IDIA 630.185 Assignment 1 – organization, labeling, and navigation analysis
Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum http://ndm.si.edu/ or http://www.cooperhewitt.org/

Introduction

The Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum has a clearly labeled, hierarchically structured website that supports both known item and exploratory searching. The site is geared towards users who browse, whom are most likely the primary target of the site (potential museum goers, NYC public, NYC tourists, designers/artists, arts educators, children, students, etc), but also offers supplementary navigational systems for frequent visitors.

Site Organization

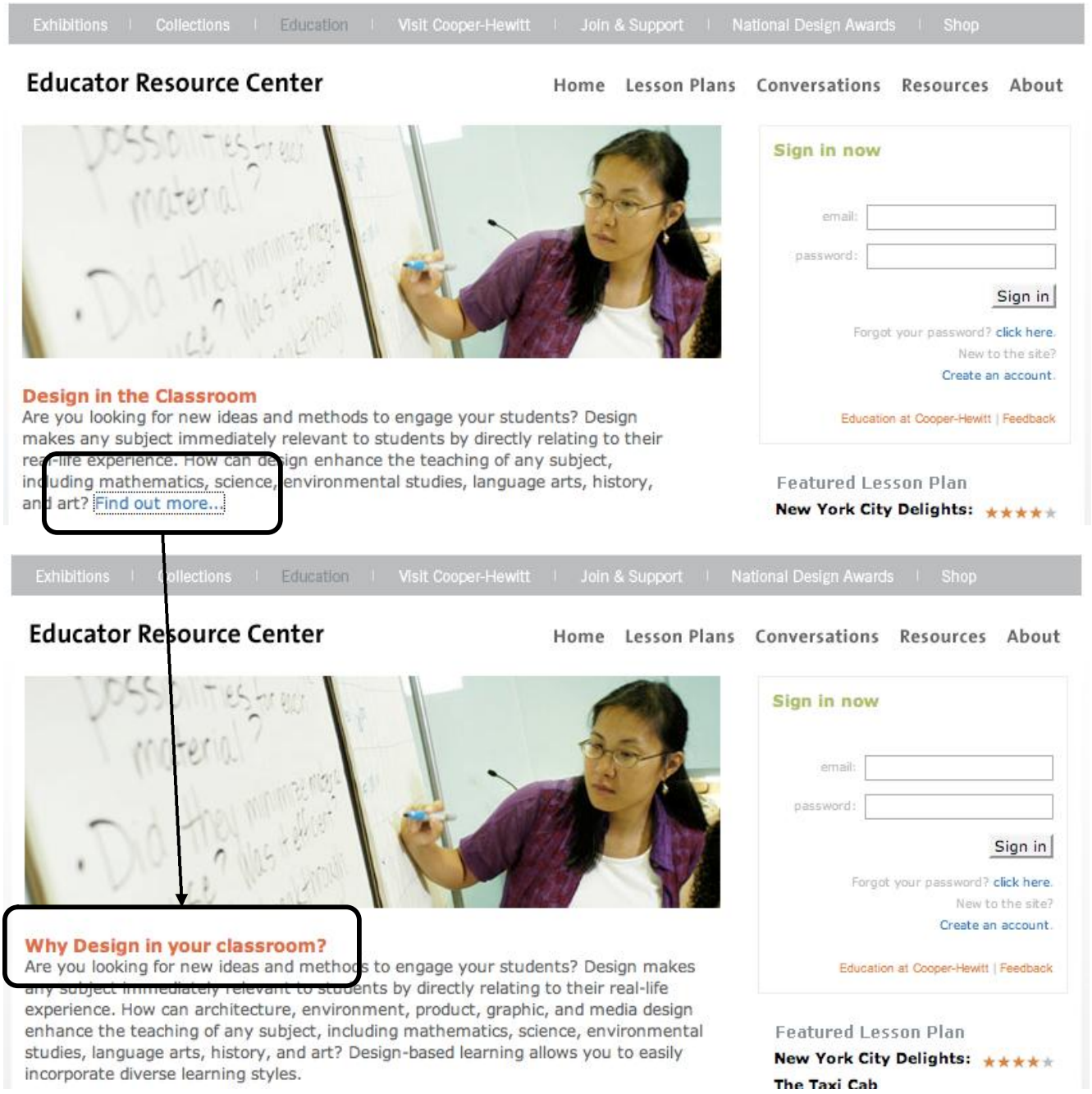
The National Design Museum's website is an ambiguous hybrid scheme, categorized primarily by topic with quick links geared towards specific audiences. The global navigation focuses on topic, with the most emphasized navigational bar (emphasis by background color and text size) featuring the museum's primary divisions (current exhibitions, permanent collections, education, the national design awards) and important links meant to draw user's to the museum (visit Cooper-Hewitt, join & support, shop). The emphasized links encourage many types of users to browse the site.

