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#### Web Consulting Students Offer Design Dos and Don'ts

04/01/2008  
by Jenna Spinelle

Attention businesses: IST students can help improve your Web sites.

Associate Professor Frank Ritter's [IST 331](#) course allows students to gain real-world experience working as consultants for a number of Pennsylvania businesses and Penn State campus organizations.

Based on those projects, Ritter and several of his students from last semester offered a few dos and don'ts of Web site design and usability tailored to 20 organizations. The — the most important onetip, they said, is to keep the user in mind.

Junior Nick Pellegrine and his group worked with an Indiana, Pennsylvania radio station WMUG. Pellegrine said it's important for businesses, especially non-profits, to combine their needs with their users' needs to design a Web site that will best suit everyone.

"The station runs off of donations, so one thing we suggested was to put the link to donate on the top bar of the site," Pellegrine said. "Before, you had to click four or five times to get to the donation page and now it's right there on the main page. It's nice to see that they followed our suggestions."

Senior Jason McGovern's group worked with the student section of Penn State's Information Technology Services Web site.

McGovern's group proposed suggestions that included changing the site's color scheme and organizing the navigation menu into groups.

Ritter said it's important for Web site designers to keep ease of navigation in mind, and remember that people visiting their site might not necessarily be computer-savvy.

"If it's a home health care company, for example, you're catering to a primarily older audience and people who might not be as familiar with computers as you, the designer, are," Ritter said.

Ritter said if a site is too hard to navigate, people are more likely to go elsewhere for information or services. He focuses the student teams on data-driven analyses rather than their opinions, which can appear as complaints if not backed up with facts.

"It's much better to present someone with data that eight out of 10 subjects took over 10 seconds to find something on a site, rather than just saying, 'that page looks really bad'," Ritter said.

Senior Rita Pang recommended that businesses monitor how many people are visiting their site and what pages are attracting the most hits. That data then can then be used as a basis for improvement.

Ritter allowed the students to choose their own companies and provided constructive suggestions on improving the usability of their Web sites – something he says fits perfectly with the college's mission of [problem-based learning](#).