begins.
- We plan to use Morae software for logging.

Hardware

Required hardware:

- Either a PC or Mac computer
- Microphone (can be built in or external) or the ability to dial in to the GoToMeeting call using a telephone while also using their computer
Incentives

The sponsor will provide six $25 gift certificates to Amazon.com as an incentive for completing the usability test. At the end of the usability test, the moderator will tell the participant that their gift certificate will come from Amazon as an email, so they know to watch their email for it.

Scenarios

The goals for the usability test are to evaluate whether participants can find information that allows them to:

- Learn more about SPSU’s credentials and program offerings
- Understand what the degree requirements are for a particular program, including what classes are offered, whether a thesis is required, and how long it will take to complete
- Learn about SPSU’s distance learning experience, including whether the program they are interested in can be completed entirely through distance learning
- Understand what they need to do to apply, including understanding program costs, whether a GRE is required, what documents are required, and how to locate an application

An additional goal is to get feedback about the overall look and feel of the web site.

The following table shows the tasks we will test, broken into scenarios that support these goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You’ve recently decided that you would like to pursue a graduate degree or certificate program through a university that offers distance learning. You’ve been searching on the Internet, and you come across the web site www.spsu.edu. | Look around the home page.  
- What do you think you can do from this web site?  
- What do you think will happen if you click on the tab and links on the page?  
- Are there any words or labels that you don’t understand?  
- What would be the first thing you’d most likely click on?  
- What’s your general impression of the web site from the homepage or First screen? |
### Goal: Learn more about SPSU’s credentials and program offerings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You’re only interested in attending a university that is accredited and, of course, that has a certificate or degree program that you’re interested in. | From the spsu.edu home page, locate the information that allows you to answer:  
- Is SPSU is an accredited university?  
- You had mentioned that you were interested in a `<state participant’s area of interest>` program. Does SPSU offer a program like that? |

### Goal: Understand what the degree requirements are for a particular program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You’ve decided that SPSU looks like a good school for you to attend, provided that the graduate program that you’re interested in includes classes that you will enjoy, that you can take completely online, and that you can finish within three years. | Using the spsu.edu web site, locate the information that allows you to answer the following questions:  
- What are the required classes for the program that you’re interested in?  
- What is an elective class for the program that you’re interested in?  
- Can you complete the program that you’re interested in completely online?  
- If you’re interested in a Master’s Degree, does the program that you’re interested in require you to complete a thesis?  
- How long will it take you to complete the program that you’re interested in? |

### Goal: Learn about SPSU’s distance learning experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’ve never taken online classes before, and you’re a little concerned about what the whole distance learning experience might be like.</td>
<td>Locate information that gives you an overview of what it’s like to take online classes and how you would interact with professors and other students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal: Understand how to apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’re feeling pretty good about SPSU’s distance learning programs, but you have a few final critical questions before you decide to apply.</td>
<td>Locate the information that allows you to answer these questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How much will the program that you’re interested in cost?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When would you have to apply if you wanted to attend in Fall 2013?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What application requirements do you need to meet in order to apply?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you get an application form?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection

During the study, we will collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data will include:

- Task completion time
- Task completion success rate
- Number of attempts it took each participant to find the desired information
- Number of participants able to successfully find the desired information
- Participants’ ratings of the ease of locating the information they were looking for

Qualitative data will include:

- Participants’ body language and facial expressions (if the user uses a web cam)
- Non-verbal communication cues, such as sighs, long pauses, facial expressions, using the mouse to hover over something for a long time, etc.
- Participants’ comments and questions during the usability test

The post-test questionnaires will ask participants to assess:

- What is your overall impression of SPSU.edu?
- How easy was the web site to use?
- How would you rate the look and feel of the web site?
- How confident are you that you found the information you needed?
- Based on this experience, how confident are you about SPSU’s online classroom experience?
- How confident are you that the SPSU degree program you explored is a respected program?
- What was the best area of the web site?
- What area of the web site needs the most improvement?
- Based on this experience, would you be more or less likely to apply to SPSU?
Usability Test Schedule
Timelines for the tests are included below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 18-24, 2013</td>
<td>Conduct test walkthrough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 26, 2013</td>
<td>Conduct pilot test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Participant 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Participant 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Participant 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Participant 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Participant 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deliverables
Deliverables for this project include:

- Oral team presentation of the results to the project sponsor on April 24, 2013. The presentation will include:
  - Electronic copies of the usability test logs
  - Audio, screen and/or video recordings (if participants have web cams)
- Formal report of the study findings complete by April 28, 2013

Test Artifacts
This section includes samples of:

- Test script
- Screening questionnaire
- Pre-test consent form
- Post-test questionnaire
- Persona
Script

Overview/Briefing (10 minutes)
The moderator will:

- Welcome the participant and tell them the session will take about an hour
- Start the recording
- Read the participant the pre-test consent form and ask them whether they consent to being recorded
- Have the participant complete the pre-test questionnaire
- Explain how we’d like the participant to approach the test (we are testing the web site, not them; share what they’re thinking as they work by talking aloud; whether we’ll stop them at the end of the time period, etc.)
- Instruct the participant to let us know when they believe they are done with a task, and to let us know if they would like to give up on a task; if the participant gets stuck, no assistance will be offered other than asking if they want to continue with this task or move on to the next one
- Ask the participant to start their web cam (if they are using one)

Scenario 1
You’ve recently decided that you would like to pursue a graduate degree or certificate program through a university that offers distance learning. You’ve been searching on the Internet, and you come across the web site www.spsu.edu. Look around the home page.

- What do you think you can do from this web site?
- What do you think will happen if you click on the tab and links on the page?
- Are there any words or labels that you don’t understand?
- What would be the first thing you’d most likely click on?
- What’s your general impression of the web site from the homepage?

Scenario 2
You’re only interested in attending a university that is accredited and, of course, that has a certificate or degree program that you’re interested in. From the spsu.edu home page, locate the information that allows you to answer:

- Is SPSU an accredited university?
- You had mentioned that you were interested in a <state participant’s area of interest>> program. Does SPSU offer a program like that?

Post-scenario questions

Please tell me whether you agree with the following statements by saying strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree

1. It was easy to find what I was looking for.
2. I’m confident that I found the information I intended to find.
Scenario 3
You’ve decided that SPSU looks like a good school for you to attend, provided that the graduate program you’re interested in includes classes that you will enjoy, that you can take completely online, and that you can finish within three years.

Using the spsu.edu web site, locate the information that allows you to answer the following questions:

- What are the required classes for the program that you’re interested in?
- What are the elective classes for the program that you’re interested in?
- Can you complete the program that you’re interested in completely online?
- If you’re interested in a Master’s Degree, does the program that you’re interested in require you to complete a thesis?
- How long will it take you to complete the program that you’re interested in?

Post-scenario questions

Please tell me whether you agree with the following statements by saying strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree

1. It was easy to find what I was looking for.
2. I’m confident that I found the information I intended to find.

Scenario 4
Assume that you’ve never taken online classes before, and you’re a little concerned about what the whole distance learning experience might be like. Locate information that gives you an overview of what it’s like to take online classes and how you would interact with professors and other students.

Post-scenario questions

Please tell me whether you agree with the following statements by saying strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree

1. It was easy to find what I was looking for.
2. I’m confident that I found the information I intended to find.

Scenario 5
You’re feeling pretty good about SPSU’s distance learning programs, but you have a few final critical questions before you decide to apply. Locate the information that allows you to answer these questions:

- How much will the program that you’re interested in cost?
- When would you have to apply if you wanted to attend in Fall 2013?
- What application requirements do you need to meet in order to apply?
- How do you start your application?
Post-scenario questions

Please tell me whether you agree with the following statements by saying strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

1. It was easy to find what I was looking for.
2. I’m confident that I found the information I intended to find.

Post-test wrap-up (10 minutes)

- Thank the user.
- Ask the user to complete the post-test questionnaire.
- Tell the user that the project sponsor will provide the user a $25 Amazon.com gift certificate as an incentive for completing the usability test. The gift certificate will come from Amazon as an email, so they should watch their mail for it.

Screening questionnaire

| Participant first name: ______________________ | Participant ID: ____________ |
| Selected: _____Yes      _____No |

Hello! My name is _______________________, and I’m a student at Southern Polytechnic State University. We are recruiting volunteers for a study, and would love your input. There’s a $25 Amazon.com gift card for volunteers who qualify for and complete this study. Does that sound like something you’d be interested in doing?

_____YES—continue    _____NO—terminate

Great! Let me tell you a bit more about our study. Our team is conducting a usability study of a university web site. We’re recruiting volunteers to test how well the web site meets the needs of users. We’ll be recording the test sessions. Would you have a problem being recorded as part of this study?

_____YES—terminate    _____NO—continue

Great! We’re going to be running test sessions on [DATE] and [DATE]. Would you be able to participate for about an hour on one of those dates?

_____YES—continue    _____NO—terminate

Great! I just have a few questions to ask, and it will only take a few minutes. Do you have a college degree?