The top global navigation separates out (by location and text size) information about the museum and time sensitive links (calendar, events and press). These links appeal to users who have plans to visit the museum or are frequent visitors.

The bottom global navigation is the least emphasized (by font size), and features important links used primarily by frequent users of the site or known-item seekers.

The site is structured polyhierarchically; it structures the content hierarchically by topic but also offers quick, audience focused links and uses a complementary hypertext structure in contextual navigation. For example, the body of the home page offers a quick link section for educators:

and within the text for the education resource landing page, there is a contextual navigation link to learn more about why design education is important in the classroom. This appeals to both repeat, known-item seekers and exploratory seekers within the educator audience.



Site Labeling

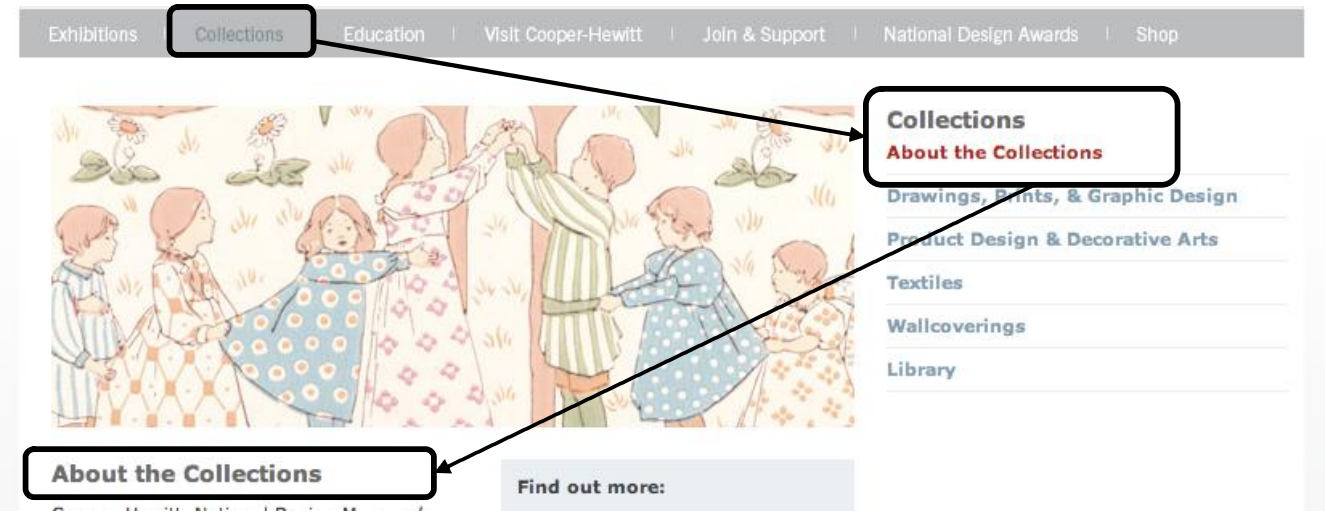
Labels throughout the site communicate the content efficiently through key words. Link labels are usually brief and emphasized in bold and a larger text size. The labels are most meaningful to frequent museum goers (*collections* infers permanent collections, while *exhibitions* infers temporary and special exhibits), but also clear enough to a browser who is not as familiar with the language of museums. The

simple labeling system also helps open up more screen space for large, clear images – important for drawing potential visitors to the museum to see more.

