MAPS monthly recap – March

Most of this month I spent working on updating the Undergraduate Research Assistant section of the L3D website. I met with Andy and Gabe to discuss the design and content. I originally modeled it after a site Gabe suggested, a people page from MIT. Later, with Andy's help, added a few more things that made it consistent from person to person.

The basic structure of the website is a home page, a people page, a projects page, and an opportunities page where new people can see how to get involved. The people page has a table that lists all of the URAs and their emails and mentors. If you click on their name, you go to their template page, which lists their current project(s) and progress reports such as this one. This page will also have a link to each person's own homepage. The project page will have a summary and breakdown of each person's work on their respective project.

The site allows people to access information about the URAs in a few ways. They can look up just the people, and find out which projects are done by who, and also find out more about a particular person. Or they can go to the projects page, and look up details on a specific project, and later see who works on it.

This website is intended to be informative for not only newcomers to the website and L3D, but also to those already involved. It will also be a great resource for the URAs to find out about their peers. In the future, it will provide a reference to past projects and past URAs. I believe that it will help define the role of the URA in a research project, benefiting not only future URAs, but their mentors and the rest of L3D.

MAPS progress

This month during Clever meetings, I learned a lot about personalization. The most important thing I learned was that it is not a simple thing. There are many levels to personalization, and finding the right one to function at is a big part of the challenge.

Ideally, we want to have a product/website/tool/etc. that is not only easily customizable for the user, but also learns things that the user likes or dislikes, and tries to improve those things for further use. An important issue that we discussed was that sometimes programs do too much, they try to adapt by, for example, putting things in the toolbar that we use most frequently. This becomes a problem if you use a certain set of tools in sequence over and over again, but each time you use one of them, that becomes the last used tool and you have to continually search for the other tools. Oftentimes, the tools don't adapt enough, and we always have to dig for what we want.

I think another important issue in personalization is feedback. In order to know that we are at the right level of self-improvement/learning of a tool, we need the users feedback. One challenge for designers is to make it easy for the user to give feedback. The ideal

way to receive feedback would require no extra effort on the user's part. We plan to do this in MAPS by having the system log the user's response time.

A common problem with systems we don't like, is that it is not easy to tell the designer or maintainer what we don't like because we can't find their email address on the webpage or there is no other contact information readily available.

In conclusion, we know that there must be at least some basic building blocks from where we can start and from there head toward our goal of ideal personalization. And when it comes to designing tools for people with cognitive disabilities, we have to try to make these issues go as well as possible, or else we risk abandonment.