_____YES—continue    _____NO—terminate
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant first name: __________________________</th>
<th>Participant ID: ____________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selected: _____Yes      _____No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Are you interested in pursuing a graduate degree?**

_____YES—continue        _____NO—terminate

**When are you considering starting a graduate degree?**

_____18 MONTHS—continue   _____18 MONTHS—terminate

**What are you interested in studying?**

_____SPSU online graduate program—continue   _____NON-SPSU online graduate program—terminate

**Do you have a computer with internet access at home?**

_____YES—continue        _____NO—terminate

**How many hours per week do you use the internet at home?**

_____fewer than 3—terminate  
_____3-5—continue 
_____6-10—continue 
_____10 or more—continue

**Are you employed outside of the home?**

_____YES, FULL TIME   _____YES, PART TIME   _____NO

Wonderful! Thank you so much for talking with me. I’m going to review your answers with the rest of the team. If you qualify as a participant, we’ll be contacting you this week to schedule your test time. Thank you!
Pre-test consent form

To be read by the moderator

I agree to participate in the study conducted and recorded by SPSU graduate students.

I understand and consent to the use and release of the audio and video by SPSU. I understand that the information and video is for research purposes only and that my name and image will not be used for any other purpose. I relinquish any rights to the recordings and understand the recordings may be copied and used by SPSU without further permission. Only my first name may be reported in association with the session results.

I understand the audio and video recordings and any highlights extracted from them may be used for any of the following purposes:

- Conference presentations
- Educational presentations or courses
- Informational presentations
- Educational courses
- As part of research

I give up any rights to the recordings and understand that they may be used for the purposes described in this release form without further permission.

I understand that I can leave the study at any time.

I agree to immediately raise any concerns or areas of discomfort with the study moderator.
# Post-test Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your overall impression of spsu.edu?</td>
<td>Very negative  Somewhat negative  Neither positive nor negative  Somewhat positive  Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How easy was the web site to use?</td>
<td>Very difficult  Somewhat difficult  Neither easy nor difficult  Somewhat easy  Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you rate the look and feel of the web site?</td>
<td>Very negative  Somewhat negative  Neither positive nor negative  Somewhat positive  Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How confident are you that you found the information you needed?</td>
<td>Very confident  Somewhat unconfident  Neither confident nor unconfident  Somewhat confident  Very confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Based on this experience, how confident are you about SPSU’s online classroom experience?</td>
<td>Very confident  Somewhat unconfident  Neither confident nor unconfident  Somewhat confident  Very confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How confident are you that the SPSU degree program you explored is a respected program?</td>
<td>Very confident  Somewhat unconfident  Neither confident nor unconfident  Somewhat confident  Very confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.a. Rate your confidence level in the quality of the program.</td>
<td>Very confident  Somewhat unconfident  Neither confident nor unconfident  Somewhat confident  Very confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.b. What is the basis for your level of confidence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What was the best area of the web site?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. What area of the web site needs the most improvement?

10.a. Based on this experience, would you be more or less likely to apply to SPSU?

| Very unlikely | Somewhat unlikely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Somewhat likely | Very likely |

10.b. Why?
Persona
Travis Treviño

“Learning is a lifetime pursuit.”

Travis is a 43 year-old potential graduate student. He lives with his spouse and his 17 year-old child from a previous marriage. He joined the Marine Corps after graduating high school and completed a 4-year enlistment. Travis then went on to college and graduated with a Bachelor’s in Journalism after five years. He currently works as the sports and local news editor for a newspaper in Midlothian, Virginia. With his son getting ready for college, Travis has been inspired to go back to school. He wants to show his son that learning is a lifetime pursuit and that he can do whatever he puts his mind to. Also, the increasingly desperate state of the newspaper industry leaves Travis uncertain about his future. He loves journalism, but knows that he and his newspaper will have to build an online presence. Therefore, he has decided to pursue a graduate degree in Technical Communication, which he feels will help him gain the experience needed with new media to push his newspaper forward. He plans to start in the fall so he and his son can start back to school together.

Travis is proficient in multiple desktop publishing programs due to his job duties. He uses the Internet multiple times each day for social media, online banking, and email. He also has experience with MS Office. He uses a PC, Mac, iPhone, and iPad for his work and personal interests. He has never taken a class online before.

Travis likes the flexibility of online schools and feels confident that he can navigate the interface. His main concern is the lack of immediate feedback and discussion that he feels an online program could have. He wants to be sure that the program he chooses is professional and interactive.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Computer Proficiency</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Behavior/Attitudes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Daily Internet usage, Uses social media, MS Word, desktop publishing software, online banking, email</td>
<td>Personal fulfillment, More experience, New professional opportunities, Example for child</td>
<td>Will do school from home, Confident he can adapt to school online, Wants interaction in classes, Wants a credible program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midlothian, VA</td>
<td>Uses a PC, Mac, iPhone, and iPad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spouse, 1 child</td>
<td>Never taken classes online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports/Local News editor at local newspaper</td>
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http://www.flickr.com/photos/67835627@N05/7301111264/
References

http://www.usability.gov/templates/index.html#Usability

Moodboard Photography (2012). Father with Arm Around Son. Retrieved from
http://www.flickr.com/photos/67835627@N05/7301111264/