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User Research

Project

Description

Our project is to create an application that will help new instructors improve their teaching skills by obtaining rapid feedbacks. In other words, the application will function as a platform that allow students to provide their thoughts and evaluations anytime, so instructors will be able to make adjustments in teaching styles based on the suggestions. It aims to leverage technology to facilitate teaching methods of new instructors while enhancing connections between students and instructors.

Target Users

Our target users are new instructors, or more specifically, people who are new to teaching with less than two years experience. Lacking in experiences, new instructors might really need great resources or tools to complement their teachings. When new instructors first teach, they have't developed mature teaching skills so they may not be able to effectively convey course materials. This application will make communications more efficient in a way that instructors can easily reach students and know exactly what they want.

Competitive Analysis of Slack

Slack is a popular application that assist users in team messaging (Figure 1). It is a prominent application and utilized by many organizations, companies and classes. It is said that Slack will possibly replace emails or other messaging apps since it is being used "as the primary means of communication at companies of every size across a range of industries" (Manjoo, 2015). The most significant function of Slack is organizing channels. Slack is mostly about channels, or groups users form (Figure 2). Slack allows user to organize team conversations in channels, and other actions can be made within channels, such as messaging, video calling and sending files (Slack.com). Slack also automatically indexes and archives messages and files, which helps users search stuffs easily.
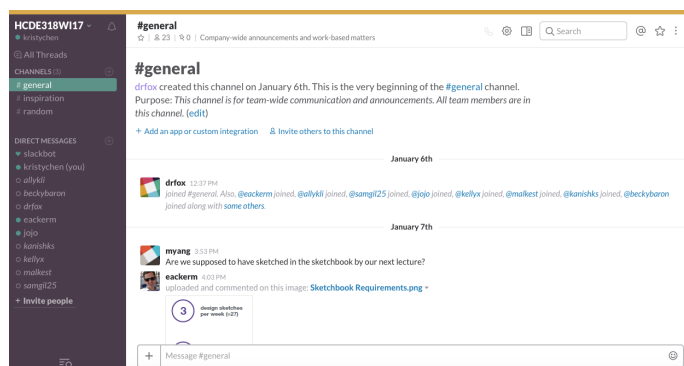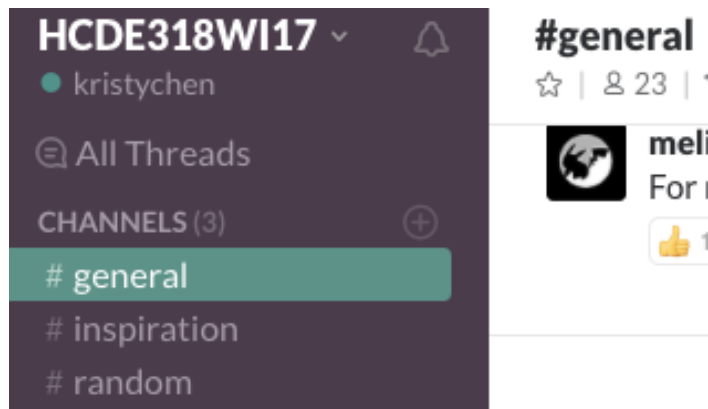

Figure 1. An team messaging application

Figure 2. Channels created

Pros

Being a messaging application, Slack helps users communicate more efficiently and at the same time manage messages more orderly. Slack is the only thing "you'll have open all day if you want to reach someone in your team" (Hamburger, 2014). When forming a group, many users have encounter a situation which they have to open various social media platforms to reach other members. Slack does a decent job to prevent this problem and fulfill users' needs by implementing many features to adapt a group setting. Users are allowed to send direct messages to a specific member within the group while at the same time send a public message to the different channels of the group. A TA can join several Slack groups to manage his or her classes, and the customizable channels allow TA and students to communicate more effectively as TA can set the channels based on different purposes such as Grading, Teaching, etc.

Cons

Slack is a handy tool for work or team project, and many TAs and instructors have utilize Slack as a class communication platform in which students can either ask questions or offer feedbacks. However, since it is neither a regular social medias like Facebook nor educational website like Canvas, many students may find it not appealing to join simply as to communicate with instructors or other classmates. Slack serves purposely for team communication so that it might not be an optimal application for new instructors who are seeking help to obtain student feedbacks to have professional development.

Interview Questions

1. Besides teaching at UW, what are you other professionals or are you a student?
    Ans: She is also a PhD student in Human Centered Design and Engineering. It is quite challenging to manage both things together due to the fact that both roles are time-consuming.

2. Have you had any training prior to be a instructor?
    Ans: Not really. UW does provides some workshops for TAs but they are not really useful. Some workshops teach a teacher how to handle conflict in classrooms and other simple things. However, none of them teaches her how to teach or be a good

teacher.

3. As a new instructor, what do you find the most challenging?
   Ans: The difficulty in knowing students' levels of knowledges and skills. Since she is a TA of HCDE 310 which is a programming-focused class, it is important to understand students' ability in coding and knowledges of algorithms.

4. What resources you might need to assist you in teaching?
   Ans: A lesson that teaches her how to deliver a class and explain stuffs that students can easily understand. Being a new TA and not knowing students' levels, it is pretty difficult to explain some programming materials to students in a way they can understand and absorb. Sometimes, it seems that students understand what she teaches about, but they still may not capable of solving problems by themselves.

5. How do you communicate with your students mostly? Is it effective?
   Ans: Face-to-face and Facebook group. Facebook group is good in some ways since students can share problems and opinions but it is not anonymous. If she really wants to help students debug their codes, Facebook is not useful in sharing files so she would demand them to send it through emails.

References

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