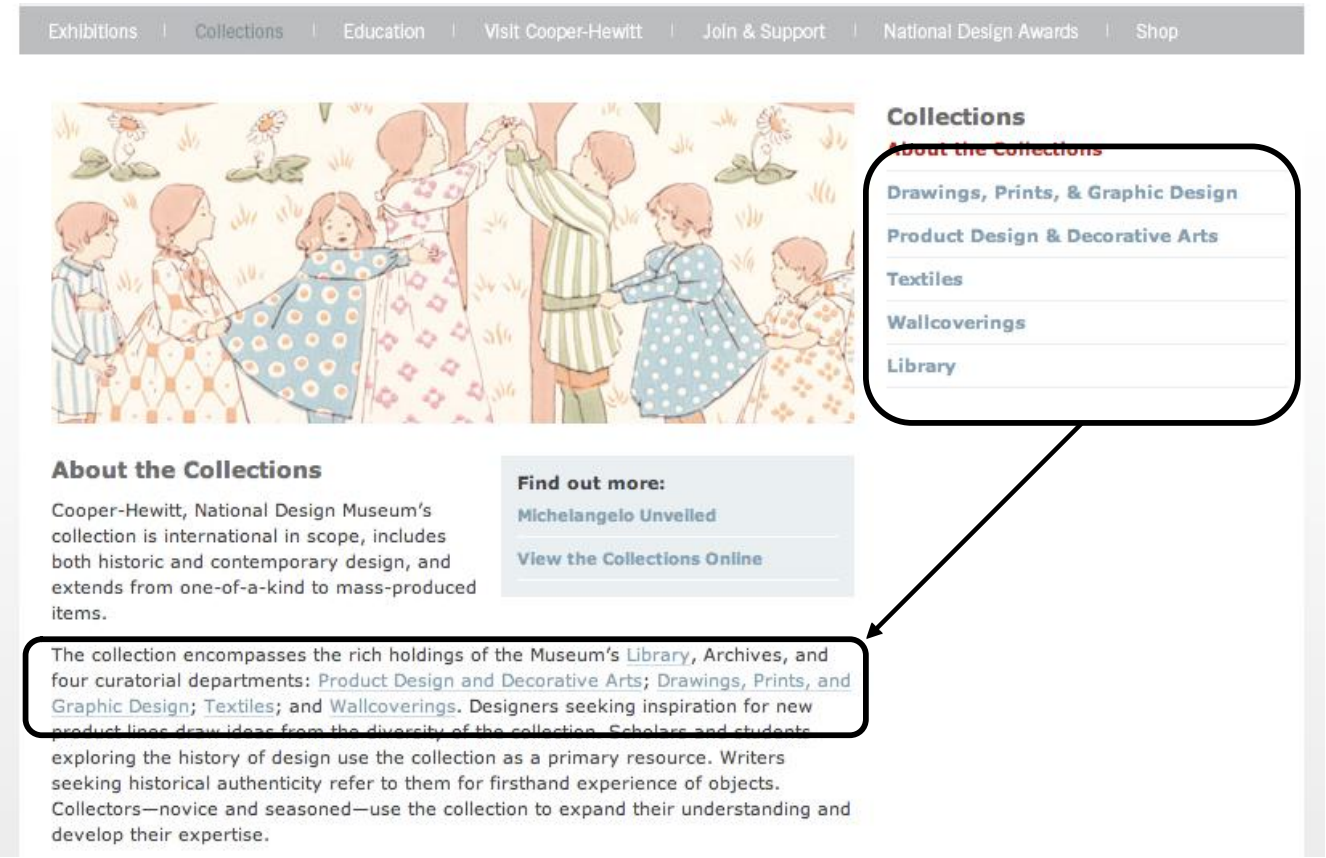
The labels are used in a very consistent manner. Most often the destination's heading label is the same as or very similar to the navigation link label. For example, in the *education* section, the global navigation label is "Education," and the <title> tag label is "Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum | Education at Cooper-Hewitt." The table below show consistent labeling – often the label does not change between the navigation, heading and <title> label at all.

