Accessibility and Usability Review

As the online course that I am currently developing isn't yet sufficiently developed, I am conducting an accessibility and usability review of my colleague's online course titled *Multispecies Imagination*. The course is intended for people who may not be enrolled in an academic institution, guiding them through three lessons including readings, lectures, and assignments, with a final assessment. The course is self-paced and lessons can be taken in any order or used separately as lessons in other courses.

Below, I will details the accessibility and usability metrics common to these reviews. Overall, however, I would evaluate the course as more than satisfactory in terms of accessibility and excellent in usability. The course is well-structured, concise yet informative, and easily navigable. The technology used for creating the course (screen-casting for lectures, embedded documents for assignments, blogs, etc.) are well integrated with no technical issues, easy to use with no obvious entry barriers, and add to the overall quality of the presented materials. All things considered, this is a high quality course, although there are a few things that could be done to make it a bit more accessible as detailed below.

Accessibility Review

I am using Michigan State University's **Quick Tips for Online Content Accessibility** to guide this review. Below are the metrics suggest by the Quick Tips followed by brief descriptions of the ways that the reviewed course meets or does not meet the metric.

- **Text and Contrast:** I used the Google Chrome Color Contrast Analyzer browser extension to evaluate the accessibility of the text in terms of contrast, size, and style. The course's site was evaluated against the accessibility standard *Level AA, Small Non-Bold Text (4.5:1)*. It succeeded in all tested pages, including top-menus, embedded assignments, and sub-pages. However, some of the external links did not pass this standard although this is to no fault of the course designer. It may be useful to include a description with these links that they may be difficult for contrast sensitive-users – I don't believe this is necessary, but may be good for ideal accessibility.
- **Heading Styles:** I used the Google Chrome ChromeVox screen reading browser extension to evaluate the structure of the content. The course's top-menus make use of headings to differentiate levels of text, but the written content does not. For example, on the *About* page, the primary headings are denoted as such, but the secondary headings are not. This would be a simple addition to increase screen reader accessibility. The lists are properly formatted, however, so no change is necessary for them. The biggest issue is that the embedded Google Document assignment were not being read by the screen reader. This could be a technical issue on my end, but the course designer should verify and troubleshoot as necessary.
- **Alternative Text:** Accessibility standards recommend that images be accompanied by alternative text describing those images for the visually impaired. No images that I evaluated had such text. The course designer should include these descriptions and describe when images are merely decorative or when they are critical for content understanding.
- **Multiple Avenues for Media**: The audio/video lessons do not have transcripts which may be difficult for non-native speakers, or learners with hearing impairments. The course designer could provide transcripts in order to meet this accessibility need.

- **Added Context:** The embedded hyperlinks are not the full web addresses, to the benefit of screen readers. However, better descriptions on the hyperlinks would benefit screen readers and course site maps. For example, instead of saying "click here" with an embedded link, the designer could embed the link on the whole sentence that describes the link, or just the title of the link (e.g. *Communication Policy* instead of *click here*)
- **Tables:** There were no tables in the course site itself, but they were in the specific assignments pages. The tables were simple and well-organized, and there isn't an obvious way to display content without them. I wouldn't recommend any change here.

Usability Review

I am using the Nielson Norman Group's Usability 101: An Introduction to Usability and selections from their 10 Usability Heuristics to guide this review. Below are the metrics suggest by the Nielson Norman Group, followed by brief descriptions of the ways that the reviewed course meets or does not meet the metric.

- **Dead Links:** I used a free online dead link checker to evaluate the course. There was one link that timed-out on the checker, but was active when checked on the course. There are no changes to be recommended here.
- **Keyboard Navigability:** I'm not sure how to test for the ability to navigate the course by keyboard. In order for a complete review, this would need to be checked by the developer.
- **Learnability:** The course is well organized throughout, allowing users to easily navigate between lectures and assignments, with a clear structure that delineates between varying content. The course is excellent in this regard.
- **Efficiency:** Given the clear and concise organization and structure of the course, users will need little time to perform the tasks that are set out. Again, the course is excellent in this regard.
- **Memorability:** Returning users will be easily able to return to the course after a long period of time and navigate it proficiently. There are no recommended changes for this.
- **Errors:** It is difficult to imagine the errors that a user could make given the excellent organization of the course, but if they did I cannot imagine that it would be difficult to recover from them. Excepting extenuating circumstances, the course is relatively error-proof.
- **Satisfaction:** The course is aesthetically pleasing, and simply designed allowing information to be clearly presented and not conflicting with extraneous design elements. There is not irrelevant information that I could find nor redundancy.
- **Visibility of System Status:** The technology that I am using to perform this review – Windows operating system with Google Chrome Browser – and the technology that the developer used to present materials both do well to keep the user informed about software processes. For example, loading screens have dynamic icons and the video lectures have tracking bars. Barring other technologies, there are no recommendations I can make here.