CS 391
Final Project
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Opportunity Costs

My original plan was poorly conceived. A "cartoon" style interface was inappropriate for such a serious topic. Too, I could have had a clearer idea of exactly how the interactive portion of the project would work – and spent too much time on statistics rather than function. This is being written after the fact, with many lessons learned!
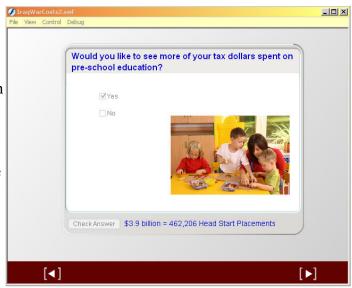

Example from Original Interface

Opening Screen

The final interface is a slide-show with added interactive content in the form of yes/no questions that lead the user to consider the alternative services that could have been purchased with all or part of the Massachusetts' 2006 federal taxes that went to military expenditures. While my bias is clear (more money for human needs at home, and less for acting as an international police force) my presentation is intended to pose the question, more than make the point.

There are four questions. If the user answers "yes" (they would like to see more of their tax dollars spent on the service in question) they are shown how much of that service could have been purchased with the $3.9 billion dollars Massachusetts contributed to war taxes. If the user answers "no" they are prompted to go to the next screen, and another question. I would have liked to have the interface allow users to assign percentages of those dollars to each of the four services mentioned, but my skill with ActionScript isn't sophisticated enough yet.

Example of Question Screen

The user could be confused about the purpose of the presentation, but I tired to describe that clearly in the introduction. Perhaps some of that information could have been included before the title screen, as the phrase "The Costs of War" has many meanings to many people. The interface should be intuitive enough to lead the user though the presentation easily. Each question has only two possible answers. "Yes" gives the user data. The presentation is set for two tries per question screen, but since the "yes" check box is set as "true" if the users answers "yes" and gets data, they can't try again.

There is a lot of information in the first five screens. I tired to keep it succinct.

The interface is more engaging than the original, though I believe that whether or not the user loses focus will be a, primarily, matter of whether or not the information is meaningful to them. There are hot-links to my sources of information, and the user is encouraged to continue investigating the opportunity costs on their own. What I am least satisfied with is my failure to use "paste in place" when inserting the question screens. This causes them to "jump" a little when the user moves from one screen to the next. I didn't have time to fix it, but will take care with that feature in the future.

Once I decided on the slide-show format, things went much more smoothly. The *Flash* template was easy to use and the tutorial on eLearning in *Flash* from http://tk07.astd.org/ (cited in the presentation) was well written and easy to follow. I will defiantly be using their site as a reference again.