Body navigation labels	Destination's heading label	Destination's <title> label
right side local navigation		(*Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum* | ...)
Educator Resources (heading)		
> Educator Resource Center	Educator Resource Center	Education at Cooper-Hewitt
> Videos for Educators	Videos for Educators	Videos for Educators
> Curriculum Guides	Curriculum Guides	Education at Cooper-Hewitt
> Books & Articles	Books & Articles	Education at Cooper-Hewitt
> Resources on the Web	Resources on the Web	Education at Cooper-Hewitt
Education at Cooper-Hewitt (landing)	Education at Cooper-Hewitt	Education at Cooper-Hewitt
Public Programs	Public Programs	Public Programs
Youth Programs	Youth Programs	Youth Programs
Educator and Community Programs	Educator and Community Programs	Educator and Community Programs
Internships	Internships	Internships
Master's Program	MA Program in the History of Decorative Arts and Design	Master's Program
Tours and Group Visits	Tours and Group Visits	Tours and Group Visits
local navigation		
Public Programs (heading)		
Tech On Your Terms: Blogfest	Calendar of Events (event entry)	
Vital Empathy	Calendar of Events (event entry)	
contextual navigation		
Conferences, studio visits, panels, and workshops	Public Programs	Public Programs
educator programs	Educator and Community Programs	Educator and Community Programs

Headings within content reinforce navigation system labels with their visual consistency. For example, on the *collections* landing page:

