Part 2:

Project description in terms of "why this is a usability problem"

Each year, hundreds of students in the EECS department are asked by their advisors to identify what classes that they are going to take in the next 2 years. Each student then goes through the monotonous task of double checking back and forth of "how many credits am I taking?" or "is this class a prerequisite?" using a complex Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. Finally, advisors are then charged with the arduous task of correcting the student's scheduling mistakes. By creating a program and a usable interface that can optimize the entire process, time and money will be saved.

A Justification Why This is a Good/Interesting Project from the Standpoint of there Being a Reasonable Amount of USABILITY Work to Think About

The current way that class schedule planning is done leaves a lot of room for usability improvements. Currently schedule planning is done on an Excel spreadsheet with two years of planning visible. The other things that are notable are the class department and numbers, prerequisites, credit amount, terms offered, and class titles. Students are expected to go through and mark the number of credits for a course in the box for that course in the term that they are planning to take it. If the class isn't offered that term, then the box is grayed out and credits cannot be marked for that term. At the bottom of the spreadsheet it calculates out how many credits the student is taking for the given terms.

We want to improve the UI and make classes that can/cannot be taken highly visible. We plan to use colors and other information such as pop-ups to guide the user in planning out their courses. Also, we want four years, rather than two, to be visible to the user. Another aspect that we want to add is a link or a button to provide course descriptions, meeting times, and professor information. This data will help the student plan their schedule without having to look it up elsewhere each time. The software will provide built in scheduling conflict notifications, such as time conflicts and un-met prerequisites, and we plan to use colors to clearly illustrate class status. The current scheme sometimes makes the user feel stuck or lost and we want to eliminate that and replace it with an easy and smart UI.

Target Users

The target users for this project are Oregon State University Electrical Engineering and Computer Science students and advisors. The students will include both currently enrolled and prospective pre/pro-school EECS students.

Potential Stakeholders/Users

Potential users and stakeholders are fairly similar to target users. It will still include both current and prospective students in the school of EECS as well as their advisiors. This application though, if done well, could be useful to the entire College of Engineering if not the Unversity as a whole. So the

set of potential stakeholders, assuming that other colleges would be ammendable to using a robust and flexible scheduling program for their academic planning needs.

Why our group would be good for this/Will be able to finish this before the end of the term?

We, as students, know how painful the scheduling process is. By bringing in our experience, we as a group find that we can be sympathetic to the user. Also, since all of us in this group are juniors and seniors in computer science, we find that we also have a relationship with the faculty. Because of this familiarity with the staff, we will most likely be able to constantly collaborate with them, ensuring that this interface will be efficient and usable as possible.

Since this project has been under way for a number of months and is a senior design project, we will likely finish the UI interface in the appropriate time frame.

Note: should also have addressed having access to potential users (although in this particular case the answer is obviously that they do).