UI Review

The Good:

Winamp

Winamp is a music player like iTunes or the Windows Media Player. It plays music, creates playlists, and lets you edit metadata for media files.

I like the winamp interface for a number of reasons. The primary reason I like it is because it puts
objects of interest, like a list of artists in alphabetical order, a list of albums in alphabetical order, and a list of songs, so that they are visually adjacent, rather than sequentially in time. This means that I can easy start a search for whatever I want by clicking on a part of the screen and starting to type. Maybe you want all the songs released in 2007, sorted alphabetically by album name. Sort the album list by year, shift-select the block of 2007 titles, and filter the song list by album. That probably took somewhere between 2 and 5 seconds for the experienced Winamp user. It's designed for efficiency rather than learnability.

Users can also modify the layout at will. Maybe you only want artist and song lists. Maybe you want genre, artist and song lists. If you want both, but don't want to go through the two clicks in order to change it, you can create a new view so that you can swap them in one click. Some may call the interface cluttered, but the user memory load is decreased by the speed at which they can look everything up.

To that end, the shortcuts are very handy, and are designed to be inputted without taking your hand off the mouse. They're also completely remappable. The delete shortcut, however, is all the way across the keyboard, by keys that are otherwise never used, and asks for confirmation, clearly marking the exit on that operation. Also, with watch folders (automatically add all music in those folders to the library), it's completely undoable.
The Steam interface is also fantastic, primarily because of the amount of common tasks that can be accomplished without even entering the interface. The entire “main menu,” if you want to call it that, is accessible from right clicking the task bar icon. There’s only one text box on each screen and it says “search.” Users can sort their games by user-defined categories. All basic commands are very high visibility, even for users of various backgrounds, and there are many ways to accomplish a task. Say I
want to install a game I own, I can either: 1) Click on it in the library and click the big install button right below the title, 2) double-click it in the library, 3) right-click it, then click install at the top of the context menu.

It also has support for expert users. Support for expert users is touchy because it should be obfuscated in order to discourage the layman from using it. These are usually places where experimentation is bad.
Northeastern.edu is an informative website for northeastern faculty and students. Prospective students access the site to evaluate the content within, and so will be exploring. Current Students and Faculty usually are searching for an email address.

My big complaint about the Northeastern.edu website is the lack of clearly marked exits. Once I go to the website of an individual college or program, it's impossible to get back to the main site without going up to the address bar.
Some of the links also have poor consistency. If I click on the link to the Creative Industries program, I'm taken to the Game Design page. The search icon also needs to be higher visibility, because it took me a while to find it. It's also got some fancy javascript code that makes it hard to find. Search bars are a case when less is more. Just put the text box and a search button. (There's no search button, you have to press enter.)

It's obviously tailored to the Prospective students, and, with the exception of some consistency problems and a lack of a link to the homepage, still works fine for them. For current students looking to find a list of faculty members in their college... good luck. If we're looking for improvement, a universal navigation bar with a search bar would be the necessary addition. A sortable faculty list would be helpful too.
It's a reference for Microsoft APIs for programmers. Most people who go there know there's a function that is going to make their life easy and are trying to find it.

The problem is high user memory load. Often impossible user memory load. Usually you need to know the name of the function, class, or structure you're looking for information on. There is a site overview on the left sidebar, but there are so many nested levels of options that you've forgotten what you were looking for while you were looking up the difference between the Direct3D core and the Direct3D layer. And the vector struct, which is used everywhere, is up 3 levels, elsewhere on the list, and then down 3 levels again.

Even after all that, sometimes when you finally get where you're trying to go, the information just isn't
there. I guess this is metaphorical inconsistency. It's supposed to be the equivalent of a guidebook, but it's not.

It was clearly designed by some programmer who liked to have everything inside its own namespace. The core can then be separate from the layer view, despite the fact that you can't have one without the other. The improvement would be to have them all in one list and have them be filterable by typing. This way I could type “Blend” and get all the information on every function that does blending or works with blendstates. The existing nested menus just increase user memory load.