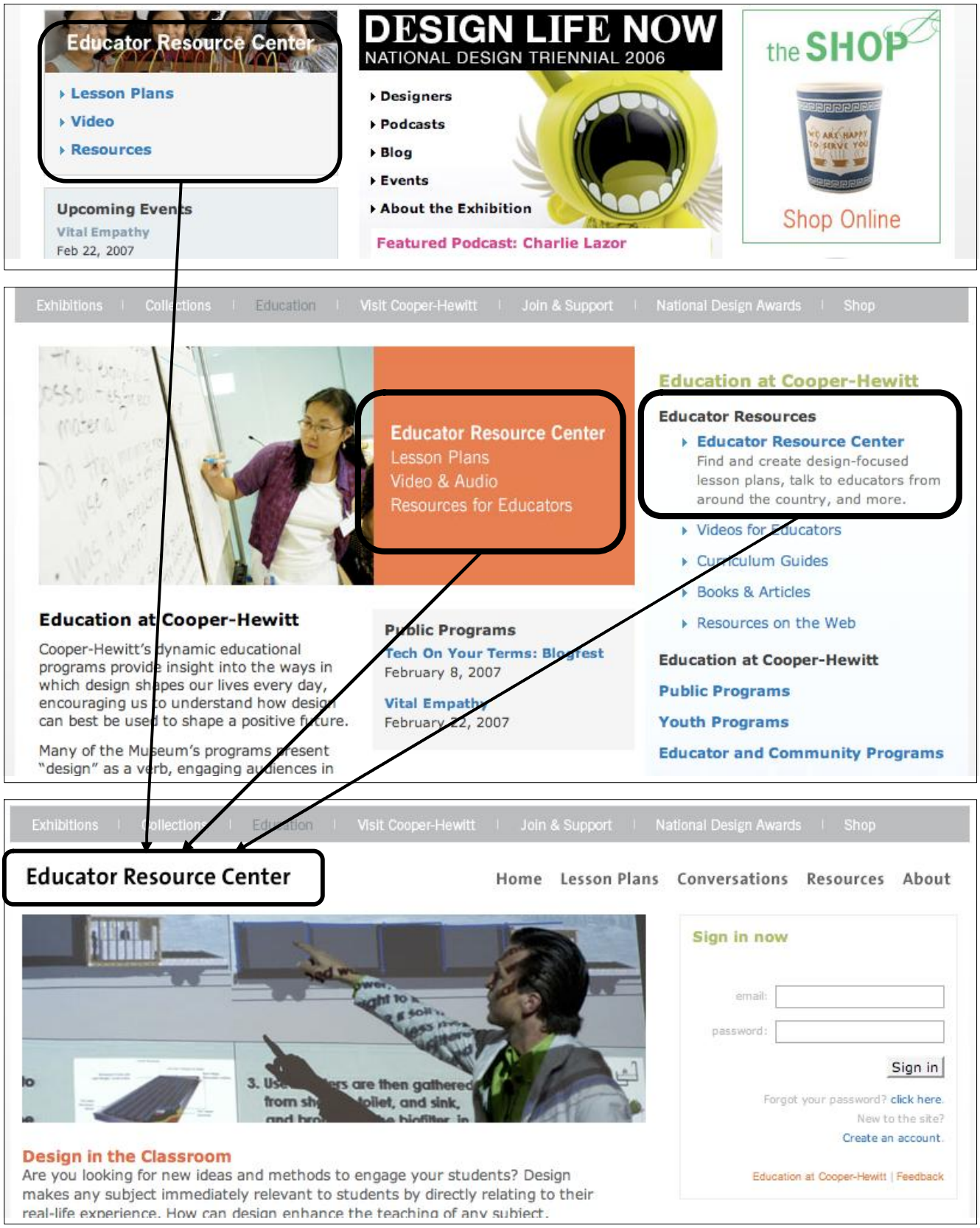


Contextual links reinforce local navigation (and the site hierarchy) for browsers new to the site.



Highlighted links in the body of the page serve to interest viewers to learn more. *Michelangelo Unveiled* is less meaningful to a new viewer, but might intrigue them enough to read further. The page also contains a link to an external (new window) website, the Smithsonian eMuseum, where viewers can browse through museum's collection online.

More specific, audience based links directing users to the same content as global navigation sits on home page. For example, the *Educator Resource Center* is a quick link to a page within *Education*:

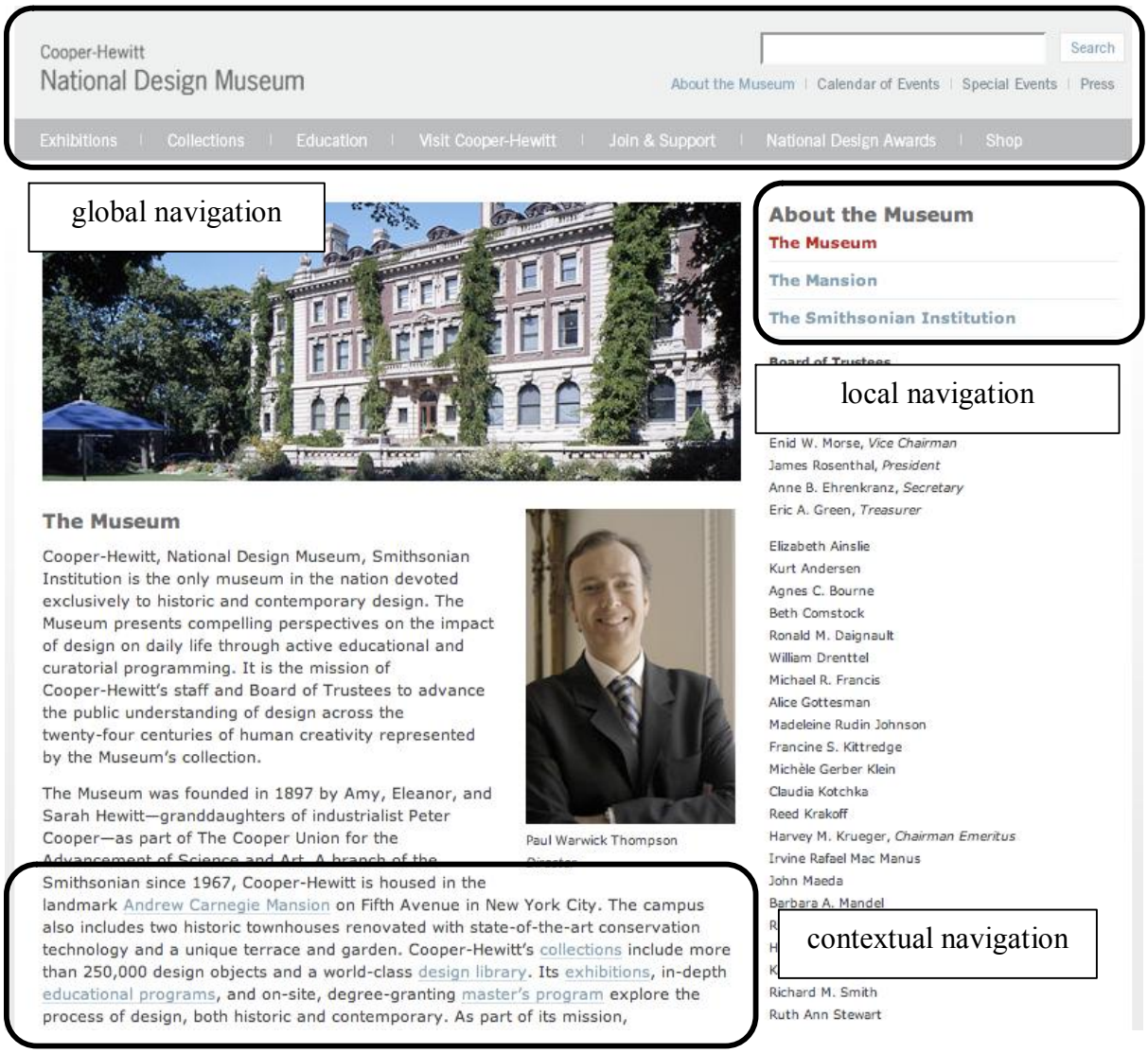


The section used in the previous example does point out some inconsistency in the labels which may cause users to miss important content. On the *education* landing page, *educator resources* contains

five navigational labels: *educator resource center*, *videos for educators*, *curriculum guides*, *books & articles*, and *resources on the web*. The *educator resource center* landing page contains four navigational links: *lesson plans*, *conversations*, *resources*, and *about*. *Curriculum guides* and *lesson plans* take the user to two different pages, as does *resources on the web* and *resources*, however the similarity in labeling may give the user the sense that they lead to the same content. Because the *education resource center* leads users to a subsite, while the following *educator resources* navigational links maintain the same local navigation, users might miss the four navigation links below. Perhaps emphasizing all of the *educator resources* links with a brief description (and not just *educator resource center*) will improve the granularity of these labels.

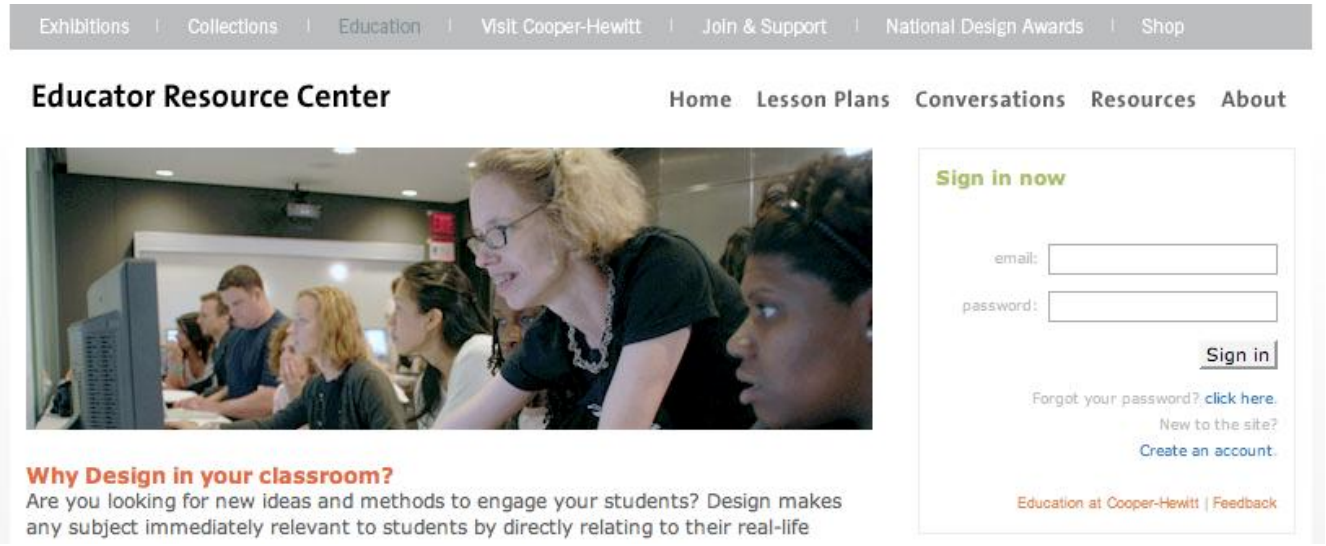
Site Navigation

The National Design Museum site uses an embedded navigation system with a supplementary search system and site map.



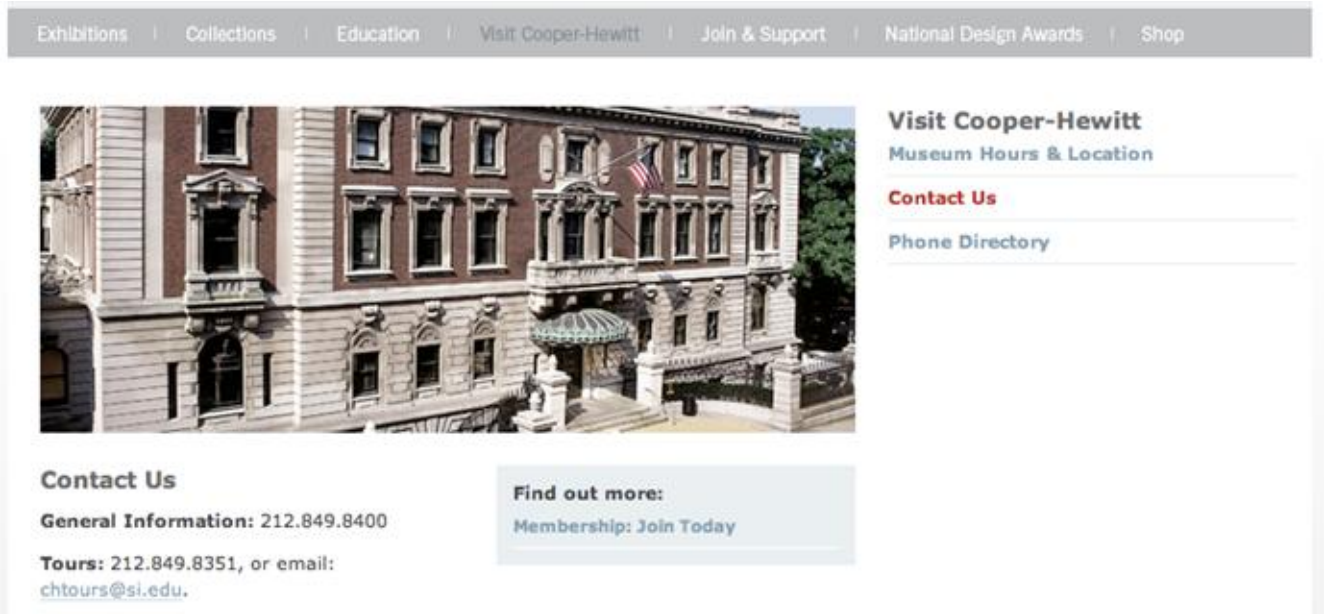
Both global and local navigation serve as site identifiers throughout the site, but local navigation is not always consistent. For example, in the image below the global navigation lets the user know she is in

the *Education* section, and the emphasized heading at the top left show that she is in the *Educator Resource Center*, however it is not as clear that she is in the *About* page.



Another page within the *Educator Resource Center*, *Conversations*, provides a heading, but it is not the most visually emphasized text on the page.

Other sections of the site, such as the *Contact Us* page below, use a different color to show what page within the local navigation the user is in. Perhaps using this approach more consistently throughout the site will give users who enter into a page other than the home page better contextual clues to where they are within the hierarchy of the site.



Conclusion

Overall the National Design Museum's website feels successful in its architecture. There are many audience based and contextual links that access the same content, and the global navigation helps users to quickly move from one section of content to another. Improvements can be made to the consistency of the local navigation throughout the site, however a clear hierarchy and labeling system make the site accessible to the diversity of users who visit the website.